THE SUBMISSION REPORT FOR SILVER AWARD

LEVEL OF AWARD

The Department of Biology is applying for a Silver Award. The department has a strong collegiate ethos with an emphasis on inclusive decision making and staff report that this culture is highly valued and appreciated. Our strategy has been to provide an environment in which all staff members are enabled to achieve their goals and the department has worked to identify and introduce good practice in the management of Academic and Research staff regardless of gender. It has acted on the assumption that good practice applicable to all staff will be of particular benefit to women in overcoming barriers to their career aspirations. However, the department has been aware also that particular initiatives were needed to ensure that changes to practices were fully embedded and to breakdown potential barriers to women for a career in SET.

The decision to apply at Silver Award level was informed by this balance between a strong background of support for the career development of women and knowledge that further efforts are essential.

1. THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The Athena Swan project within Biology was given support at Strategy Group, the highest decision-making body in the department. The self-assessment process was undertaken by a sub-group of the Department’s Human Resources Committee, which oversees strategic staff-related matters. Members were chosen to represent a range of backgrounds, knowledge and career stage, and to ensure that decisions were owned by those with the authority to implement them. It is the intention that the involvement of a range of other contributors will be engaged to implement our action plan, including post-doctoral researchers and post-graduate students.

The working group comprises:
- Professor Ottoline Leyser (chair)
- Professor Dale Sanders (Head of Department)
- Dr Nathalie Signoret, Lecturer (Departmental representative at the University Athena Swan working group)
- Dr Harry Isaacs, Lecturer
- Ms Janina Pirozek, Human Resources Manager

A series of meetings were arranged to:

1) Consider the data needed for the self-assessment process, the initiatives and plans already in place in the department, and points in the five key areas of the Athena Charter to be addressed;
2) Develop actions to raise awareness of the Athena Swan project in the Department;
3) consider the activity of the University Athena Swan project working group and discuss its implication for the Biology assessment exercise;
4) Develop an overview of the project and requirements, discuss the timescales and set deadlines for each stage of the project, draft the assessment document and approve the final draft before submission.

Members of staff were consulted on the Athena Swan project at one of the department’s monthly staff consultation meetings, and plans for new initiatives were discussed at relevant departmental committees.

Furthermore, the Department recognises the benefits to be gained by sharing good practice between
science departments and is committed to implement the University of York Bronze Award plan, in addition to Departmental activities.

4. WORK IN SUPPORT OF CHARTER PRINCIPLES

4.1 Knowing the base line and the SET academic staff profile

There are over 200 scientific staff in the Department of Biology including Academics, Independent Research Fellows and Post-Doctoral Researchers. In 2005, 82 out of 200 scientists were female indicating marginally unbalanced gender representation.

Academic staff:
The department’s Academic staff still reflects its largely male history, but the ratio of female to male members over the last three years has increased (see table III in statistics attachment).

Promotion statistics show a broadly positive picture of the opportunities for those women who have been appointed. To date 7 out of the 17 female academics in the department are Professors, and there is no indication of significant gender differences with 41% and 46% of female and male academic staff being at Professorial level, respectively. This is an achievement of which we are proud, given the overall historical pattern of appointments.

Since there is no evidence that normal turnover among female staff is higher than that of males, there is an opportunity to change the gender balance as the older cohort of staff retires.

Recruitment data have been collected only since 2005 so information on the gender balance of applicants, which might help us analyse whether there is a problem at the recruitment stage, is lacking. In 2005, a total of 13 applicants to academic posts (8 male and 5 female) were short-listed for interview, from which 4 men and 3 women were appointed. That would appear to demonstrate that there is no problem with women being short-listed, but the figures are too limited to be of much significance.

Researchers:
There is a total of 133 Research staff (Independent Research Fellows and Post-Doctoral Researchers) in the department, with a broadly equal gender mix (65 female and 68 male researchers).

Departmental recruitment figures for Post-Doctoral Researchers indicate a good gender balance in appointments; in 2005 13 of 195 female applicants were appointed compared to 14 of 221 male applicants. However, the difference between this healthy gender profile and that of the profile for academic staff indicates a poor transition of female Post-Doctoral Researchers to academic levels (see table IV in statistics attachment), a career move which has historically been either disproportionately unsuccessful for women or they have chosen not to attempt it. Overcoming the high loss rate at this career point is one of our major challenges.

Undergraduates and Postgraduates:
It is reasonable to expect that the ratio of male to female Academic appointees would reflect the picture of undergraduate and postgraduate students in Biology. This is not the case. National statistics in 2001/2 show that, among Biology undergraduates, females outnumber males by more than 2:1 (69.9% to 30.1%). Our own Department’s student statistics (see tables I & II in statistics attachment) indicate that on average, females form more than 50% of total student numbers.

### Summary of Departmental representation for 2005/2006

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Doctoral</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers/readers</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professors</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, the data available from the department of Biology indicate that:

a) Female science graduates and post-graduates are slightly less likely than males to go on and pursue a career in academic science.

b) Transition between Post-Doctoral and Academic levels appears to be much more difficult for women.

c) There is no evidence of females dropping out of their career path or being disadvantaged for promotion once they reach academic level.

4.2 Providing positive support for women at key career transition points

General points

I. In order to improve job opportunities for women all Academic and Post-Doctoral vacancies are advertised nationally or internationally. Interviews always involve mixed-gender panels; every effort is made to provide external panellists, and a range of selection processes is used to enable all applicants to receive full consideration regardless of gender.

II. The department operates a system of Performance Review for all staff that provides them with dedicated time to discuss their development needs and career aspirations. This systemic approach to discussing career development has helped address the possibility that women are less likely to ask for advice or support, or put themselves forward for new opportunities. The system has operated for three years and, having embedded the process, the Department is now concentrating on improving the content of the discussions.

III. The department aims to provide the best support and advice to staff regarding promotion in order to overcome any inhibitions in staff putting themselves forward for promotion, and this has been widely recognised as more of a danger for women. The Department also encourages proactively applications from staff who are at an appropriate stage. This encouragement may be from Mentors or Performance Reviewers, or by the Head of Department identifying an individual at an appropriate stage of their career.

Researcher to Academic

I. The Department has appointed a Skills Development Co-ordinator with funding provided as a result of the Roberts report "Set for Success". Her role is to support Post-Graduate Students and Post-Doctoral Researchers with a range of careers and professional development advice and opportunities. The intention is to ensure these groups are provided with the information they need in planning their career choices and the skills to compete effectively for their chosen moves. Although all Researchers can access this advice and support the Department was conscious that data had identified career transition points as a particular problem for women who might therefore be expected to be key beneficiaries.

A range of activities has been offered within the last twelve months. Examples include a careers day for Post-Doctoral Researchers with a range of science-based speakers; a ‘Women in Science’ session; skills training such as grant writing and small group teaching; CV writing & interview practice involving an industrial representative; and a ‘media skills’ session involving local journalists. A website has been developed for Post-Doctoral Researchers with a range of features and links (http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/biol/skillsdev/).

II. The number of Post-Doctoral staff on indefinite contracts is increasing and redeployment between projects and between groups is becoming more common and better organised. The Department recognises that the security that can be offered to this staff group will continue to be limited by the insecure nature of grant funding combined with the highly-specialised skills needed in scientific research and is giving active consideration to ways to ameliorate such difficulties.

III. Increasingly, successful candidates for Academic posts have first held Independent Fellowships. The department recognised that Independent Fellows tended to join us by utilising networks of
contacts to make an approach with a request to hold their Fellowship here. In identifying that use of networks has historically disadvantaged women, the Department has introduced a new practice of soliciting applications for an annual, nationally advertised ‘fellowship day’ where short-listed candidates are given the opportunity to give a seminar and attend an interview.

4.3 Changing the culture and gender balance in decision making

In the department, key academic and administrative roles are rotated, decision-making takes place within committees and collegiality is highly valued (see the department committee structure on http://www.york.ac.uk/depts/biol/dept/comms/comstruc.htm). Feedback on committee decisions is invited during regular Departmental staff meetings.

The Head of Department operates an open door policy which encourages staff to discuss matters with him informally. He also introduced two years ago the practice of bi-monthly informal lunches to which he invites small groups of staff – for example junior Academics - who are encouraged to share concerns and ideas.

New members of Academic staff are provided with a timetabled induction programme, which enables them to meet all key departmental personnel within their first month of employment, and this practice has received very positive feedback since its introduction three years ago. However, induction has not been used consciously to provide positive messages about culture and it is intended to review the content to see if that aspect could be improved.

4.4 Work-life balance

It is recognised that the role of an Academic is highly demanding of time. The department has attempted to alleviate Academic workload by appointing non-Academic staff, where possible, to undertake essential managerial and administrative duties. The department has its own IT specialist, Human Resources Manager, Financial Adviser, Health and Safety Adviser, and a Director of Infrastructure and Facilities. Finally, timetabling and examinations organisation are undertaken by non-Academic staff.

15% of Research staff work part time but only two (3.5%) of the Academics do so; one male, and one female. There are no job-share arrangements among Research or Academic staff. The department identified that although staff with childcare responsibilities may find it difficult to undertake full-time employment, it has been virtually unknown for job applicants to request part-time work. Since it is likely that applicants do not wish to challenge what they believe are cultural norms before they are offered a position, we have changed our recruitment literature recently to make the possibility of part-time or job-share arrangements explicit.

4.5 Champions, responsibilities and accountabilities

The department has a number of successful female academics and champions including Professor Ottoline Leyser, the current Chair of Research Committee, one of the most influential posts in the department. In terms of responsibility and accountability, Professor Leyser and Professor Deborah Smith are leading figures of the department involved in high-level decision making for national funding bodies (Chair of the BBSRC Genes and Development Biology Committee and Deputy Chair of the MRC Infections and Immunity board, respectively). Professor Dianna Bowles, OBE, director of CNAP is also a highly prominent woman scientist who is very visible within the department, at University level and nationally.

The department is conscious that it needs to do more to raise the profile of the success of women in science, and in particular should aim such information at students and Post-Doctoral Researchers. It has taken initiative to do so such as introducing a “Women is Science” day and by organising the York Biology Open Lectures given by distinguished scientists including women who are presented as role models. Notable female speakers have included Professors Cheryll Tickle, Kay Davies, Nancy Rothwell, Caroline Dean (who is actually an ex-York student). These are series of lectures mainly (but
not exclusively) aimed at undergraduates, with the basic remit to excite and inspire young minds. Graduate students also have the opportunity to meet with the speakers without academics or senior researchers dominating proceedings. The lectures are essentially public lectures open to a campus wide audience.

The participation of Principal Investigators is an essential element in supporting the careers of Post-Doctoral Researchers. The awareness among PIs of their responsibilities is variable and the department has taken action to make its expectations in this respect more explicit. It has produced a ‘Roles and Responsibilities’ document that together with the review of the current Policy & Procedure for Performance Review will ensure better support and advice for Post-Doctoral Researchers from senior members of the department.

5. ACTION PLAN

Set Baseline and academic profile:

To collect, compile and perform qualitative analysis of departmental statistics and staff information essential for the department to understand the choices made by women researchers and identify specific barriers to their achievements:

- Data on appointment, promotion and employment issues and gather information about opinions and motivations using an online survey (CROS) adapted to the needs of the department.

- Information on leavers, such as where do they go and what are the reasons, that would help us to get a better understanding of why women drop out at Post-doctoral level and to tackle the problem.

To encourage female researcher to continue into academia, provide better support of their career development and maximise their opportunities in the department.

Key career transition points:

Strengthen actions in support of women researchers within the department, in order to retain female Post-Docs, attract them to a career in academia, and give them the best chance to access to their first academic position:

- Pursue the departmental skills development programme for researchers and determine ways to maintain the range of activity offered by the Skills Development Co-ordinator once ‘Roberts’ funding concludes in 2008.

- Ensure that the process of Performance review meets the needs of staff and supports their development. This means providing the Performance Reviewers of Academic and Research staff with clear guidelines about their responsibilities for discussing matters such as possible promotion applications. Reviewers will need to help Post-Doctoral Researchers to define a career path, consider time frames and set objectives that will need to be obtained to reach the standard required.

- Establish a bridging fund to help the career advancement of Post-Doctoral Researchers by supporting their salary in an emergency funding gap. Funding will be for a few months and its attribution will be subject to committee decision for cases where there is clear evidence of: a) career progression agreement for the individual; b) a high probability of obtaining a submitted grant.

Culture change and gender balance in decision making:

To develop initiatives providing opportunities to raise the profile of female research staff and maintain a gender-balanced representation and input on departmental decisions and initiatives:
• Review induction literature and practice with the aim of incorporating positive messages about inclusion and equality, and publicise to staff the initiatives in support of the equality agenda that have been undertaken at both, institutional and departmental levels, as a result of the Athena SWAN project.

• Consider which Departmental governance bodies could and should include representation from Research staff and make appropriate changes to membership. Identify opportunities to incorporate into departmental policy development the views and needs of Research staff in general and female Research staff in particular.

• Assemble a volunteer group of trained Post-Doctoral Researchers and Independent Research Fellows to ensure a mixed representation on Researcher recruitment panels and to give such staff the opportunity both to develop interviewing skills and to extend their cross-departmental networks.

**Work life balance:**
Emphasise in all possible ways the department support to staff balancing work and caring responsibilities and its positive attitude towards part-time and job-share arrangements to give female scientists better prospects in pursuing an academic career.