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France: Charter for Gender Fairness at Conferences

V. Pierron-Bohnes^{1, 3, 4, a)}, N. Westbrook^{1, 2, 3, 5, b)}, Caroline Champenois^{1, 2, 3, 6},
Claudine Lacroix^{1, 3, 7}, Pascale Launois^{1, 8}, Marie-Aude Méasson^{7, 1, 9},
Michel Spiro¹, and Amina Taleb^{1, 3, 10}

¹*SFP (French Physical Society), 33 rue Croulebarbe, 75013 Paris, France*

²*SFO (French Optics Society), 2 avenue Augustin Fresnel, 91127 Palaiseau, France*

³*Association Femmes & Sciences, 7 rue Lamennais, 75008 Paris, France*

⁴*Unistra-CNRS IPCMS UMR7504, 23 rue du Loess, BP43 67034 Strasbourg Cedex 2, France*

⁵*LCF-Institut d'Optique, 2 av. Fresnel, 91127 Palaiseau, France*

⁶*PIIM, CNRS-Un. d'Aix-Marseille, Centre univ. de St Jerome, 13397 Marseille Cedex 20, France*

⁷*Néel Institute – CNRS, 25 rue des Martyrs, BP166, 38042 Grenoble Cedex 9, France*

⁸*Laboratoire de Physique des Solides, bât. 510, Univ. Paris Sud-CNRS, 91405 Orsay Cedex, France*

⁹*MPQ Université Paris 7-CNRS, Bât. Condorcet, Case courrier 7021, 75205 Paris Cedex 13, France*

¹⁰*Synchrotron SOLEIL, L'Orme des Merisiers-Saint Aubin, BP48, 91192 Gif-sur-Yvette Cedex, France*

^{a)}Corresponding author: vero@ipcms.unistra.fr

^{b)}nathalie.westbrook@institutoptique.fr

Abstract. Several French research entities, committees, and professional associations have jointly agreed to ask conference organizers to sign a “gender fairness” charter (*charte de parité*) when they apply for help from any of the participating organizations. These organizations are the Women and Physics Committee of SFP (the French Physical Society), CNRS (National Centre for Scientific Research, a large research entity in France), F&S (Women and Science Association), and SFO (the French Optical Society). This condition would apply to requests for funding, official endorsement, or help with publicity. We recommend that the women physicists’ committees in all national physics societies institute similar initiatives so that all physics conferences will soon become “gender fair.”

INTRODUCTION

Before the European Parliament resolution of 9 September 2015 on women’s careers in science and universities, and glass ceilings encountered, France had already adopted, in July 2013, a law on higher education and research, the so-called Fioraso’s Law, which mandated the inclusion of gender parity in university councils. Earlier, in January 2013, a charter was signed between the government, represented by ministers Genevieve Fioraso and Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, and organizations representing more than 300 higher education institutions in France, to promote equality between men and women in higher education and research.

The effects of these governance decisions are now visible in the compositions of university councils and recruitment committees. The effects at the level of recruitments and promotions in physics are more difficult to observe, as there is an interference with the gender balance among the candidates, especially when there are very few candidates (or only one). When selecting from larger numbers of candidates (typically when there are more than four), the proportion of women attains non-zero values, whereas when a unique person is considered, it is almost always a man.

In addition to these institutional measures, the careers of women scientists also need to be promoted in other ways, such as encouraging their contributions to conferences as invited speakers. Such invitations are essential when

applying for a promotion, as they demonstrate international visibility and scientific influence. Unfortunately, there is often a vicious circle in which the same scientists, which happen to be men, are invited to most conferences.

The most recent action of the Women and Physics Committee (Commission “Femmes & Physique”) within the French Physics Society (SFP) has been to propose a charter for gender fairness at conferences in France. This effort was undertaken in partnership with the Women and Science Association (Femmes & Sciences Association). The charter has now been ratified by the SFP, the CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique), and recently by the French Optical Society (SFO). In this paper, we describe the content of this charter and suggest that it can inspire similar actions in other countries.



FIGURE 1. Organizations supporting adoption of a “gender fairness” charter for conferences seeking funding or other assistance.

NEED FOR THE CHARTER

In Europe (EU-28), only 30% of the researchers in the government sector (all fields included) are women, and the proportion falls to 20% in the fields of sciences and technology [1]. In all European countries, when the physicists’ figures are available, they are very similar to the one for science and engineering (Figure 2). The percentage of women researchers in physics is 13% in Germany [2] and 16% in Ireland [3]. In the UK, women are 9% of professors, 19% of senior lecturers or lecturers, and 19% of researchers [4]. In the Netherlands, in the Foundation for Fundamental Research on Matter (FOM), only 10% of the scientific staff is female, whereas 24% of PhD students and post-docs are female [5]. In France, 21% of physicists are women (varying between 16% and 25% depending on the physics domain; see Table 1). The situation is not really better in the United States, as the American Institute of Physics reports that less than 23% of U.S. physics faculty members are women [8].

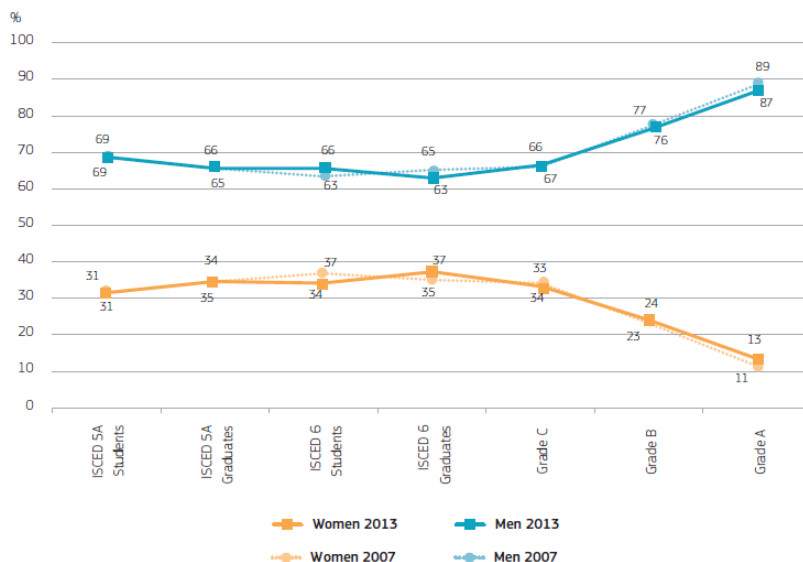


FIGURE 2. Statistics of women and men in a typical academic career in science and engineering, for students and academic staff in Europe in the 2007–2013 period. This curve is called “the scissors curve” (from [1]).

TABLE 1. Female Physicists in France, 2015–16. (Compiled from two French sources [6, 7].)

Domain in Physics (Statistics in France 2015-2016)	Full professors in universities and research directors in CNRS				Assistant professors in universities and researchers in CNRS				Total				Male advan- tage
	Men	Women	Total	% Women	Men	Women	Total	% Women	Men	Women	Total	% Women	
Condensed matter and materials	638	133	771	17%	823	342	1 165	29%	1 461	475	1 936	25%	1.6
Subatomic physics	319	53	372	14%	345	118	463	25%	664	171	835	20%	1.6
Diluted matter and optics	426	74	500	15%	548	118	666	18%	974	192	1 166	16%	1.1
Globally in physics	1 383	260	1 643	16%	1 716	578	2 294	25%	3 099	838	3 937	21%	1.4

Note: The male advantage is the ratio of the proportion of males at grade A positions to the proportion of females at grade A positions.

Moreover, female physicists experience further discrimination in the context of conference participation. From an already small cadre, the percentage of female invited speakers at conferences is even smaller, putting female physicists at a disadvantage in employment and promotion. In all countries, the proportion of women is the smallest at the top of the academic hierarchy (for example, only 10% of full professors are women in the United States [9]). In France, whereas 25% of assistant professors in physics are women, there are only 16% of female full professors [6, 7].

We believe that an important action is to promote fairness for women attending and presenting their scientific results at national and international conferences, following the recommendations made at the 5th IUPAP International Conference on Women in Physics, in Waterloo, Canada, 2014 [10].

TEXT OF THE FRENCH GENDER FAIRNESS CHARTER

This section provides a translation into English of the charter [11] presented to conference organizers who seek support from the French organizations that have adopted this requirement.

Preamble

The French Physical Society (SFP), the French Optical Society (SFO), and the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) are actively engaged in gender equality, which is today a significant international issue. They work to improve the place of women in physics research and to increase the visibility of women in physics, in order to attract more young women into physics research. The Women and Physics Committee of SFP, supported by SFO and CNRS, proposes actions to actively promote fair recognition for women in scientific conferences. One of these actions is to require conference organizers to sign the following charter when applying for any help from SFP, SFO, or CNRS (official endorsement, funding, or help with publicity).

Recommendations

- Reach the percentage of women in the domain (when known [*data in Table 1 cited –Ed.*] – 20% otherwise) in the conference’s committees (scientific committee, program committee, international committee, publication committee, chairperson pool...).
- Reach or exceed the percentage of women in the domain with a floor of 30% (when unknown [*data in Table 1 cited –Ed.*], the floor applies) for invited talks and oral presentations by women. (The easiest method for organizers to achieve that goal is to choose female invitees first, before fulfilling any other balance criterion [geographic, thematic, etc.]. One will always find male invitees to complete the other criteria.)
- Present these percentages and the percentage of women participants at the closing session or at the general meeting if any during the conference. (We recommend asking for gender during registration; doing so will make reporting very easy.)
- After the conference, send the Women and Physics Committee (mail to sfp-femmes@sfpnet.fr) a final written report, including the percentages of women at all levels and describing what the organizers did to increase these percentages. Examples of such actions could include grants earmarked for female PhD students or post-docs; provision of childcare during the conference; organization of a “Gender Issues in Physics” session as a parallel session (see <http://meetings.aps.org/Meeting/MAR16/Session/E14>), or any other initiative to improve gender equality.

If you agree to follow these simple guidelines, it will convey a very positive image of your discipline to young scientists and to your sponsors and supervisors within the framework of the equal opportunity policies of your institutes, the Ministry of Education and Research, and Europe. This will have a beneficial impact in the development of your discipline and will contribute to the success of your conference.

CONCLUSION

We recommend that the women physicists' committees in all national physics societies propose similar initiatives, so that all physics conferences will soon become "gender fair"! You are welcome to use and adapt this charter in your own country!

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