

BY MARJA MAKAROW

## Shining the light on hidden figures



**M**y grandmother received her master's degree 109 years ago from Helsinki's Imperial Alexander University, which was later renamed the University of Helsinki. Her professor started every lecture by kissing the hand of the only female student in the department of Finnish and Finno-Ugrian studies.

She was one of 233 graduates, 29 of whom were women whose academic ambitions

were encouraged by the women's rights movement. In 1907 Finland became the first country in the world to grant women the right to vote and stand for election. In another political first, 19 female MPs were elected to the newly established 200-member Parliament the following year.

In 2016, Finland's 14 universities issued 15,321 master's degrees, 58 per cent of which were granted to women.

While the majority of early career researchers are female, the academic glass ceiling has yet to be shattered. The proportion of the Finnish university's women professors is 24 per cent, the European average, while Finland excels in gender equality in other sectors of society. Might this have to do with the fact that universities, the world's second-oldest still functioning institution after the Catholic Church, are steeped in tradition?

Women remain hidden figures on the global innovation scene. This was recog-

nised by our Parliament when it decided to celebrate the 110th anniversary of universal suffrage by establishing an award for women for science-based innovation in economics or any branch of technology. The award was created to highlight women's contribution to our innovation-based societal capital and financial growth.

The Parliament's Chancellery Committee invited Technology Academy Finland to organise the call for nominations and evaluation of the proposals. Out of the innovations nominated by research organisations, academies, and

enterprises, the evaluation panel singled out six, from which the Committee selected the winner.

Speaker of Parliament Maria Lohela presented the award on June 1 to Hele Savin from Aalto University for her nano-structure-based method for the construction of high-capacity solar cells, contributing to the "solar revolution" in energy production by lowering costs and improving efficiency.

Diversity fosters collective intelligence – diversity of gender, age, as well as cultural and national backgrounds. The world needs to tackle huge challenges such as the fight against climate change and the quest for sustainable energy sources. Our planet can no longer afford to hide any talent that can be put to work for the common good.

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