

Getting the diversity balance right in Physics

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Group picture of the participants of the VII EPS Forum Physics and Society, 27th of October 2016, London. Credits Ophelia Fornari.

The VII EPS Forum Physics and Society (FPS) took place in London on the 27th of October 2016. It was organised and hosted by the Institute of Physics (IOP).

The FPS is a committee of the European Physical Society (EPS) acting as an outreach body. It accomplishes its mission through workshops and meetings gathering decision-makers in politics and economy, and physicists in order to put the spotlight on topics of interest to both society and to the physics community and to share best practice across the physics community.

The 2016 edition of the Forum focussed on the diversity issue in Physics across Europe with the inspiring title: “Getting the Diversity Balance Right in Physics”. Diversity is a vast subject including all the ways in which we differ (gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age, ...). The participants had the pleasure to be welcomed by the IOP President who gave a very motivating introduction. The EPS president, the EPS General Secretary and the Chair of the EPS Equal Opportunity Committee were present at the event.

The Forum was organised in three sessions, one in the morning and two in the afternoon, comprising two plenary presentations each. The morning session was dedicated to draw a panorama of the current situation: the speakers presented data on diversity in Physics in Europe and in USA with a special attention to gender diversity. The first session of the afternoon dealt with how to improve diversity in the Business and Enterprise sector with two captivating talks, the first from a Member of the IBM diversity team and the second from the Chair of the FPS. In the third session, inspiring initiatives aiming to obtain the balance right in Physics were presented by the Chair of the Institute of the JUNO Committee and the Head of the Learning Research and Resources of the Science Museum of London. The sessions were followed by ample discussions among the participants organised in small groups.

An unanimous consensus was reached on the fact that Europe needs excellent Science and Innovation to tackle the Grand Challenges and that all resources are needed irrespective of gender, race, religion, sexual orientations, age, in order to achieve excellence. To this extent, the promotion of initiatives to assess and guarantee Fair Treatment and Equal Opportunity at all levels is a key issue and deserves a special attention. At the end of the Forum concrete proposals were formulated and will be collected in a recommendation document that will be addressed to the Executive Committee members.

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