

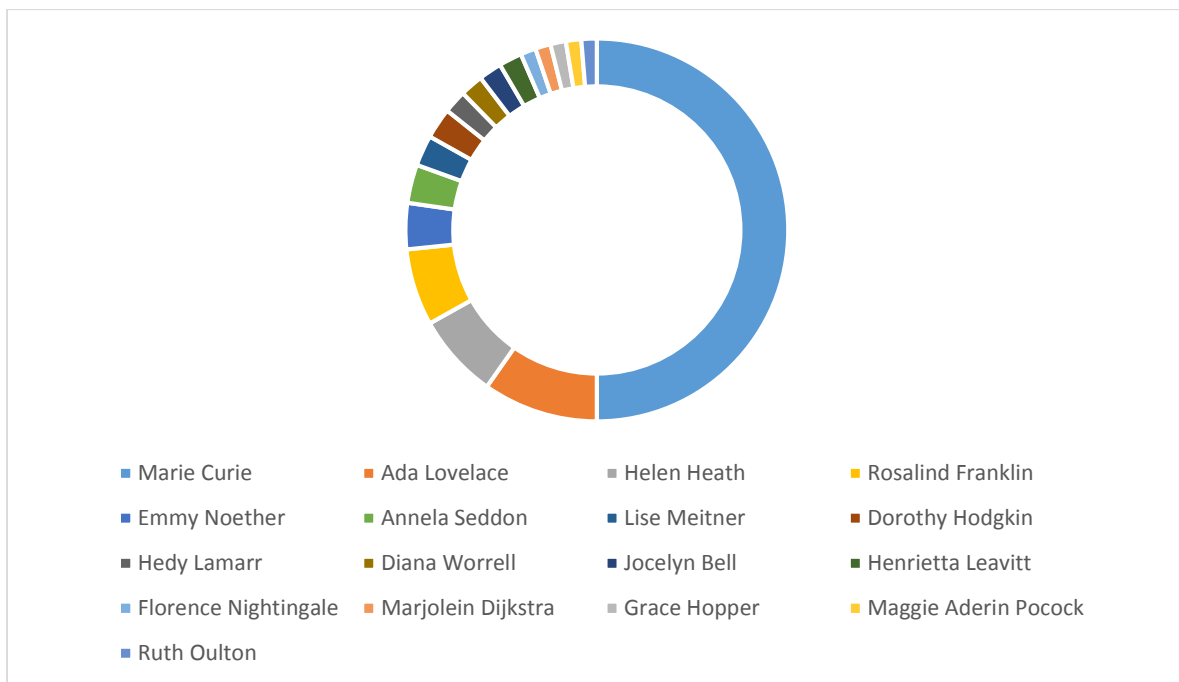
## Ada Lovelace Day Report

The School of Physics took part in Ada Lovelace Day 2014 by organising a stall and a display in the foyer of the Physics building. The display was focused upon the role of women in science in the past, present and future, and showed examples of female scientists from a historical perspective, highlighting the struggles that they had had for acceptance. This was juxtaposed with examples of current female “superstars” of science, as well as thought provoking questions, such as “how many women take Physics at University?”

There were 7 (?) student volunteers who helped with the stall as well as two members of academic staff. People entering the building were challenged to name a female scientist (and were encouraged to do so through being bribed with chocolate). The names were written on post-it notes and displayed in the foyer.

Overall, 230 people took part in the exercise, and there were 89 unique answers. Of the total 230 answers, 12 were either illegible, or not suitable as answers for this exercise<sup>1</sup>.

Of the remaining 218 answers, if we consider only the answers which received more than one vote, the results are below:



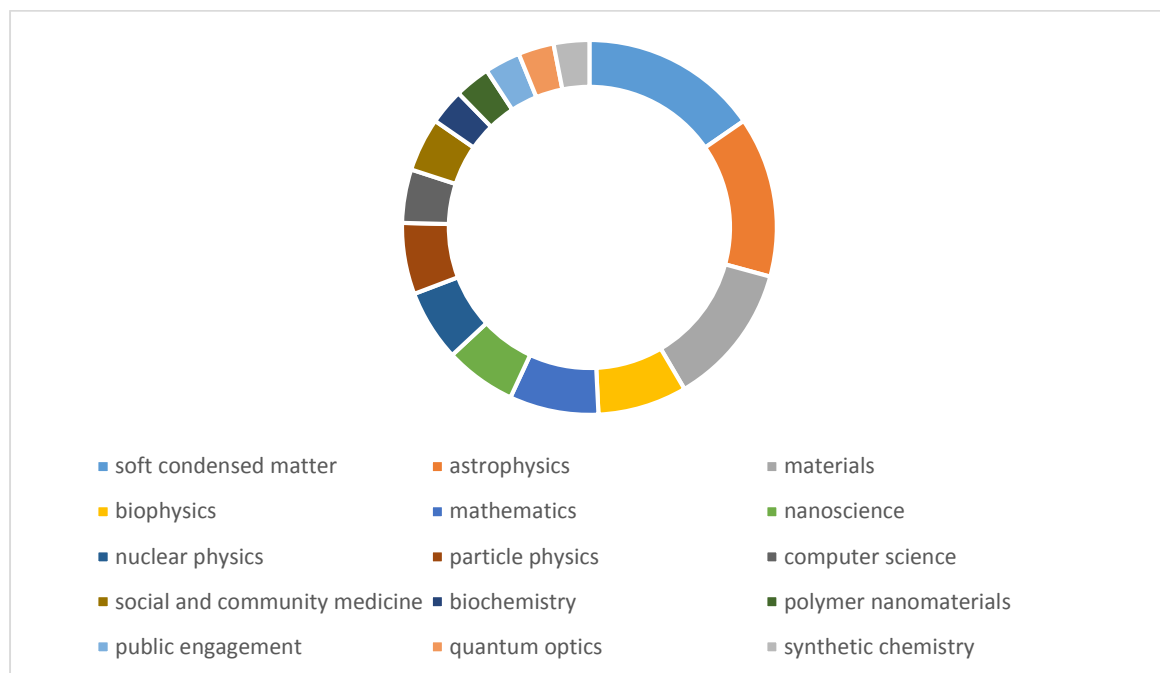
By far the most popular answer (35.3%) was Marie Curie, with Ada Lovelace (6.9%) being the second most popular answer. It was clear that many people had not heard of Ada Lovelace before taking part in this survey, so it would be interesting to see if this is run again, whether there is any increase in the number of people who give this answer.

<sup>1</sup> These included answers such as Isaac Newton, “Alberta” Einstein, but also Barbara Barres who underwent gender reassignment and is now Ben Barres. After discussion, it was decided that including a trans man is not appropriate in this discussion.

The next two most popular answers were Helen Heath (5.0%) and Rosalind Franklin (4.6%). This likely reflects the number of students who have been taught by Helen during their Physics degree. Rosalind Franklin was discussed in 3<sup>rd</sup> year Biophysics the week before the survey.

The results were also broken down to ascertain whether students were most likely to know female scientists who were alive or dead. 78.0% of the scientists named are still alive – this extremely high figure can probably be accounted for when we consider that 24.3% of the answers were for female staff and students currently working at the University of Bristol.

Taking a broad view of the different areas of science represented (and I've had to take some liberties), 12.2% of the scientists were from the field of soft condensed matter. This has been highly skewed by one research group who wrote down every woman in their field they could think of! 11% of the answers were from the field of astrophysics, and 9.8% from materials. However overall there was a broad split across disciplines. The graph below shows all fields that received more than one vote (and with any "unknowns" removed).



Anecdotally, a number of students claimed not to know any female scientists at all, even when pressed (and given hints). This included some Physics PhD students.

The results are in broadly in line with previous surveys about influential women in science which showed that the two most popular answers were Marie Curie and Rosalind Franklin. As an aside, mark Dennis set his group a homework task of finding women who were known in the field of knot theory and this was discussed at his group meeting.

It is clear that this event was a success and in my opinion should be run in the future. A more careful collection of data (for example by year group) would be informative. However the key point was that

the event was fun, and popular and a number of students expressed an interest in attending the lunchtime talk about Ada Lovelace after having found out more about her life.

There is scope for a bigger, university wide event next year, with more involvement from the community, including local schools.