

## Diversity Conference 2017

### PRS opening comments

I would like to welcome everyone to the Royal Society's fifth annual diversity conference. In recent years we have focussed on themes such as breaking down barriers and inclusivity. This year our focus is on confidence and competence.

In order to instil both confidence and competence in everyone, our education system is crucial. We need to be prepared for a rapidly changing and increasingly interconnected and technology rich world, a world where there will be many new opportunities but where there will also be disruption across many industries that could impact peoples livelihoods. All of this creates a need for greater career flexibility for everyone.

All young people need access to an education that allows them to realise their potential, otherwise we are simply wasting talent. And wasting talent is not just to the detriment of the individual – we lose as a society if we do not allow everyone to flourish to the best of their abilities.

However, despite many efforts, problems remain. Uptake of A-level physics among girls has remained static at 20% for the last 30 years and only 4.1% of black pupils are taking computing at GCSE compared to the national average of 5.6%.

Just last week the Royal Society published a report looking at the uptake of the new Computer Science curriculum in England at GCSE. That also told a sorry tale with Computing remaining a male-dominated subject with only 20% of GCSE Computer Science candidates in 2017 being female. That falls to 10% at A-level. This problem is exacerbated by our narrow, outdated post-16 education system where students choices, that can be influenced by misguided ideas of boys and girls subjects can restrict their future opportunities.

We must do everything we can to try and identify barriers and to start to break them down.

We will hear today from our keynote speaker, Professor Sarah-Jane Leslie, how early some of the barriers can emerge. You will no doubt be aware of the research she published with colleagues earlier this year that showed that by the age of 6, girls become less likely than boys to associate brilliance with their own gender and are more likely to avoid activities said to require brilliance.

The Society is committed to increasing diversity in science, technology, engineering and maths by seeking out participation from underrepresented groups, in order to build and develop a world in which studying and working in science are open to all.

Diversity is not the first thing many people think of when you mention the Royal Society but we want to face up to that challenge and so publish diversity data on an annual basis. I am glad to say that things are getting better but we still have a long way to go. That is why today is so important.

The Royal Society is only one voice but we believe that we can and must make a difference – we can combine our convening power with leadership to help increase diversity in science,

technology, engineering and maths. I am very encouraged looking around this room at the range of organisations represented.

I am delighted that we have Kevin Coutinho from the Windsor Fellowship on one of our panels today. The Society is working with the Windsor Fellowship on our Destination STEMM programme which provides mentoring from Fellows of the Society to support black students into research careers. This is a relatively small programme given 0.5% of professors are black but many small changes can make a difference.

I also wanted to take this opportunity to thank Uta Frith, the chair of the Royal Society's Diversity Committee. Her leadership has made many of the things we have achieved possible. One particular example was the fact that at this conference last year we were celebrating the fact that our animation on unconscious bias had been watched 50,000 times. As of last week that number was up to over 165,000. We will be hearing from Uta later.

You will also be hearing from the London Mathematical Society, the winners of the first Royal Society Athena Prize, who have led the way in increasing the number of women in Mathematics. We will be launching the call for the next Athena Prize on 30 November which is the date we open the call for all Royal Society medals and awards.

But before we get to the rest of the conference I just want to reflect on recent revelations about the behaviour of some people in positions of power. While the focus has been on politics and the arts, there is no doubt such bullying, harassment and beyond can be found in all walks of life. No one should be subject to such behaviour, which is another barrier to success. It is unacceptable and unless we can ensure that everyone is treated with dignity and respect we will continue to deny people the chance to fulfil their potential.

I would now like to hand over to Julie Maxton the Executive Director of the Royal Society who will introduce our keynote speaker.