



**SOME IDEAS FROM THE
WOMEN IN ECONOMICS: STUDENT WORKSHOP**

Economics for All

7 Action Points to make Economics more inclusive

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SUMMARY

Economics has recently been in the spotlight for neglecting one of the main topics of concern for the profession: lack of diversity. Economics is less diverse by gender and race than the general population. Increasing diversity would allow to broaden and enrich the research perspectives in the field which would help to improve policies and in general the impact of the discipline. However, bias and discrimination create many obstacles for underrepresented groups to join and remain in the profession at all levels from undergraduate to academic positions.

There have been lots of attention on attracting more women into economics, and in addressing the challenges that female face in academic positions. However, less has been done at undergraduate level. Bringing more women into studying economics is good, but they have to find an inclusive environment at university that allow them to achieve and thrive. Economics has been accused of being a hostile environment for women and more in general minorities, and we need to make sure that potential biases do not affect students academic experience.

In this report, we propose 7 action points for departments of Economics to adopt and start creating an inclusive environment for women studying economics, and that fosters diversity more in general. **Action Point 1** is about *reshaping the image of economics* away from the stereotypes of economists as white men who work in banks. **Action Point 2** focuses on introducing a curriculum that reflects “*What Economists Really Do*”. We can start by rethinking the current module offer for economics students, consider biases in teaching economics, and refocus on the work of economists beyond banking and finance. **Action Point 3** is about diversifying *role models* in Economics. Students need to feel recognise with the discipline. In male-dominated subjects, role models are important for retaining female students. Universities need to be more proactive in how they promote academic and professional economists in a way that all students feel reflected in these roles models.

Feeling part of a community is important for students' achievements and progression. Given the very important role that non-academic activities play in students' experience, **Action Point 4** focuses on *practicing inclusivity in non-academic activities*. Societies and other student-led organisations matter not only for the social aspects while at university, but also for the networking opportunities, and therefore, it really matters that *all* students have access to these opportunities. These activities also help students to feel accepted and develop *sense of belonging* to the institution. **Action Point 5** is in fact about helping students to develop *sense of belonging* not just through non-academic activities, but through academic practices too.

Action Point 6 advocates for the creation of *women spaces*. Situations of being “*the only one*” can negatively impact on women's experiences in economics, affecting engagement and retention. Women spaces (these can be virtual or physical spaces) can help to empower women by sharing experiences and providing a network of support. **Action Point 7** finally emphasises the importance to make everybody aware of the problems with the discipline and engage in constructive discussion on how to address current problems with bias and discrimination. Everybody's contribution is important and we need to avoid ‘*diversity enclaves*’ that may not be effective in delivering the needed change.

In this report we focus on women. However, we do realise that this is not the only group to suffer from bias and discrimination in the discipline and it is important to engage more broadly with the intersectionalities of the different groups. Race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disabilities, etc cannot be ignored when creating a diversity strategy, and each department needs to carefully consider cohort characteristics before implementing changes.

Finally, these actions need to be followed up by deeper changes aimed to challenge any current biases and discrimination practice within the institutions. This is not an easy task and requires an active recognition that these problems exist and that we all need to actively engage for real change to happen.

1. Introduction

Women are under-represented in Economics at university level and in the profession more generally. The academic field even lags behind subjects typically characterised as male dominated such as STEM ones which, after some campaigns to increase diversity, now boast a 52% female student body at UK universities. In Economics, female undergraduates are less than a third.¹

Universities have undertaken positive action in order to attract more women into studying Economics at undergraduate level. The idea is that, if sufficient women are encouraged to study Economics, we will observe a fairer gender representation in the discipline.² While we are very optimistic on the positive effects these initiatives can have on gender balance in Economics courses, we also believe that increasing the number of girls studying Economics may not be sufficient if other institutional-level factors are not simultaneously changed.

Economics has been accused of being a hostile environment for women and more in general minorities. Alice Wu in 2017 shamed the discipline after her research detailed gender stereotyping and misogyny in a famous forum for

¹ More on this in Casselman & Tankersley (2019), Harvey (2019), Smith (2018a, b).

² See for instance outreach initiatives linked to 'Discover Economics' supported by the Royal Economic Society in 2019, aimed to school students and sixth formers to introduce them to economics as a field of study (<https://www.res.org.uk/membership/financial-support/discover-economics-grant.html>), and the off-spin initiative 'Discover Economics' <http://www.discovereconomics.ac.uk>.

economists. Her research contributed to bring attention to the issue. In 2018, the American Economic Association run a “climate survey” to investigate sexism and discrimination in the discipline (AEA, 2019). This survey highlighted the extend of the problem which highlighted the hostile environment that economics offers to women: only 20% of women are satisfied with the overall climate in economics compared to 40% of men; 22% feel included socially within the field (men 44%); 22% have suffered sexual harassment (men 3%).

Universities have done some self-reflection on how to improve the environment for staff, but it is important to consider how potential exclusionary cultures and biases in Economics departments may affect students. An organisation’s culture is given by the shared beliefs developed over time by their members, in this case, academic and non-academic staff. Therefore, conscious or unconscious biases and discriminatory behaviours might reflect on teaching practices, educational policies and even in initiatives aimed to engage students.

Even institutions that have made efforts in creating a more inclusive culture and addressing staff’s biases, may still need to consider some changes or at least reflect on current practices. Changes in student body (e.g. due to the efforts of increasing the number of female students in Economics) require an adaptation of institutional norms. A new group of students who are under-represented in the current cohorts may not develop a sense of belonging to the institution, may perceive the new learning environment unwelcoming or in any case might feel they do not fit well, and this could in turn adversely affect their academic performance.

The aim of this report is to help departments of Economics to create a more inclusive environment that allow under-represented groups to engage with the subject and thrive. In Section 2, we offer 7 *Action points* that are practical and can be easily implemented. Appendix A summarises some of the practical aspects of these points. These action points are based on the ideas proposed by current

Economic students from various UK universities at the “*Women in Economics Workshop*” held at the University of Warwick on 18-19 January 2020, and are complemented by research on gender discrimination and pedagogical literature on classroom inclusivity with the aim to address specific issues on Economics and diversity. We have tried to make these points as practical as possible, so that these can be put in place without further delay.

We would like to emphasise that, these points have to be followed up by wider and deeper changes aimed to transform their structures, processes and practices, including the mental models that help to perpetuate any form of discrimination. Without changes in the character of their environment, and without rethinking the institutionalised routines and practices embedded in their culture, minor changes are not going to be effective and may even be counterproductive as they may carry workload burden, without the benefit of any tangible improvement. Law et al. (2004) explain the nature of racism in higher education institutions and the structural constraints to change. For a detail review of experiences of racism and its interplay with gender, see Sian (2019).³

While we focus on gender⁴, we believe that creating a more inclusive environment will not just benefit women, but it may help to increase diversity in general. Nonetheless, in Section 3 we explain how intersectionalities play a role in how we deal with bias and discrimination and universities have to consider the specific characteristics of their student body when implementing changes.

³ Sian provides a good summary of some these issues (including some students’ experiences) in her article for the Conversation: <https://theconversation.com/extent-of-institutional-racism-in-british-universities-revealed-through-hidden-stories-118097>

⁴ Throughout this report, we refer to gender when making the distinction women/men, as the focus of our discussion was on women. However, this can be misleading and in section 3 we will talk about sex discrimination instead as we are going to briefly look at other forms of gender discrimination. Sex and gender are terms often used interchangeably as for many people they are the same, they are in fact two different concepts and when talking about discrimination this matters. Sex refers to the biological aspects of an individual, while gender is a social construction, it is not binary, and gender categories and identities may not match the sex that an individual was assigned at birth. See more detail explanation in ONS (2019).

2. 7 Action Points to Make “Economics for All”

We explain how departments of Economics can start with 7 Actions Points to increase inclusivity and female students’ satisfaction with the subject:

1. Reshape the image of Economics
2. A curriculum that reflects “*What Economists Really Do*”
3. Be Proactive with role models
4. Practice inclusivity in non-academic activities
5. Diversify the sense of belonging
6. Create spaces for women
7. Stop focusing on women!

Points 1 and 2 focus on how to change the perception that students (but also the general public) may have of Economics as a discipline i.e. focus on money, banking and being a men’s club. Some may also think of Economics as theoretical and abstract without immediate application to the ‘*real world*’. Points 3, 4 and 5 consider changes to current practices in all aspects of the academic life that may be gender biased. Point 6 and 7 complement each other. The former looks at women specific activities while the latter explains why it is important that male students get involved too and become *diversity allies*.

ACTION POINT 1

RESHAPE THE IMAGE OF ECONOMICS

Men continue to dominate economics and there remains a disappointingly strong stereotype of economists as a homogenous sea of white middle class men staring at screens of numbers in high-stress financial careers (Bayer and Rouse 2017). This is a major barrier to young people who may feel economics is not the right choice for them. Breaking down the economics stereotype is vital to show all students that economics is for everyone and universities have to contribute to reshape this image.

Another stereotype about Economics is that it is only (or at least mainly) about money and finance and theoretical/abstract. This misconception may affect the appeal of Economics to young girls. Crawford et al. (2018) find that, compared to their male peers, girls of high school age are less likely to be driven by financial return and job status as career motivation and more driven by the opportunity to care for others and contribute to the society and environment. Economists know that economics is more than just money and banks as many of them work in a variety of areas and most of the economic research is based on empirical evidence. We need more emphasis on these to attract and retain more women to the discipline.

Within the current offer of economic modules, we need to help students understand the link of learning outcomes in these modules and the potential skills needed in their professional (and not just academic) career. We observe that those modules that are directly linked to potential future jobs tend to be oversubscribed. This is the case of money and banking modules, and in more recent times experimental and behavioural economics. Economics departments need to make sure that the availability and encouragement to pursue finance and banking

modules is balanced with a wide variety of other focuses within economics, such as historical, development and policy perspectives.

Broadening the perspectives of what we can do with a degree in economics benefits all and not just women. Using a series of surveys, Bowles and Carlin show that economic students believe that economists should address major problems. They asked 4,442 students on the first day of their introductory economics class, what they believed to be the major problems economists should be addressing. Across twenty-five universities and twelve countries, the responses were remarkably uniform: inequality, climate change, unemployment and globalisation dominated the minds of the students. Notably, climate change grew in importance for the most recent cohort surveyed in 2019, and we would not be surprised of the appearance of pandemic in the next survey round.

From Crawford et al. (2018), we can get that boys and girls have different motivations for choosing particular subjects to study. Girls are less likely to rank high salaries as the most important aspect for studying a subject, but seem to give higher weight than boys to “making a contribution to society or the environment”. We need to show the path on how different courses link to potential jobs, and not just research or high salaries. This closely links to *Action Point 2*.

ACTION POINT 2

A CURRICULUM THAT REFLECTS “WHAT ECONOMISTS DO”

Following from Action Point 1, reshaping the image of economics, also goes through the changes in what is taught in the classrooms. Lecturers have to play an active role in revising and updating the economics curriculum. Lecturers cannot just rely on teaching resources from commonly used Economics textbooks as these show biases against women. Stevenson & Zlotnick (2018) analysed eight leading

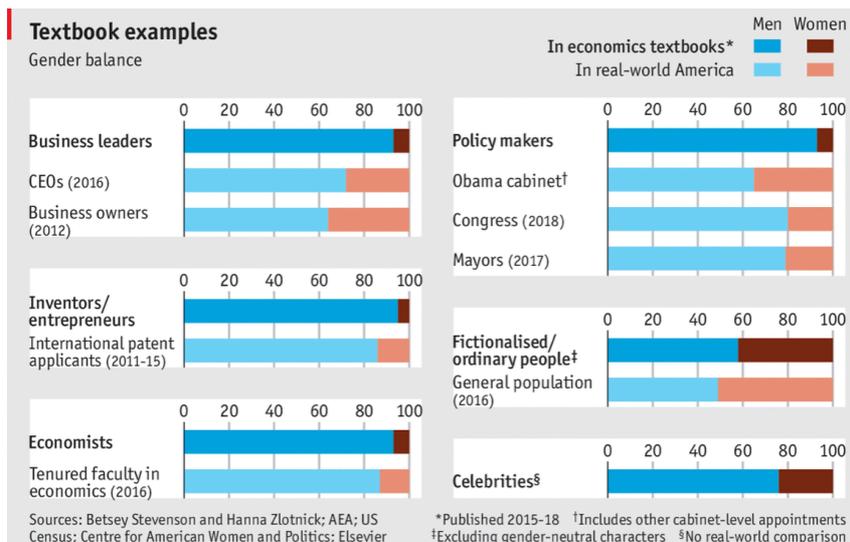


Figure 1: How Economics textbooks (mis)represent women (source: The Economist, 2018)

economics textbooks to see who the authors used as examples and found that three-quarters of all mentions are men. Not only are men significantly more often shown as economists, policy makers and business leaders, but there is also a vast misrepresentation of the proportion of men found in these roles in the real world. These results are represented in Figure 1.

Currently, women-owned businesses represent 42% of all businesses in the US and a quarter of C-suite executives are female (American Express, 2019; Korn Ferry, 2019). In stark contrast, Stevenson & Zlotnick’s research shows that the textbooks represent only 6% of real-world leaders as female, with women consistently presented as more passive than their male counterparts and most often seen involved in household, food and fashion related tasks. Therefore, defaulting in using the material provided by textbooks may have negative effects on students’ interest in the subject.

In explaining gender under-representation in Economics, some have argued that women are not attracted to economics what it is about. However, if economics courses do not engage in explanations on how economic events may affect women

and other minorities in different ways, they may fail to engage these groups. Lecturers are responsible to ensure that they paint a picture of the world that a student of any gender or background can relate to. Through lectures and other teaching activities, students should be able to understand the real world around them and be able to relate their life experiences. Lecturers should therefore strive to use examples which represent the diverse experiences of the student body. Considering that women make up a third of undergraduate economics classes, it becomes glaringly obvious that they are not taught how to use their economic toolkit to address current events which disproportionately affect women (and this is also valid for other discriminated groups).

Some examples: the UN estimates that 70% of those living in poverty today are women (UN Women, 2017). In many societies across the world women are responsible for gathering and producing food and gathering water, putting them at greater risk from the impacts of climate change. In 2020, the Young Women's Trust utilised data from the Office of National Statistics to calculate that the unpaid work of young women, such as childcare, cooking and cleaning, is worth £140 billion to the UK economy. Despite widespread calls for women's unpaid work to be included in GDP calculations (Messac, 2018; Dhaka Tribune, 2019), women's contributions to the worldwide economy are not represented and there is still a significant under-exploration of issues which pertain to gender inequality within current curricula.

In the very recent experience, the coronavirus pandemic has brought into even more stark reality the economic inequality faced by women as they are disproportionately represented in populations worst hit by the economic impacts of the coronavirus, such as those in the caring professions, in low paid and insecure employment, lone parents or homeless (WBG 2020; UNWomen, 2020). Next academic year, it is a great opportunity to engage with these issues and explain what are the structural factors that allow this to happen in first place.

It is not just what we teach, but also how we teach that matters. Various studies show that economic training affects students' behaviours and decisions: economics students show lower levels of cooperation than other students (Carter and Irons, 1991; Frank et al. 1993) and they also show a higher gender-bias upon entry and the gap becomes more pronounced in senior students, which shows that exposure to economics teaching is not neutral (Paredes et al. 2020).

The CORE Econ Project (core-econ.org) offers a good starting point to start rethinking how we teach Economics. It offers three e-books in which real world problems are used to explain economic theory and their more empirical nature offers students the opportunity to engage with data and explain the social dimension of economics. It is still early to gather evidence on the effects of the CORE curriculum on students, but some anecdotal evidence was presented at the 2020 Symposium at the Bank of England (see Phillips, 2020a,b blog entries). For further help with good practice on teaching economics, Bayer (2011) offers a series of practical advice to diversify the economic curriculum.

ACTION POINT 3

BE PROACTIVE ON ROLE MODELS

Role models are figures who can *“influence role aspirants’ achievements, motivations, and goals, by acting as behavioural models, representations of the possible, and/or inspirations”* (Morgenroth et al., 2015 as cited in Porter and Serra (forthcoming)). The lack of female economists translates in less role models for young female who may feel like economics is not the right choice for them.

There are disappointingly few female economists in the media, though this is slowly improving as we see ever more female and minority personnel taking top

economics jobs and winning prizes: Christine Lagarde at the ECB, Kristalina Georgieva at the IMF, Esther Duflo the 2019 co-winner of the Nobel prize for economics. But unlike STEM subjects, female leaders in our field are disappointingly absent in popular culture: think *Amy* from the Big Bang Theory, *Jodie Whittaker* as Dr Who, *Dr Alice Roberts'* awe-inspiring documentaries, all of whom have helped to make STEM subjects feel more accessible, inclusive and inspiring.

Role models are found to be important for retaining female students in male-dominated subjects such as economics. Looking at STEM subjects, Drury et al. (2011) argue that female role models are more important for retaining women already in STEM fields who contend with negative stereotypes on their abilities to perform well. Female role models are effective in preventing women from underperforming and misidentifying from the field.

Universities can play an active role by deploying female role models for current economics students, starting from lecturers. However, the biases of the discipline may mean that there are not enough same-gender role models, or the department culture may affect the perception that students have of their lecturers. For instance, if universities celebrate only narrow achievements (either for research or teaching) that are biased in first place and may benefit male lecturers, they may not be celebrating enough female role models.⁵ Departments need to work on celebrating staff for wider contributions to the institutions and to students' learning and engagement with the subject. Public recognition of these achievements will put diversity in the spotlight and will help students to see themselves reflected in these achievements.

⁵ For example, most universities have teaching awards; however, if these are based on students evaluations of teaching male instructors are more likely to receive 'excellent' ratings than similarly competent female instructors (see Boring 2017, Mengel et al. 2018). Similarly on the research side, if staff are publicly praised for research output, this will likely favoured men as women face discrimination in the publication process. Lundberg's ebook (2020) highlights many of the issues women face in economics.

It is also important to consider that, despite the important role that lecturers can play as role models, students in higher education are focused on their future careers. They really try to make that connection between their academic experience and their future careers. There is evidence that contact with charismatic and successful women graduate, increase female engagement with the subject (see Avilova and Godin (2018)'s project on Undergraduate Women Economics). External and alumni mentoring initiatives are a great way to expose students to a variety of role models who have studied economics and gone on to do a vast array of different careers with the skills and knowledge they acquired. This last point is important: mentors should come from a variety of sectors including - but not limited to - banking and finance.

ACTION POINT 4

PRACTICE INCLUSIVITY IN NON-ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

Non-academic activities form an integral part of everyday life at university and enhance and enrich the student experience in a wide variety of ways which are relevant to making university life more diverse, inclusive and rewarding. There are many reasons why students join these activities: gain practical experience through their involvement on society committees, attending event directly related to economics (such as panel debates, debating competitions, essay competitions, article submissions etc.), networking, making friends, etc. These activities form the basis for both formal and informal networks of economics students which have wider reaching implications for student progression and outcomes in the long run.

University societies and other non-academic activities in fact provide students with important CV-builder opportunities by taking leading roles in these activities (e.g executive committees of university societies). However, less-represented groups may have less opportunities to join these events. Various studies offer

evidence of a structural exclusion of women from vital career-enhancing informal networks (see Greguletz et al. 2018 for a concise summary). The exclusion arises primarily from *affinity bias*, whereby individuals have a tendency to form professional relationships with those whom share similar traits and interests to themselves. In fact, due to affinity bias (and other forms of discrimination) it is likely that appointments of exec roles are in fact influenced by relationships with existing members. This is further supported by evidence from the workplace which illustrates how those in positions of power are more likely to appoint/promote those they consider similar to themselves (Rivera, 2012).

One way through which students create and reinforce connections and relationships with other members of these societies and groups is through the attendance of socials and events organised by these societies. Even when these events are open to all and seem to offer similar opportunities for networking, the nature of these events may be exclusionary. Economics and finance societies events usually have a heavy focus on alcohol and/or party culture, serving to reinforce affinity biases by inadvertently excluding anyone who may not wish to drink or attend such parties. This has been found to be exclusionary for women of faith or those from some religious backgrounds whereby attending an alcohol-centric event may be culturally inappropriate (Arifeen and Gatrell, 2020).

While these are usually student-led organisations and activities, universities can and should play a role in making these activities more inclusive. Merely advocating for more representative exec appointments may not be enough if the problems are not solved at the roots. Universities should work together with student unions to address some of the issues, and departments of Economics can use their leverage on Economics and Finance societies, arising from the financial support they usually provide for these activities.

There are three main areas around which universities should intervene: the alcohol culture, the type and the time of the events. Regarding the alcohol culture, there should be clear criteria on drinks available at these events.⁶ Student activities should also offer *alcohol-free* events and these should be of equal relevance for students as those in which alcohol is served. For instance, some events in which students may meet with potential employers, can be made alcohol free. Finally, there should be a variety of events on offer during daytime and at weekends (i.e. meals, coffee meetings, gender-neutral sporting activities or team-based challenges) such that no women are repelled by the issue of travelling home in concerns for their safety, deterred by the alcohol culture, or the sport practiced.

Economics departments also organise events for students. These are important for students to relate with the course peers and also academic and professional service staff. These events are also used as an informal opportunity to get students' feedback on their academic experience. However, if these events replicate or are very similar to the ones organised by students, then the same students are going to be excluded and in addition, will have less opportunities to talk about their experiences which means departments may received biased feedback.

Non-academic activities are one of the pillars of the student experience and the current crisis has emphasised this. Lecturer and academic activities will be moved online in many institutions, but students are concerned on how their university experience may be affected due to the lack of engagement with social activities. These activities also help to create a sense of belonging with the institution and the discipline (Anh and Davies, 2020) aspect that should not be neglected. We will elaborate more on this in the next Action Point.

⁶ Stanford University has taken the initiative by setting a policy of "Equally Attractive Non-Alcoholic Beverages" that could be replicated (Kinney, 2013)

ACTION POINT 5

DIVERSIFY THE SENSE OF BELONGING

Sense of belonging refers to students' feelings of being accepted and play an active part in their university's life. Students' perception of belonging is strongly related to student engagement (Osterman, 2000; Anh and Davies, 2020), academic achievement (Smith and Bath, 2006), and retention (Thomas, 2012). Institutional culture and sense of belonging are intrinsically related. Departmental policies and norms reflect the the culture of the institution, and a discriminatory culture in departments of Economics can contribute to the alienation of some groups which may feel they do not belong to the institution and to the discipline.

In typically male-dominated disciplines, women consistently report less sense of belonging than men. In the AEA climate survey (2019) only 20% of women said they were satisfied with the overall climate within economics compared to 40% of men, and only 22% feel included socially within the field compared to 44% of men. Studies in STEM have found that belonging uncertainty pushes women away from STEM fields towards more gender balanced ones (Thoman et al. 2014). More in general, Rainey et al. (2018) find that women report lower sense of belonging to STEM subjects (60% of women reported they feel they belong compared to 80% of male) with women of colour reporting the lowest sense of belonging when compared to all other students (almost 20% of the women of colour reported they *don't belong*, compared to around 5% of white women).

Curricular and extra-curricular activities both contribute to generate sense of belonging. Social activities play an important role too in developing sense of belonging with the institution and, as discussed in the previous action point, affect students' engagement. Lecturers who have direct contact with students play an important role in fostering sense of belonging and it is important that students get cues on inclusivity from faculty and staff. Educators with direct contact with

students can help to create sense of belonging through *validation* i.e. “*demonstrations of recognition, respect, and appreciation for students and their communities by faculty and staff*” (Hurtado et al. 2015). Studies show that students from under-represented groups experience lower levels of validation.

Action Points 1 and 2 can help to improve female students’ sense of belonging (but also those from other under-represented groups) to economics as a discipline, but some other actions have to be put in place for improving *validation*. Avilova and Goldin (2018) find that women’s decision of taking further economic studies is directly proportional to their grade in introductory economic (no such relationship holds for men) which reiterates the need for improving validation in Economics.

Economics departments should create a “*Validation Strategy*” defined as a clear set of guidelines and procedures on how lecturers recognise and appreciate students. These guidelines should follow Cooper (2009) recommendations to help to build *multiple positive cultures*, so that each student can relate and feel a sense of belonging. Examples of validating experiences include: referring students by name, curriculum that reflects student backgrounds, faculty help students to develop supporting networks and provide positive reinforcement.

The Validation Strategy should be kept separated from recognition schemes already in place. Recognition schemes usually praise individual students’ contributions on specific aspects. While we do not advocate for cancelling these, it is clear that they may be biased themselves for the reasons mentioned before. Even if they are not biased, recognition schemes tend to be very narrow and tend to recognise only outcomes. A *Validation Strategy* is not focused on one student, but on how staff put in place good practice to recognise the diversity of their cohorts. For instance, it should start by acknowledging the type of diversity in the classroom (how many academics know the demographic composition of their classes?), and it should be targeted to the specific institutions. While in this

document we focus on women, this strategy needs to go beyond gender considerations and understand the intersectionalities of the cohort.

As part of the validation strategy, the departments should offer staff adequate training. Staff should be trained to recognise and address any type of bias and discrimination. The *Project Implicit* <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html> (hosted by Harvard University) offers a series of tests on implicit association that may be useful to start working on this. However, it is important to keep in mind the shortcomings of this training. Unconscious bias training alone has not been proven effective in promoting diversity and it may be even counterproductive (Atewologun et al, 2018; Shirley and Page, 2018; Williamson and Foley, 2018).⁷ Unconscious Biased Training does not address systematic issues driving discrimination. It is crucial that unconscious bias training is paired with action-oriented strategies (as the ones we proposed in the previous action points) and it is part of an active process to change the structure of the institution. People's actions are not just guided by the unconscious, but are dictated by the social norms and constraints in the organisation. Without changing these, we cannot change discriminatory behaviour.

A well designed strategy can help to develop pathways for under-represented groups of students to become engaged and develop a sense of belonging to both economics and the institution and can even help to mediate the impact of discrimination and bias from other students.

⁷ Unconscious bias training is mainly aimed to address individual behavioural change and it does not address systematic issues driving gender inequality and discrimination (Noon, 2017). This training has to be embedded into sustained interventions to address discrimination as otherwise, discriminatory behaviours can be normalised and used to condone the use of stereotypes creating more prejudice rather than less as individuals do not have the opportunity and motivation to assess the consequences of their actions (Shirley and Page, 2018).

ACTION POINT 6

CREATE SPACES FOR WOMEN

In Economics, female students will likely find themselves to be in minority or even the only ones in many occasions (e.g. small classes, seminars, group work). We may not pay too much attention to this, but this may affect women retention rates in the discipline. According to the “*Women in the Workplace*” report, in work environments where women are the ‘*only one*’, they have significantly worse experiences than women who work with other women. For example, over 80% experienced forms of micro-aggressions compared to 64% of women as a whole. Negative experiences and emotions associated with being the ‘*only one*’ increase the likelihood of thinking about leaving their job ([LeanIn.org](https://leanin.org) 2018).

Given that women are in minority in most economics departments, it may be difficult to avoid situations in which they will be ‘the only one’. However, it is possible to compensate for this by creating ‘*women spaces*’. Feedback from the workshop emphasised this: for many of the participant students (but also academics), this was the first time attending an Economic-related event in which women were the majority. They felt more freedom to express their ideas and a greater collegiality.

Greguletz et al. (2018)’s research shows that women and men network differently: women tend to prefer more socially-oriented networking as opposed to the sometimes instrumental-seeming formal and corporate forms that are typically on offer at careers events. *Women spaces* can contribute to create more meaningful networks for female economics students.

There is another aspect that women spaces can help to address. It has been raised in numerous reports that men and women differ in their levels of confidence. There is much debate on whether women are less confident than men

or this is a response to discrimination forces. Lindeman et al. (2019) discuss that women avoid self-promoting or feel discomfort when doing so because they believe that it could be used against them personally, as women are judged more negatively when they self-promote (Rudman, 1998). Women also tend to apply for a new job only when they meet 100% of the listed criteria, compared to men who usually apply when they meet about 60% (Mohr, 2014).

Whatever the reason for lack of confidence, women spaces have shown to help women. Various careers events targeted at women have already adopted this principle, e.g. London Business School, Cambridge University; Harvard; KPMG; Goldman Sachs among many others host networking brunches or panel discussions with refreshments exclusively for female students. In fact, it seems business schools and financial firms are taking the lead on this, but such efforts seem not to be matched within the economics career.

In an educational context, these spaces could promote sharing of questions, tips and informal support. These spaces can open opportunities for the female cohort to communicate openly through many dimensions of their course - educational, friendly, extracurricular. As the spaces become more mainstream and accepted within the student body, it could hopefully create a naturally comfortable environment that could improve students' enjoyment of learning. Under the current scenario, these spaces may have to be virtual, but this is not necessarily a negative thing. A virtual space may allow to trial how these spaces may work and learn valuable lessons for establishing future physical spaces.

Virtual or physical, the success of these spaces relies on how well they are implemented. One measure does not fit all here, and their nature will depend on the characteristics of the student body in each university. In fact, these spaces could start as focus groups to discuss the settings. Whatever the setting, it is

important that students feel comfortable, supported and encouraged in these spaces.

Students collaboration with the organisation and management will be key as they may be more successful in reaching students. Students at Warwick have taken the initiative, and after the workshop, they started the “Women in Economics Student Society”. Hopefully the society will create links with the department management and collaborate in order to shape future policies.

ACTION POINT 7

STOP FOCUSING ON WOMEN!

Despite the efforts to increase women in Economics, women will be in a male dominated environment for a while. For this reason, diversity initiatives to make economics more inclusive for women, minorities or any marginalised group cannot exclude male students. It is important that male students are as aware of the problems in economics, and as involved in actions to help to overcome these problems as the under-represented groups.

For men to engage in diversity efforts, it is important to identify how they can engage and mitigate the barriers that distance them from these initiatives in first place. Men need to be aware of how bias and privilege works in economics to be able to engage. Even when men show to be supportive of diversity initiatives and acknowledge the obstacles that women face, they struggle to recognise and name acts of discrimination at both individual and institutional level (Drury and Kaiser, 2014; Promundo-US, 2019). It is important that men also understand that diversity and inclusion efforts are not a zero-sum game and their support can enrich life experience for all (including themselves).

The strategy to engage more male students should start from an open and honest dialogue about the initiatives in place to increase diversity, and to address any potential misperception of these initiatives and how we all stand to gain by diversifying the field. This can be done through lectures, guest lectures, a series of talks on diversity e.g. organise a “*Let’s talk about diversity in Economics*” series with open lectures and incentives to students to attend.

Universities can provide training that goes beyond being a (generally passive) *bystander*, and help men to become *an ally*. This training can help men to overcome fears of saying or doing the wrong thing, a common fear that discourages men from getting involved (Watkins, 2015; Diversity Best Practices, 2017). An ally is defined as

“a person who is member of the ‘dominant’ or ‘majority’ group who works to end oppression in his or her personal and professional life through support of, and as an advocate with and for, the oppressed population” (Washington and Evans, 2000, p.313).

Men allies can help to create space for women and minorities to establish a sense of agency. It is important that we do not feed into narratives that women or minority groups “need help” because they are not able to succeed on their own. Women do not need to learn to behave like men to be equally successful.⁸ The idea is that allies find ways to stand next to women (and discriminated groups), follow their lead and work collaboratively (Patton and Bondi, 2015).

Men allies can also contribute to support other aspects that affect women in university campuses, for instance sexual violence. Fabiano et al. (2003) suggest that correcting men’s misperceptions of other men’s attitude towards sex consent can help to reduce sexual violence in campuses. Men allies can play an important role in challenging other men over their sexism and misogyny by calling out these

⁸ Patton and Bondi (2015) explain that, while this assumption may be accurate in the sense that minority groups may be more successful if they refrain from challenging dominant ideologies and behaviours, this does not address the reasons why discrimination exists and how this is institutionalised.

behaviours. Usual erroneous assumptions in organisations' sexual misconduct policies is to rely on victims to file complaints while at the same time they overestimate the efficacy of their grievance channels in reducing sexism (Nielsen and Nelson, 2005 as cited in Drury and Kaiser, 2014). Environments that encourage everyone, including allies, to report sexism may be more effective in the fight against sexism. Allies can also collaborate on bridging communication with other men for instance, using their own networks (societies, sports, classrooms).

Finally, it is important that those in power positions at all levels engage with the diversity efforts and these are not relegated to specific groups (usually with no male or senior management representation). No diversity efforts will deliver real results if those in power positions are disconnected from the strategy.

3. It's not just *women* discrimination

While in this report we focus on women, this is not a homogenous group and they are not the only under-represented group in Economics.

Unfortunately, there are other forms of discrimination in the discipline that affect all.

The *Black Lives Matter's* protests in June 2020 in the US and rest of the world have given new fuel to talks about racial discrimination in the discipline. The number of black economists is extraordinarily small⁹ and, according to the Climate Survey by the American Economic Association, nearly half of Black economists (47%) reported being discriminated against or treated unfairly in the profession. More in general, economists from minority groups (employed in academia and outside academia), reported substantially worse experiences along all dimensions of discrimination than White counterparts (AEA, 2019). Given this, it is not surprising that Black and minority economists are underrepresented in academia and in the profession more in general.

⁹ We could not find data for the UK (most data is for BAME rather than only Black population). Data for the US shows that, in the academic year 2015-2016, only 5% of BA degrees were awarded to Black/African American students, this percentage goes down to 3.1% for PhDs in Economics - this means 15 students were awarded a PhD in Economics.

If we couple sex with other types of discrimination, women from minority groups may bear a double burden on the basis of both, their ethnicity/race and gender (and a combination of the two) which make their experiences very specific. University policies aimed to tackle discrimination need to consider these intersectionalities and how they affect the lived experiences of women (and men) in their engagement with the discipline and in their academic life more in general.

When accounting for intersectionalities, characteristics such as physical and mental health disabilities and sexual orientation which are also subject of discrimination - have to be included. We could not find specific data on health disability and discrimination in Economics, but from the AEA survey we learn that 25% of economists who reported some health disability feel they have been discriminated against. Looking at students' experiences, despite the university efforts to increase accessibility, students with disabilities still find many challenges during their studies that make them feel unwelcome and with no equal access to education.¹⁰

Regarding mental health, there is an increasing literature interested in students' mental health. In the US, Barreira et al. (2018) find that 18% of Economics graduate students in prestigious PhD programmes experience moderate or severe symptoms of depression and anxiety, and 11% report suicidal thoughts with many of these students are not in any form of treatment. Both statistics are higher than the reported in the rest of the society. The findings show that the prevalence of these issues are higher for women and international students. We don't have data for economics at student level in the UK, but there are some alarming statistics regarding students wellbeing at university level. UK universities are experiencing a

¹⁰ In 2019, the Disabled Students Network (DSN) at UCL conducted a survey of Disabled Students' experience and reported the findings. You can read more about here: <https://studentsunionucl.org/articles/disability-discrimination-faced-by-ucl-students-and-recommended-measures>. More in general, Disabled students discrimination accounts are not uncommon in the news, due to lack of accessibility to buildings (e.g. <https://thetab.com/uk/2020/02/12/wheelchair-using-student-forced-to-sit-in-stairwells-during-lectures-143582>) or lack of reasonable adjustments (see for example here: <https://eachother.org.uk/university-discriminating-against-disabled-students-by-charging-for-assignment-extensions-due-to-medical-needs/> and here https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/8xwrmav/disabled-at-university-uk-discrimination).

surge in student anxiety and mental health issues (The Guardian, 2019) with a peak of suicides among young people during exam season (Bradshaw, 2019). Therefore there is a call to be done at university level, but economics departments can take lead to support students in house or at least leverage to increase resources to support this cause.

Unlike sex, race, ethnicity, and some forms of health disability, sexual orientation (and some forms of mental and physical disability) are not a readily visible attribute and, in absence of open disclosure, universities cannot know how prevalent these groups are. From the general university student population, we know that LGBTQ+ students are more likely to experience depression or anxiety: 42% compared to 29% of non-LGBTQ+ students according to the NUS LGBT report (2014). These students may face a range of barriers such as bullying, harassment, violence; non-inclusive curricula; non-inclusive options for gender, marital status in university systems; lack of access and support from student services; exclusion from sport and extra-curricular activities, etc (Stonewall, 2019). To account for these issues, universities and departments of Economics can openly support the public initiatives organised by these groups at national level and in the local communities. This can help these students to feel accepted and welcome even if they prefer not to disclose. Of course, this has to be on top of policies to support students with their academic lives.

The lack of positive action in Economics towards the eradication of the various forms of discrimination - in some cases backed by the refusal of many leaders in the discipline to acknowledge this discrimination exists - is not without consequences. This usually translates into an extra burden for women and minorities as they need to prove that the lived discrimination experiences are indeed discrimination. This only amplifies existing problems. For instance, there is evidence that racial and ethnic minority individuals can experience discrimination

as a psychological trauma (Polanco-Roman et al. 2016). In the case of university students, this would negatively affect their academic experience and attainment.

Lack of diversity amongst economists means that our universities and departments of Economics are not well-equipped with ideas and policies on how to tackle discrimination within the discipline. However, there is a lot we can learn from those ahead in the game. Economics can be used to give voice to marginalised groups and there are good examples of economists working on this. The *Black Economists Network* (TBEN) was founded in 2019 in the UK that seeks to challenge the lack of diversity within economics (<https://linktr.ee/tben>). This follows *The Sadie Collective* founded in 2018 by Fanta Traore which aims to bring together Black women, create spaces where they can obtain the resources they need to thrive, and advocate for a broader visibility in the field (sadielcollective.org). In the UK there are various initiatives looking into these issues. We have mentioned *Discover Economics*, and would like to add *D-Econ*, a network of students and scholars working to diversify and decolonise Economics (d-econ.org).

While our 7 action points do focus on women, we believe that these are also general good practice to start the needed change and make the discipline more welcome for all under-represented groups. When *reshaping the image of Economics* broaden the perspectives of what economists do beyond the finance-centred image, lecturers should also consider how structural racism and discrimination shape our societies and the economic and political institutions that dictate the rules of the game and contribute to perpetuate structural racism and other forms of discrimination. This will also contribute to validate the life experiences of students from minority groups.

Lecturers can play a key role in helping (all) students to engage critically with these topics and create collective awareness of the structural changes needed.

Economics syllabi have to reflect what economists like Nina Banks, Sarah Smith, Wendy Carlin and others *really do*. Role models cannot be a binary decision of women as opposite to men. Identities are fluid, temporal and contingent and role models should embrace this. It is important to constantly update and adapt.

Non-academic activities have to be inclusive in a very broad sense and beyond gender aspects. Universities should promote and support the creation of spaces that allow people to talk about feelings and emotions around their experiences so that they do not feel isolated and can develop a sense of belonging. We should connect with these communities and learn from them and become allies in the fight against any form of discrimination.

The right implementation of the 7 action points here presented, with adequate consideration and adaptation to include the experiences of all under-represented groups, can help to fight bias and discrimination in economics and increase general diversity.

4. Concluding Remarks

We need more women and diversity in Economics. Encouraging young people to study Economics is good, but we also need to make Economics relevant and interesting for them. We need to provide an academic environment in which they feel engaged and can thrive.

This report offers 7 practical and easy to implement action points for universities and Economics departments to start creating a better environment for women studying economics. More women studying economics can help to increase diversity too. Research shows that women economists are more likely to be interested in what affects people's wellbeing and quality of life and social equality and fairness.

Despite of our focus on women, the implementation of these points cannot ignore the intersectionalities we talked about in Section 3. Students population differ by institution and any good policy implementation process has to start by a careful analysis of the composition of the student population.

We are not advocating on initiatives that provide simple-minded or fractional solutions to complex problems. We do not argue that these action points can fully eradicate systematic, historical and widespread problems of discrimination. On the

contrary, we want to emphasise that these should be followed up by a comprehensive transformation programme that aims to improve gender representation and inclusion in Economics, and that are tailored to characteristics and culture of each university. Organisations with structures that embed accountability, like a diversity officer position, a diversity committee and an affirmative program, show the greatest increase in both race and gender diversity over time (Dobbin and Kalev, 2018).

Changes in structures, processes and practices need the commitment from all: academic, professional staff and student body. You can start by identifying what are the common biases in your institution and there are tools that can help. Changes should prompt transformation in the institution's climate and should ultimately modify institutionalised routines and practices embedded in the culture, and without these, minor changes will only be seen as *ticking box exercises* and may even be counterproductive.

Finally, we cannot ignore that the world has changed since the workshop in January 2020. The COVID19 pandemic has affected all but it has mainly highlighted the economic and social inequalities of our economy: poorer people, women and minorities (and their intersections) carry the heaviest burden in this pandemic. Most universities are preparing for online/blended teaching next academic year. The new planning should include an analysis of how to carry forward the efforts in creating inclusive classrooms and recognise the diversity in experiences that students will bring. This is important if we do not want to wipe out the recent efforts, or even worse, increase the gap for women and under-represented students. Economics departments carry the responsibility to equip students with the right tools to deal with these problems and create new solutions that benefit all.

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A. Appendix. The 7 Action Points *in Practice*

ACTION POINT 1: RESHAPE THE IMAGE OF ECONOMICS

- Consider the current offer of modules in your department. Is it biased towards money and finance? Diversify and emphasise the variety of modules in economics;
- Link the learning objectives of economic modules to employability skills in the job market (and not just in academic careers). For instance, it is easy to see how ‘Money and Banking’ directly links to a job in the banking system, less clear to see this for ‘Development Macroeconomics’.

ACTION POINT 2: A CURRICULUM THAT REFLECTS “WHAT ECONOMISTS DO”

- Reconsider the examples used during lectures or in the problem sets provided to students. If taken from commonly used textbooks, these are likely to be biased;
- Make a conscious choice to increase diversity in your teaching. Use more examples of women in power positions, consider a variety of names (John or Mary are not “common” names everywhere)
- Consider how students can relate their experiences to the economic theory they are studying. CORE Econ Project and resources in diversifyingecon.org can help.

ACTION POINT 3: BE PROACTIVE ON ROLE MODELS

- Make positive action to increase the visibility of women in your department;
- Reconsider the criteria to celebrate achievements and success. If the criteria you use is mostly based on the usual aspects of research and teaching we are used to, likely these are tainted with bias and may not emphasise enough the role of women and other minorities;
- Check the list of invited/guest lecturers, employability events, and other external interactions you offer to students and make sure there is diversity;
- Alumni can be a source of role models for women, keep in contact with former female students and invite them to talk to current students (even over virtual communication).

ACTION POINT 4: PRACTICE INCLUSIVITY IN NON-ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES

- Work together with student unions to raise awareness on the importance of diversity in students' societies, and promote a culture of inclusivity;
- When offering financial support to events organised by students, give preference to those which have made positive action to consider their impact on diversity;
- Events in which there is the opportunity to meet future employers (e.g. job fairs but not only) should be made alcohol-free;
- Consider the type and the time of events. Events tend to be narrow and mostly consists of parties in the night. Consider breakfasts and lunch events too;

ACTION POINT 5: DIVERSIFY THE SENSE OF BELONGING

- Find out (e.g. through a survey) your students' sense of belonging to the institution and to the discipline, and identify what are the obstacles to develop a sense of belonging;
- Take into account the intersectionalities of the students' demographics in your department and how this affect the feeling of belonging;

- Create a “Validation Strategy” for lecturers to help to develop students’ sense of belonging. This is a clear set of guidelines and procedures on how lecturers recognise and appreciate students;
- Use unconscious bias training to make staff aware of their biases and how to deal with these, but also recognise the limitations of this training if other actions are not taken.

ACTION POINT 6: CREATE SPACES FOR WOMEN

- Set up virtual or physical spaces for women in your institution;
- Establish the dimension(s) of this space: educational, peer support, extracurricular, etc;
- These spaces may not look the same across institutions. Investigate the specificities of your institutions and establish the best way to set these assessments (e.g. organise focus groups to gather ideas on the use of these spaces);
- Reach out current organisations (e.g. economic society) to help out to set these spaces and give ideas on what works better with the students in your department.

ACTION POINT 7: STOP FOCUSING ON WOMEN!

- Open the dialogue (through a workshop, a special lecture, etc) with *all* students on (i) why your department is interested in diversity initiatives, (ii) what are the current initiatives in place, and (iii) why these matter to *all* and not just to under-represented groups;
- Address all potential misunderstandings about these types of initiatives. For example, you can collect feedback from students and address the negative feedback publicly and in a constructive way;
- Provide training courses on how to become an *ally*;
- Engage male students (*allies*) in promoting diversity initiatives through their networks (sports, societies, classrooms).

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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In January 2020, Stefania organised the “Women in Economics: Student Workshop”. She has recently been appointed as *Diversity Champion* by the Royal Economic Society and is Executive Board member at the Economics Network. Stefania teaches Macroeconomics and her research focuses on Latin American institutions and inequality.

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Kate contributed to this report by writing Action Points 1 and 2.



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Caroline’s PhD is funded by a studentship from the University of Leeds. Her research focusses on the relationship between economics and society. This includes challenging the philosophy of science of current orthodox macroeconomics which systematically excludes female perspectives. Caroline presented at the Women in Economics Workshop “*Girls Bossing Economics*”.

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Izzy was an organiser for the ‘Women in Economics Workshop’. She is now President and co-founder of the “Warwick Women in Economics Society” which aims to make *diversity in economics* a permanent item in the university agenda. She has a passion for understanding social issues. She has previously done research on housing policy in the UK supervised by Dr. Paredes-Fuentes.

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Economics for All

7 Action Points to Make Economics more Inclusive

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