

June 2018

# CREATING INCLUSIVE CONFERENCES FOR ACADEMICS WITH CARING RESPONSIBILITIES

## GUIDANCE FOR CONFERENCE ORGANISERS

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### About this briefing

The briefing gives an overview of findings from a small-scale, exploratory study that looked at the impact of caring responsibilities on academics' participation in conferences. It presents recommendations for how conference organisers can be more accommodating towards these attendees.

### Context

Conferences are known to be vital sites for career progression, networking and intellectual engagement for academics. However, conferences can be highly exclusionary spaces for a number of reasons, including income, employment contracts, border politics, in/accessibility and caring responsibilities. As such, addressing issues of access to and participation in conferences is an essential part of conference organisers' responsibilities.

The study employed the diary-interview method, in which 29 academics with a variety of caring

### Why develop an inclusive conference policy?

- Academics place a great deal of importance in attending conferences, particularly in relation to accessing research culture, networking and intellectual stimulus.
- Academics with caring responsibilities face several challenges in attending conferences, and in managing their caring responsibilities while at conferences so that they can fully participate.
- Some of these challenges can be addressed by conference organisers through more consideration to arrangements before and during conferences, e.g. prompt advertising of the schedule, Wi-Fi provision, sufficient breaks, provision of care facilities and/or bursaries.
- By adopting an inclusive conference policy, conference organisers can make simple accommodations that enhance the ability of academics to attend and participate in conferences, and so create more inclusive spaces for sharing ideas and developing collaborations.

responsibilities traced their experiences through one conference each, and then reflected on their conference attendance more generally.

The findings fill a gap in knowledge about how caring responsibilities impact on academics' ability to both attend conferences and fully participate in conferences when they are there. The recommendations overleaf are based on participants' own experiences and feedback, as well as subsequent discussions with carers' groups, the project stakeholder group and academic audiences.

## Recommendations for an inclusive conference policy

Conference organisers can support academics with caring responsibilities by considering conference schedules when planning. Those with care responsibilities are adversely affected by schedules which:

- Are released at late notice
- Involve very long days that fall outside of, e.g. day care times
- Are changed at the last minute or which overrun on the day
- Do not include breaks or only include very short breaks
- Include impromptu social events which are announced on the day

There are also a number of ways that conference organisers can support academics with caring responsibilities during conferences:

- Ensure reliable, easily accessible Wi-Fi is available, as this is often vital for academics with caring responsibilities to stay in touch with those at home.
- Provide childcare facilities at the conference location (although this does not offer a comprehensive solution as older children or children with more complex needs cannot use these facilities).
- Provide a designated, supervised space for older children.
- Offer care bursaries which reimburse academics for extra care expenses incurred by attending conferences. These are particularly inclusive as they can support academics with a variety of caring responsibilities which cannot be provided for in other ways.
- Include a space on the registration form similar to dietary requirements and access requirements for care-related requests, and ensure requests are considered individually.

Some academics with caring responsibilities can only attend part of a conference, or cannot attend at all. It is helpful for these academics if conference organisers can consider:

- A day-delegate rate
- Live-streaming the conference, or parts of it

- Filming or recording the conference, or parts of it (e.g. using lecture capture) and promptly distributing this material afterwards
- Including an option for pre-recorded or video-conferenced presentations



*"In Two Places at Once" by Rhiannon Nichols*

## Contact the researcher

Dr Henderson would be particularly interested in hearing from conference organisers who implement these recommendations, or who are interested in doing so.

Contact Dr Emily Henderson:

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## Further information:

This policy briefing is based on 'In Two Places at Once: the Impact of Caring Responsibilities on Academics' Conference Participation' (Visit [www.warwick.ac.uk/i2po](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/i2po) or search #I2PO on Twitter).

*This briefing was supported by Warwick Research Development Fund and the Warwick Institute for Advanced Studies. The views contained in this briefing do not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Warwick.*