DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

The Department of Psychology at the University of York is applying for a silver award. The department is one of the leading centres for research and training in experimental psychology in the UK. Founded in 1974, it is a medium-sized department within the University, with 30 members of academic staff, 20 research associates and fellows, and 30 PhD students undertaking research across a broad range of topics within experimental psychology, from Social Psychology through to Cognitive Neuroscience.

BACKGROUND

The University of York has a flat management structure: there are no faculties, and individual departments operate with considerable autonomy and direct links to central university administration. Within this context and in line with university policy, the psychology department is committed to identifying and implementing good practice in order to create a productive and supportive working environment. While the view of the department is that this will benefit all staff, regardless of gender, it is also recognised that further initiatives will be necessary to fully support women in their career aspirations within SET, particularly at the early stages of these careers. As such, the department has been involved from the start with the Athena Swan initiative within the University of York, and is committed to implementing the action plan proposed at university level. In autumn 2006 we assembled a working group to consider issues specific to the psychology department.

SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The departmental Athena Swan initiative is led by a working group set up specifically for this purpose in autumn 2006. It has high-level support from within the department, as evidenced by the involvement of the head of department, and includes members – both female and male - from all stages of an academic career, from PhD student to professor. The current membership of the working group is as follows:

- Dr Claudine Crane (Research fellow)
- Prof Susan Gathercole
- Dr Silke Goebel (Lecturer)
- Dr Tom Hartley (Lecturer)
- Dr Emma Hayiou-Thomas (Lecturer)
- Prof. Graham Hitch (Head of Department)
- Anna Wilkinson (PhD student)

Meetings of the working group are arranged with the following main aims in mind: to discuss the data relevant for the self-assessment process, to identify existing instances of good practice within the department, and to propose new initiatives that will promote good practice in line with the Athena Swan charter principles. In addition to this, the meetings provide an opportunity to feedback from the University Athena Swan working group and to discuss issues raised in those meetings that are relevant for the department; to plan the application process; and to plan implementation of new initiatives.

The departmental self-assessment and submission to Athena Swan has been fully supported by the most senior levels of the university administration, with active encouragement from both the Vice Chancellor and the Pro Vice Chancellor for Research. The PVC-Research is also Chair of the University Athena Swan working
group, which holds regular meetings to discuss departmental progress. Generous administrative support is also provided by the University Research Policy Office.

WORK IN SUPPORT OF CHARTER PRINCIPLES

Knowing the baseline and academic profile

Full statistics are provided in tables, in the appended document.

Undergraduate and post-graduate students

Our current undergraduate student body consists of approximately 80% female students, which is a figure that has remained stable over nearly a decade. The figure is similarly high at MSc level, with 81% female students for the current academic year. There is a small decrease in the proportion of female PhD students, which currently stands at 69%, and which has also remained stable in recent years. Our PhD completion rate is very near 100%, so the women who pursue PhDs are receiving them. These figures are in line with national statistics, which indicate 79% of Psychology students are female.

Research staff

The female majority seen at student level in psychology is maintained for research staff, at the pre-doctoral level: of the 10 research associates currently in the department, 9 are women. However, there is a steep drop at the post-doctoral level, with the proportion of women in the last 5 years either at or below 50%. Currently there are 16 post-doctoral researchers, of whom 7 are women.

Academic Staff

Of the 30 academic staff, only 8 are women (27%). The overall gender profile has remained stable over the last six years. There is also a relatively stable pattern over this period of more women at the lecturer level (4 women & 2 men in 2006) and more men at higher levels (4 women & 20 men at senior lecturer or above, in 2006). It is worth noting that this in the context of a department which has historically had very low turnover, and a large proportion of academic staff at senior levels.

Recruitment and appointments

Of the 8 women currently in the department, 4 have been appointed in the last two years, with 3 of these at lecturer level, and one at professorial level. However, for appointments across different post types, including lecturer and senior lecturer/reader, the proportion of interviewees and appointments who are women is greater than or equal to the proportion of applicants who are women (see detailed breakdown in Statistics document). There have recently been 3 further appointments, which are due to start in October 2007: one woman appointed at lecturer level (who is completing a 2-year fixed-term lectureship in the department, and will now be taking up a permanent position), and one woman and one man appointed at senior lecturer level. Overall, of the 9 most recent appointments, 5 have been women, which is an appointment rate for women slightly above the application rate.

Promotion

Since 2001 there have been three promotions within the department, two of which were men promoted to a readership and a professorship, and one of which was a woman promoted to a senior lectureship. However, the recent expansion of the department has included 6 new appointments at the lecturer level in the last few years, 4 of which are women, and the progress of this group will be particularly informative in terms of the current career support and development offered by the department.
In summary, unlike many SET departments, the baseline data for the psychology department at York show a clear majority in favour of women at both undergraduate and post-graduate level. This suggests that in terms of teaching psychology, we are successful in engaging students’ interest in research as an attractive career option, and the large proportion of female research assistants and PhD students shows that they are exploring this option. There then appears to be a substantial change in pattern in the transition from PhD to post-doctoral positions, where there is approximately a 1:1 ratio of men to women. This is followed by a further drop-off in the proportion of women between the post-doctoral and lecturer levels, from approximately 45% to under 30%. The beginning of a decline in the transition to post-doc, which continues in the transition to lecturer both point to the importance of supporting the early stages of career development for women in academic psychology. In relation to the national baseline, the HESA statistics suggest that the proportion of female academic staff in psychology and the behavioural sciences has risen slightly from 50% in 2001-2 to 56% in 2005-6. As this information is not broken down by grade it is hard to make a direct comparison, but it does seem that the York department has had a smaller proportion of female academic staff than the national average.

**Providing positive support for women at key career transition points**

**Supporting new staff**

The Department has already put in place a number of support mechanisms for new staff including:

- Allocating a light load of teaching and administrative duties to new appointees, in order to allow them to better manage the transition into the new post and to set up research projects in the new environment.
- Assigning each new academic appointee a mentor from within the academic staff, who can help both with initial settling in, and also provide a longer-term contact for informal advice and support.
- All members of staff undergo an annual performance review - the last academic year saw a return rate of 100%. In the case of research staff, the reviewer is typically the supervisor; in the case of academic staff it is usually a more experienced member of staff. This provides an opportunity for a regular assessment of work undertaken over the course of the year, and a chance to discuss both the individual’s aims for the following year, and how the department can help to achieve those aims. The department has been proactive in this respect, including allocating funds for external training courses that staff members
- Annual individual progress meeting with the Head of Department, which can be used either as an opportunity for a general appraisal of progress, or for a more focused discussion of particular problems.

**Transition to Senior posts**

- The head of department actively encourages individuals who are at an appropriate stage to apply for promotion.
- Open promotions seminar near the beginning of the academic year, which provides a forum for general discussion and queries; this is then followed up with individual meetings to assess current readiness for promotion, and to discuss areas that may need further development to meet the university’s criteria for promotion.
Postdoctoral Staff support

As a direct result of the Athena Swan self-assessment exercise, a new initiative has been the creation of a Post-Doc Forum. It was felt that post-docs can often find themselves isolated both socially and academically, as they are attached to a particular supervisor and research group, and often find it difficult to create wider networks within the department. The Forum has been modelled initially on a similar group at the Institute of Psychiatry, which Emma Hayiou-Thomas was involved with as a post-doc. Drs Claudine Crane and Paula Clarke, both post-docs in the department, undertook to set up the Forum, and put forward a proposal to the departmental Research Committee, which in turn agreed to support the Forum with £1000 of the Roberts funds. It was decided to open the Forum to all early-career researchers within the department, from research students through to early career lecturers. The inaugural meeting was held on May 16, and was a resounding success: over 30 attendees, who were enthusiastic about the project and suggested a range of potential activities, from informal social events to psychology-specific training events (e.g. grant-writing workshops). Although it is in its very early stages, the Forum has the potential to provide a significant source of personal and academic support to early career researchers within this department – at precisely those career stages at which there is the most dramatic decline in the proportion of women.

A further initiative which was undertaken as a result of the self-assessment exercise, is a destination survey of PhD students and post-docs who have left the department in the last five years. The results of this survey are tabulated below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PhD students &amp; Post-docs who left the department between 2001-2006</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Post-Doc %</th>
<th>Lecturer %</th>
<th>Other %</th>
<th>Retrain %</th>
<th>Off %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PhD at York (F)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5 22%</td>
<td>6 26%</td>
<td>7 30%</td>
<td>5 22%</td>
<td>1 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD at York (M)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7 44%</td>
<td>6 38%</td>
<td>3 19%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Doc at York (F)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4 27%</td>
<td>6 40%</td>
<td>3 20%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>2 13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Doc at York (M)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5 45%</td>
<td>4 36%</td>
<td>2 18%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most marked gender difference here is that, despite overall larger numbers of women completing PhDs and post-docs, a much smaller proportion of these continue on to a further research post, compared to men. This may reflect the relatively large proportion (22%) of women completing PhDs who re-trained in a related field (e.g. clinical psychology); none of the male PhDs and none of the post-docs did this. In contrast, the gender gap is narrower for people going on to lectureships; in particular, women who completed a post-doc at York were slightly more likely to be in a lectureship post than men.

The culture and balance in decision-making

The department fosters an open culture with considerable transparency. All full-time teaching staff, as well as post-doctoral researchers, are members of the Board of Studies. Committee minutes are available to staff on internal web-pages; departmental resources are allocated according to a Points = Prizes formula, and academic staff are regularly updated on departmental allocations and spending. Administrative responsibilities, as well as student supervision and marking loads are also transparent. It became apparent during the self-assessment exercise that the only significant area of activity that is not fully transparent is the number of teaching contact hours, and it was agreed that this would be worth reconsidering.
Key academic and administrative roles are rotated, including Head of Department changing every four years, and Chair of the Board of Studies every 2 years. Key roles are filled with a view to departmental requirements, but also to individuals' career development needs. In addition, there is a deputy system in place for Board of Studies and Chair of Examiners, in order to ensure a smooth transition of roles, and to provide a stepping-stone to these senior levels of responsibility.

Considering the small number of women in senior academic positions within the department, it is fair to say that women are appropriately represented in senior decision making committees. Interview panels for academic posts always have female representation, following university policy. The Chair of Examiners is female (Dr K. Kirkpatrick); there has been a female external examiner for the undergraduate course since 2000; and the two most recent external examiners for the MSc in Reading, Language and Cognition have been female. The director of the MSc in Applied Forensic Psychology, which is the largest MSc course in the department, is also female. Two out of our three female professors, the only female senior lecturer, and a female research fellow, are all members of the departmental Research Committee, and the next chair of the Research Committee will be female (Prof. Sue Gathercole). There is a female representative on the Head of Department’s Advisory Group (Prof. Maggie Snowling). The tutor for visiting students is female, as is the chair of the Athena Swan working group (Dr Emma Hayiou-Thomas). Women are represented in both the undergraduate and graduate teaching committees, the ethics committee, and the staff/student liaison committee. Nonetheless, there are several key committees with no female academic staff represented at all.

**Work-life balance**

Recognising the dual demands of research and teaching on academic staff, the department has attempted to alleviate the administrative workload by appointing a strong team of support staff, including the recent appointment of a full-time IT manager.

Although there is no formal system of sabbatical leave, the department is very supportive of staff sharing, and also of ‘blocking’ teaching wherever possible, to minimise teaching requirements for at least part of the year.

The department is responsive to people’s changes in circumstances, and has been supportive of shifts to part-time work. However, only 3 members of academic staff work part-time for the department, and 2 of these combine their academic work with other employment. During the self-assessment process it was noted that it is virtually unknown for job applicants to request part-time work, and nor does the department make it explicit in job advertisements that part-time work or job-sharing may be possible. Following discussion in the Athena Swan working group, this is something that the psychology department will consider. There are also no examples of academic staff taking long-term career breaks, either for maternity leave or any other reason. This is another area that will be fruitful for the department to consider, in terms of managing such breaks and supporting the return to work. However, two staff (one male, one female) have arranged to take one term’s leave in the coming academic year.

**Champions, responsibilities and accountabilities**

The department encourages engagement with research from the undergraduate level upward, and a major part of the BSc degree is an independent empirical research
project carried out over the course of the 3rd year. Emphasising the importance placed on this are the two annual departmental prizes for the best undergraduate projects each year; of the last four prizes awarded, two have gone to male and two to female students. There is also an annual nomination for the (national) Experimental Psychology Society’s undergraduate project prize: the last four nominations have all been of female students, and the 2006 candidate won this highly prestigious prize. At the post-graduate level, the department awards an annual prize for most meritorious thesis (the Stott prize); five of the last six awardees have been female.

There are many examples of women who have been through the York Psychology department and have succeeded in developing successful academic careers, either at York or elsewhere. For example, 3 former York PhD students were appointed to their first lectureships at York, before moving on to posts at other prestigious research universities (Leeds, Warwick and Oxford). At slightly earlier stages in their careers are two current York post-docs who have been here since their undergraduate degrees. Dr Paula Clarke won the University K.M. Stott prize for best PhD thesis in 2005. Following her PhD, she was appointed to a two-year fixed-term lectureship, during which time she was awarded the vice-chancellor’s teaching award. Having made a successful bid for a large-scale ESRC grant developing a new educational intervention programme for children with reading comprehension difficulties, Dr Clarke is now the lead researcher on this project. Dr Claudine Crane provides an excellent example of successfully balancing career and family obligations at some of the key transitional times in a research career. Having had her first child as a mature undergraduate, and her second child following her PhD, Dr Crane went on to be lead researcher in a large-scale project funded by the Nuffield foundation, examining the effectiveness of a novel intervention for young children with literacy difficulties. In 2006 she was offered a permanent post at the University of Hull, which she accepted on a part-time basis, while continuing her work on the research grant at York.

The psychology department has three female professors who are highly active and visible both within the department and at a national level. Professor Cynthia McDougal, OBE, is Co-Director of the Centre for Criminal Justice Economics and Psychology at the University of York and is Director of the MSc. program in Applied Forensic Psychology. Professor Maggie Snowling, a leading expert in the field of dyslexia, is currently the recipient of a British Academy Readership 2005-7, and was founder and until 2005 director of the MSc program in Reading, Language and Cognition. Professor Sue Gathercole has recently joined the department, but she and Prof. Snowling have two of the largest research groups in the department. At a national level, Profs. Snowling and Gathercole have recently made appearances on the BBC Panorama program, and BBC Radio 4. Professor Snowling acts as consultant to the Department for Education and Skills on the national literacy strategy and is President–Elect of the Society for the Scientific Study of Reading, while Prof. McDougal acts as Consultant Psychologist to Durham Probation Area and is a member of the Close Supervision Centres Advisory Group for HM Prison Service.

However active and visible these role models, however, the department is conscious of the need to do more to raise the profile of women in academic psychology, and that this message needs to be made most urgently to large number of women at post-doctoral level, and the smaller number of women at lecturer level. The departmental external seminar series, which is very well attended by both postgraduate students and staff, is one forum where this is possible, and the organiser monitors the number of women speakers and as far as possible tries to maintain proportional representation. We also intend to join with other SET
departments in the university to organise and participate in a regular ‘Women in Science’ day.

**PLAN OF ACTION**

**Set Baseline and academic profile:**

1. Analysis of the baseline data makes it abundantly clear that the transition from PhD to post-doc and form post-doc to lecturer is a particularly difficult one for women in psychology. As a result of the Athena Swan self-assessment exercise, the department has undertaken a destinations survey for post-docs and PhD students who have left the department in the last 5 years. This has given us a clearer idea of how many York alumni, and particularly women, continue on to careers in science. Following up on this first step, we will contact as many of these leavers as possible in order to gather information on the factors that have informed their career choices. We hope that this will clarify whether and how the department can play a role in supporting women pursuing a career in academic psychology.

**Key career transition points:**

2. The largest initiative that we are currently undertaking to further the Athena Swan principles is the establishment of a Post-Doc Forum (soon to be renamed, in order to accurately reflect its membership), described earlier. Initial ideas for Forum activities include seminars on grant-writing, publications, and a Question & Answer session with senior members of staff on careers in psychology. A further role that the Forum plans to undertake is an Induction each October of new early-career research and academic staff. The department has undertaken to support the Forum with Roberts funding. Although the Forum has made a very promising start, it is in the very early stages of development, and will require monitoring over the next year to ensure that momentum is maintained and that it gains a foothold within the culture of the department.

3. Although the department provides a generally supportive environment to new staff, as well as a mentor to whom new appointees can turn for advice and questions, there are inevitably many aspects of both a new department and a new role that take time to discover. Based on comments collected from research and academic staff who have joined the department in the last two years, we have compiled a list of ‘Things I Wish I’d Been Told’, as an informal supplement to the Staff Handbook and an addition to the current induction process. The aim is for this document to be updated on a regular basis as new staff are appointed, with queries of their own!

**Work life balance:**

4. The lack of explicit advertisement of part-time posts, and the lack of precedent for career breaks, both raise issues that we intend to explore further within the Athena Swan working group, with a possible first step being a survey of opinion within the department.

**Culture change and gender balance in decision making:**

5. As outlined in the progress form, the self-assessment exercise highlighted several areas where continued monitoring would be advisable, including female representation in senior decision-making committees, the appointment of female external examiners, and the number of female speakers invited to the departmental seminar series.