



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH
School of Mathematics

James Clerk Maxwell Building
Peter Guthrie Tait Road
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01 February 2018

Organisers of the “Women of Mathematics throughout Europe” exhibition

Sylvie Paycha, Sara Azzali, Alexandra Antoniouk, Magdalena Georgescu, Noel Tovia Matoff

Institut für Mathematik

Universität Potsdam

Karl-Liebnecht-Strasse 24–25

14476 Golm

Germany

Dear Sylvie Paycha, Sara Azzali, Alexandra Antoniouk, Magdalena Georgescu and Noel Tovia Matoff,

We write to express our concern about the “Women of Mathematics throughout Europe” exhibition which has been on display here in Edinburgh.

The board reporting the views of Oksana Yakimova includes a quotation from her interview saying, “Even though I enjoy collaborating with women, I find it more difficult than with men, since we start talking about other things; starting from mathematics, we can end up talking about flowers! Men are much more focused, no flowers with them!” Concern that this remark seems rather insulting to female mathematicians has been raised at the most recent meeting of the Good Practice Committee of the School of Mathematics, University of Edinburgh (which deals with equality and diversity issues).

Although the remark may have been meant to be light-hearted, we feel concerned that the decision to include it gives a platform for an opinion that is inappropriate in an exhibition that aims to portray the thirteen women interviewed “as role models to stimulate young women scientists to trust their own strength” (<http://womeninmath.net/project/>). We believe that reading Oksana Yakimova’s comment may damage the confidence of young women at the beginning of their career in mathematics and bolster the stereotype of successful mathematicians as male.





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As members of the Good Practice committee who are concerned to reduce the barriers that exclude young women from the mathematics profession, we ask you to reconsider the inclusion of this remark in your exhibition.

Yours sincerely,
Ruth Forrester
Jill Douglas
Diletta Martinelli
Clark Barwick

