

WMUK Gender Gap Report - Q3-4 2014 project

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Wikimedia UK sponsored a gender gap project during the autumn of 2014. Wikimedia UK (WMUK) is the British chapter of the global Wikimedia movement, which works towards maximum public access to free and open knowledge. The Wikimedia projects are run by the US-based Wikimedia Foundation. WMUK supports but does not control these projects.

Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, is the best-known example, but there are about a dozen others - Wikidata, Wikisource, etc. Wikipedia itself exists in hundreds of different languages. All of these are, in principle, open to anyone with an internet connection to contribute to and change ("edit"), but in practice the self-selected volunteers ("editors") are nowhere near a representative sample of the global population. Wikimedia has identified this as a problem of systemic bias, and one of its major manifestations is the gender gap.

1.

a. What is the gender gap?

The gender gap, in this context, refers to two things. Women have a low rate of participation as editors on Wikipedia; various studies put this at 13-16% of volunteers.¹ ("Charting Diversity", p7-8) In addition, the encyclopedia gives relatively lower coverage to women's biographies and subjects more likely to be of interest to women. To give two examples: military history is extensively written about, but food and cookery less so; male academics are more likely to have a Wikipedia biography than female ones, at any given career level. This imbalance is strengthened by Wikipedia's intrinsic biases, but it also reflects the general situation, where it is more difficult to find reliable sources for female academics.

b. How did the project come to be?

One of Wikimedia UK's key aims as a charity is to teach under-represented groups how to edit Wikipedia, and develop under-represented content (e.g. Women in Science). Wikimedia UK has been running 'Women in Science' editathons for the last two years - one of the first ones was the much acclaimed Royal Society event to celebrate Ada Lovelace in 2012 (https://wikimedia.org.uk/wiki/Ada_Lovelace_Day_2012) - as a part of the wider Ada Lovelace Day celebrations.

In 2013 our editathons have expanded and received extremely positive responses from the attendees and in general. They were organised with a strong support from the Medical Research Council, which enabled

¹ P 7-8 of the 2014 Wikimedia Deutschland report "Charting Diversity: Working together towards diversity in Wikipedia" ([pdf](#)).

us to deliver events in partnerships with other organisations who hosted them and invited people from their networks to attend. Since then we have been contacted by various organisations interested in collaborating with us further.

Thanks to the popularity of these activities we decided to give more capacity for organising these diversity events (logistics can take a lot of time and effort!), and perhaps even growing the group of people who are interested and keen to be involved in this programme. This led to creating the gender gap project worker post, initially for 4 months so we can explore how giving more capacity to this area would benefit what the charity does.

c. Summary

WMUK hired a gender gap project worker from September to December 2014, four days a week. This was intended to act as a focus for the charity's work, because already there was a track record of previous years' successful endeavours to build on, particularly training sessions ("editathons") structured to appeal to women and to fill in the areas of missing encyclopedic content. Hiring one person would also provide an opportunity to explore new possibilities, for example within women's networks.

d. What were the aims of the project at its inception?

- Organise and deliver a series of editathons around Women in Science, addressing gaps in content on Wikipedia, in cooperation with the host partners.
- Research individuals and organisations to approach around event partnership opportunities.
- Liaise with partners in organising the logistics of the events. Advise on Wikimedia requirements for running a successful event.
- Create a write up of a 'how to' organise and deliver this type of events to be of use to future partners.
- Work to develop our active volunteer base by inviting volunteer trainers to support the events.
- Undertake accurate data recording and entry to capture relationships with contacts, attendees at events and outcomes of those.

e. What issues did you want to explore?

Our main aims were to increase the number of female editors, especially in the UK based community, and to improve the content related to women on Wikipedia. In addition, we wanted to see whether the women we interacted with gave any new insight into reasons for the gender gap, beyond what previous sources had indicated.

f. What was the project's value?

Here is a quote from an interview with Latrice Reid, a young black woman from Hackney, London:

"Before I went to the Wikimedia event, I didn't really know anything about Wikipedia. Well, I knew about reading Wikipedia, but not about editing it. ...I suppose it's sort of empowering knowing anybody can edit it

it. Think of the voices that could be added to it, the amount of knowledge. When you've got more people who are able to contribute to it, it means more knowledge, more different viewpoints, it's less likely to be one-sided. You get something more well-rounded."

[How does it make you feel, to know that you can challenge a page?]

Empowered!

The project supported the delivery of AdaCamp in Berlin in October 2014.

The power of Ada Camp lies in the conversations it fosters. Roberta led a Wikimedia session that was part editathon and part discussion of the gender gap. Ten women came to this; some had created accounts and edited years ago, but dropped it, for reasons in some cases eloquent and in others forgotten by the women themselves. Zara Rahman [wrote later](#) of why editing [Hedy Lamarr's biography](#) earlier that year had turned her off Wikipedia; Ednah Kiome [spoke about](#) returning to editing after years away. One woman, a computational linguist, said that her job would not be possible, in a very literal sense, without Wikipedia. Some expressed surprise at how large the encyclopedia had grown since they last really looked at it, and at the number and scope of the other Wikimedia projects. Others were taken aback at how little had been written about the places they came from or the subjects they are interested in.

2. Critical analysis

a. Did anything tangible arise out of this project?

Pages on Wikipedia were created and expanded. Women were given the opportunity to create a tangible, deliberate, and positive digital footprint.

b. What have you achieved that would not have happened otherwise?

Partnering with the [Science Museum Late](#) initiative was discussed previously within Wikimedia UK, but there wasn't a focus or drive to take it forward. In a brilliant drive, during the gender gap project, it went from conception to delivery in the course of the autumn. This event, or rather, these half-dozen events, put the charity and the idea of contributing to Wikipedia in front of thousands of people who are in theory prime candidates to take the plunge from reading to writing. The Late also brought together about 30 Wikimedia volunteers on the night, which was one of the largest single in-person gathering of WMUK volunteers, outside of conferences. One of the board members remarked how good it was to see new faces, and new types of faces. The team bonding and networking effects are added bonuses.

https://wikimedia.org.uk/wiki/Science_Museum_Late

During the event, we used the opportunity of having access to a large audience, and surveyed them on their thoughts on Wikipedia. The results, together with a word cloud, are here: https://wikimedia.org.uk/wiki/File:Science_Museum_Late_survey.pdf

There were the specific editathons set up for the gender gap autumn, such as the Oxford Food Symposium at the British Library, and the women's health "translatathon" at University College London, a novel and successful initiative, that will hopefully be carried into the future.

<http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/ele/2014/12/15/teaching-translation-through-editing-wikipedia/>

There were talks to audiences as diverse as the Equalities Challenge Unit conference and the Camden School for Girls' extracurricular sixth form: both covered the very basics of editing, but with more weight given to a discussion of the gender gap.

There were Ada Lovelace -themed editathons in Oxford and Southampton.

The charity acquired the *pro bono* services of a portrait photographer, who has already twice provided us with professional images of our events, suitable for fundraising and marketing purposes.

And finally, setting the stage for things that will happen well after the autumn of 2014. This includes the "Wiki Women of Wales" editathon for January (co-created with Robin Owain), the volunteer-led proposals for Women's History Month in March (co-created with Fabian Thompsett), and the potentially massive scale of a possible 2015-2016 collaboration with the National Federation of Women's Institutes.

- c. How it benefitted, challenged or made a difference to you and other people involved?
Definitely to many of the women who came along to events, the project had the benefit of empowering them in the digital world. Even more importantly, the volunteers I worked with, particularly Raya Sharbain and Mary Langsdale, said that it has had an impact on them. (See 5a below.)

And then there are wider ripple effects. For example, in my first month, together with Stevie Benton I initiated conversations about lone working for employees, a female-specific security hazard in the office building, and childcare policy for volunteers attending events. Creating an environment where these matters are worthy of attention helps smooth the way to wider female participation in our projects. This doesn't count the many conversations I initiated with colleagues and community members about the nature of the gender gap; gendered styles of Wikipedia editing; assumptions and stereotyping; masculinities, etc.

- 3. Briefly explain any key learning points you gained. For example, what would you do differently if you could repeat the work? Could include unexpected findings
 - a. One thing that I learned is that this job depended on so much embedded knowledge. My colleagues had relevant skills or information because of involvement with the community, or positions held on-wiki, or simply long employment in their roles. I knew what I didn't know from the start, but the areas I didn't know that I didn't know took months longer to surface.
 - b. I'd also seek clarification on what's private and what's public, and what to reveal when to whom, in terms of planning events and reaching out to potential trainers. This proved a stumbling block.

4. Statistics

The events created through the project were:

Women & Classics editathon

AdaCamp Berlin - a talk and editing session

Ada Lovelace day 2014 in Oxford

Ada Lovelace Day Southampton

ECU conference - presentation

UCL Translatathon

Oxford Food Symposium

Girl Geeks Manchester

Science Museum Late outreach engagement

Southampton Solent editathon, twice

In total, there were 108 recorded attendees to the training events - people reached out to, and given skills to contribute to Wikimedia projects. Through the efforts of these volunteers, a total of 142,114 bytes were added to Wikipedia.

5. Quotes from volunteers

- a. From an autumn lead volunteer, Mary Langsdale, new to WMUK:

Among many things, Roberta supported me throughout by showing me how Wikipedia and Wikimedia worked and would support this project. She led me to become an editor. She supported me hugely in planning the individual events, working through them meticulously One key thing I learnt through this project was the importance of following up on events like these....From this data we will hopefully see some new Wikipedians!

- b. From a participant at an editathon:

A third student told me she felt very motivated to practice translation on Wikipedia in the future. As well as the realisation that some of the women's health articles are underdeveloped on Chinese Wikipedia, she was excited about writing on such a visible site and inspired that people in China would be able to read her work.

- c. From the Science Museum Late, responding to the question, "What would life be like without Wikipedia?"

- *University would be harder; what would appear on a Google search?*
- *I'd be devoid of knowledge!*
- *Life would be less convenient and less interesting.*

6. Recommendations for the future of the programme

- a. Any future position should be over a longer time, even if the days per week reduce, perhaps building on the residency model. A year at minimum - academic schedules are surprisingly inflexible (as is e.g. the WI's)
- b. Commitment to fostering and developing female trainers and lead volunteers. "Equal ops" is not enough - this needs to continue to be pro-active.

7. Another way of telling the story of the gender gap project, and reaching out to the public: I've Storified my week running the Twitter #RotationCuration account @WeAreWikipedia. [Have a look!](#) Scores of people already have.

Notes

- This case study was structured with help from Manchester Beacon's [Public Engagement Evaluation Guide](#).
- The research referred to is summarised in the 2014 Wikimedia Deutschland report "Charting Diversity: Working together towards diversity in Wikipedia" ([pdf](#)).