



The Athena SWAN (Scientific Women's Academic Network) Charter was established in 2005 with the aim of *"Encouraging and recognising commitment to advancing gender equality"* within STEM subjects, i.e., science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. The Athena SWAN agenda has grown overtime to promote equality in general. Scan the QR code opposite for more background about Athena SWAN at Heriot-Watt, including guidance and resources.



1. WiDS UAE 2026 brings together global voices in Data Science and AI – Dubai



On Saturday 16 May MACS Dubai hosted the 7th edition of Women in Data Science (WiDS) UAE 2026 on campus. It was a successful event, bringing together more than 110 attendees, and we were pleased to see men in the audience. There were over 25 female speakers from academia, industry, and government. Organised independently as part of the global WiDS Worldwide initiative, the conference celebrated the contributions of women in data science while exploring the latest developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning, and data-driven innovation.

The opening address was delivered by **Professor Lynne B Jack**, Deputy Provost of the Dubai campus. Led by **Professor Hind Zantout**, the technical conference featured keynote addresses, fireside chats, panel discussions, and presentations that focused on emerging developments and real-world applications of data science.

MACS Dubai faculty chaired the various sessions including **Assistant Professors Dr Drishty Sobnath**, **Associate Professor Dr Cristina Turcanu** and **Dr Heba Elshimy**, and **Associate Professors Dr Maheen Hasib** and **Smitha S Kumar**. **Professor John Woodward**, Head of MACS Dubai, was also present as were **Talal Shaikh**, **Dr Abrar Ullah** and **Dr Radu Mihalilescu**.

The conference welcomed an impressive lineup of speakers such as **Dr Sameh Ben Fredj**, Senior VP Data Science at Emirates Group, **Areej Essa** from Cloudera, **Alice Wonjahi** from Amazon and Heriot-Watt Dubai graduate **Mary Qasim** from IBM. Government entities were also represented by two Heriot-Watt Dubai MSc graduates, **Dr Layla Sultan** from DEWA and **Fadwa Al Loubani** from DHA and **Suzanne Hamouda** from Abu Dhabi Health Data Services. **Nikita Naik** from myagemap, **Grace Tang** from Am I Tech Enough and **Naiyarah Hussain**, one of our first Heriot-Watt Dubai graduates from AI Safety Asia completed a well-rounded list of non-academic speakers. The dominant theme of the day was healthcare, and we were delighted with the contribution of **Dr Khawla Alzarooni**, Director of Dubai Biobank Operations and a number of academics and students from universities in the UAE.

Discussions explored the practical applications of data science across sectors, including healthcare, education, transport, and the environment. Key topics included Data Science and GenAI, Bias in Healthcare, Healthy Ageing, Data Standardisation for AI, and Data Science in Biobanking.

Speaking on the occasion, **Professor Hind Zantout** said: *"My takeaway is that women in the region continue to play important roles in Data Science and AI, with skills that are key in facing the challenges of deploying technology that shapes a better future."*

Events such as WiDS UAE 2026 reinforce the commitment of Heriot-Watt University Dubai to advancing innovation, research, and industry collaboration strengthening its role as a platform for meaningful dialogue, knowledge-sharing, and empowering future talent in AI and data.





2. EPSRC Summer Internships: Helping address the Digital Financial Literacy Divide – Edinburgh



Alona Nezhenska, Precious Onuora, Emma Parfinowska and Theo Georiou (left-to-right) pictured in Panmure House at the project presentation event on 8 September 2026.

Over the summer, **Dr Theo Georiou** supervised an EPSRC funded summer internship project called:

Project Scarlet: *Designing Interactive Tools for Digital Finances*

which explored how young people engage with digital financial information and services.

The three Interns attached to the project, **Alona Nezhenska**, **Precious Onuora** and **Emma Parfinowska**, ran workshops with Young Learners and Young Professionals in order to investigate the barriers that young people experience when using digital services within the banking sector.

As well as questionnaires and brainstorming activities, the workshops adopted a co-design style of methodology when exploring potential design solutions. Key findings included issues of *trust* that young people have with AI when it comes to decision making. The project also revealed subtle differences between the needs of Young Learners and Young Professionals. A paper is in the pipeline – watch this space!

EPSRC

Engineering and Physical Sciences
Research Council





3. Prize winning colleague – Edinburgh



Cameron Fields President Student Union (left)
Theo Georgiou (middle)
Holly McAdams Vice President Academic (right)

LEARNING AND TEACHING AWARDS 2026



Each year, Heriot-Watt Student Union:

“Celebrate the incredible staff members who make a lasting impact on the student experience”

through their **Learning & Teaching Awards ceremony**.
This year’s event took place on May 6th, and we are
delighted to report that MACS’s **Dr Theo Georgiou**
(Computer Science) won the prestigious:

Best Undergraduate Supervisor Award 2026

<https://www.hwunion.com/news/article/hwunion/The-Learning-and-Teaching-Awards-2026-Recap/>





4. MACS Events in Celebration of Ada Lovelace Day 2026



Ada Lovelace Day 2026 Edinburgh Campus



The Bayesian Pendulum: Swinging from Improper to the Engine of AI



An Open Lunchtime Lecture by* **Professor Ruth King**

Director of the Bayes Centre
School of Mathematics
University of Edinburgh

1pm on Thursday 8 October 2026
Lecture Theatre 3 (LT3)
Hugh Nisbet Building

* This lecture is open to all staff and students at Heriot-Watt as well as the wider community.

ABSTRACT: Asking an LLM (*pick your favourite LLM tool here*) “How old is AI?” a very common response is 70 or 76 years old, to the Dartmouth workshop in 1956 when the term Artificial Intelligence was first coined or to Alan Turing’s seminal paper relating to the “Turing test” in 1950. However, the underpinning mathematical principle of AI dates back more than 250 years. This principle is “Bayes Theorem” and can be expressed in a simple single statement. Paraphrasing the idea: “current knowledge = past knowledge x new information”. In other words our current understanding of something is a combination of our previous understanding which is updated if/when we receive new information. This is very much how our own brains processes information – we interpret the new information in light of our experiences and knowledge to date.

In this talk we will discuss the underlying principles of Bayes Theorem, the associated history and controversies of the area of “Bayesian statistics” from its “birth” relating to a simple statement of the Reverend Thomas Bayes published (posthumously) in 1763, to its subsequent fall in popularity with statisticians between the 1920-1980s before its resurgence in the 1980’s onwards to the modern day. Some examples will also be discussed where the principles of Bayes Theorem have reached the wider public domain – at least in impact or application if not by name itself (and this is not only modern AI).

BIO: Ruth King is the Thomas Bayes Chair of Statistics in the School of Mathematics at the University of Edinburgh (UoE). She is also the Director of the Bayes Centre, the UoE’s Innovation Hub for Data Science and AI, leading data-driven innovation and supporting the adoption of translational research for societal and economic benefit. Previous roles include lecturer then reader at the University of St Andrews; EPSRC postdoctoral fellow; and postdoctoral research fellow at the University of Cambridge. She graduated with a PhD in Statistics; and BSc in Mathematics with Statistics from the University of Bristol.

She is an applied statistician working at the interface of statistics and different application areas, most notably in ecology and epidemiology. Her work focuses on the development of novel statistical models, techniques and tools to address real world problems and answer specific questions of interest. Research areas of particular interest include: Bayesian inference; capture-recapture methods; multiple systems estimation; missing data; population size estimation; state-space models; and hidden Markov models.

Ruth is an elected Fellow of the Academy of Mathematical Sciences; Learned Society of Wales; Royal Society of Edinburgh; and the Institute of Mathematical Statistics. In 2022 Ruth was also awarded the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) Barnett Award for “her work in statistical ecology, and in particular bringing to prominence in the field, the use of Bayesian statistics”. She is an active member of the wider scientific community, with current/previous roles ranging from President of the International Biometrics Society: British and Irish Region and RSS International Conference Chair, to panel membership of prize/fellowship committees, member of editorial boards and supporting initiatives relating to under-represented groups in STEM.





Ada Lovelace Day 2026

Dubai Campus - Ada Lovelace Celebration

Date: Friday 9 October 2026

Time: 4-5 PM Dubai Time

Format: A Q&A Session with Ms Sharron Gunn, Group Chief Executive of British Computer Society (BCS)

Organiser:

Dubai HW BCS Student Chapter

Lead organizer:

Isaias Biju

(Year 4 BSc Computer Science)

MACS Faculty Members involved:

**Dr Drishty Sobnath, Dr Talal Shaikh,
Dr Adrian Turcanu**



Ms Sharron Gunn
Group Chief Executive of BCS

Online session (students and staff from all campuses welcome to join)

link: <https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/371253495269221?p=ez4qTwTWfl8qtFA2Xa>

The BCS Student Chapter will host a one-hour Q&A and discussion session with **Ms Sharron Gunn**, Group CEO of BCS, providing students with an opportunity to gain insights into the future of computing, emerging technologies, and the evolving role of computing professionals. The session will be held in celebration of Ada Lovelace Day, which is observed annually on the second Tuesday of October.

The session would offer students a unique opportunity to engage directly with a senior leader from the professional body for the computing profession and to gain a strategic perspective on the future direction of the sector. Topics could include emerging trends and technologies, the changing skills landscape, opportunities for professional and career development, the role of research and innovation, and the contribution of BCS towards shaping the future of the computing profession.



This session is open to undergraduate and postgraduate students, faculty members, and anyone with an interest in technology.





5. Carer Awareness Training

Identifying and Supporting Carers: *an online session via Teams*



This introductory session delivered by [VOCAL](#) aims to make carers more visible in the workplace and help those in senior positions reflect on the hidden impacts of caring, and how to identify and support unpaid carers in their organisation.

Wed 7 October
13:00-14:00

The session will be interactive with opportunities to ask questions along the way. Register via the following link:

https://enzj.fa.em3.oraclecloud.com/fscmUI/redwood/learner/learn/redirect?learningItemId=300001660462252&learningItemType=ORA_COURSE

This training opportunity is part of Heriot-Watt's Bronze Athena Swan Action Plan and is being leveraged by the MACS Silver Athena Swan Action Plan.

6. Canvas Pages for Athena Swan and Equality Diversity and Inclusion

To all our **MACS students** – information related to **Athena Swan**, and more broadly **Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)**, is now available through your **Degree Discipline Canvas pages**. Specifically, check-out the **Induction hub 2026-2027** module.

(part of our MACS Silver Athena Swan Action Plan 2024-29)



**Equality
Diversity
Inclusion**

If you have suggestions or questions related to Athena SWAN, or an event that you would like to advertise, then please send them to us via athena-macs@hw.ac.uk. In addition, if you would like to be part of the MACS Athena SWAN Team (a.k.a. the Self-Assessment Team (SAT)) then please do get in touch.



Audrey Repetti and Andrew Ireland
(MACS Athena Swan Coordinators)

