

DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

**Minutes of the Athena SWAN Working Group held on Wednesday, 18th February 2015**

Present: Keir Bailey (KB), Amanda Barnes (AB), Helen Coombs (HC), Calvin Dytham (CD), Adrian Harrison (AH), Erin Haskell (EH), Jane Hill (JKH), Mel Smee (MS),

Apologies: Boris Bongalov (BB), Janina Pirozek (JCP), Jon Pitchford (JWP), Jen Potts (JP), Betsy Pownall (MEP) and Richard Waites (RW)

In Attendance: Andrea Johnson (AJJ)

**15/001 Introduction to new ASWG members**

JKH welcomed Erin Haskell (EH) to her first meeting of the ASWG and explained the current position and how the form of the meeting will take place. It was noted that EH is replacing Keir Bailey (KB) as PhD representative.

**15/002 Minutes of the Meeting of 5th November 2014**

The minutes of 5th November 2014 were agreed as an accurate record, and AJJ will add these to the Biology Athena website accordingly. **AJJ**

Ongoing issues from the meeting of 5th November 2014 would be picked up in the minutes of this meeting.

**15/003 Engagement of undergraduate students: ideas for summer term activities**

Although BB was unable to attend the meeting, he had sent JKH two ideas for discussion, with the aim of completing an u/g activity after the exam period at the end of the summer term. There therefore needed to be agreement if either/both of these ideas formed an appropriate activity for u/gs.

1. ***Activity 1***

The first idea centred round the concept that ‘old white males dominate the sciences’, and for a discussion to be based around that. It was noted that in order to have a useful debate it would be important to get the question right and frame it in a way that engendered positive discussion. It was queried what would be achieved at the end and whether it would merely be ‘increased awareness of the problem’. This was something that came through from the student surveys the previous year … there is clearly a lack of appreciation by male students of how difficult female students believe it is to succeed in comparison with male students.

It was proposed the event should appear in the timetable as an optional activity the students could do, and it was also suggested it would be useful to have this as something that should happen every year as a regular timetabled item. It would also be important get good attendance. Putting the event within a module will ensure someone takes ownership of it.

JKH reported that BB has asked for feedback and will be involved with JKH/RW/Dani Ungar about taking this further. It was queried if this would be a wholly-run student thing, but was ultimately agreed that someone would need to oversee it (this could be the new undergraduate rep). It was also felt that it would be beneficial to have an academic member of staff there as well. JKH suggested that she could go along and present some statistics, and further discussion could take place with Paul Pryor about how he runs the Ethics module. The ASWG further queried if the event could be presented as a larger discussion about research careers. It would be good to provide examples of what we have done to overcome barriers and to highlight practices that are in place to support all students to get the best career that they wish to do. Other people could be asked to come along to bring another perspective (eg PhD students and postdocs could be asked to come and talk about their experiences). The session could even include people who have moved out of academia. It was agreed that holding the session on the careers day would raise Athena Swan within the context of people’s careers, and Dani Ungar will be approached to discuss if this will be appropriate.

**Action**

The ASWG agreed for JKH and BB to have a further discussion with possibly another member of the group (eg AB) to progress this further. JKH/BB will talk to Dani Ungar about getting the event into the teaching timetable. **JKH/BB/AB**

1. ***Activity 2***

The second idea related to the production of ‘shadow CVs’ and an enclosure had been circulated with the Agenda on these. It was acknowledged that academic and researcher careers do not always go to plan. Shadow CVs could be used to highlight this and show students and early career researchers that people in academic posts succeed despite the difficulties they encounter. As females are more likely to leave academia at these stages, BB suggested this may have a direct impact on combating gender bias.

The ASWG queried how these could be used (either as a discussion session or as a document on the website (like the ‘mothers in science’ document).

EH advised that Gradshare have also looked at this and it would be useful to run something through Gradshare. The aim would be to encourage academics to discuss their ‘alternative’ CV, about jobs the individual applied for but did not get, papers they did not get published and grants that were not funded. It was recognised that academics may not necessarily want to engage with this and may need encouraging, but if it were done well it could demonstrate what individuals have overcome, and non-conventional career paths. This could be valuable if students and ECRs perceive role models as ‘beyond their reach’.

It was agreed that this would be best done as an interactive session, and that it would be good for BB to come and talk to the PhD group (Megan/Caitlin) as it could be built into what is currently done rather than a separate session. EH agreed to email those concerned about setting this up. **EH/BB**

**15/004 Staff Survey 2014: discussion of data and agreed actions to follow up**

It was acknowledged that it would be good to think about the outcomes of the Staff Survey from an Athena perspective, and pick out things where there was a specific difference between males and females.

CD had submitted data on the outcome of the staff survey to the ASWG and reported that he and Mary Ashbridge would be focussing on areas for improvements. The two main areas that had been highlighted in this respect were ‘Communication’ and ‘Performance Review’. CD asked the ASWG to let him know if they felt there was anything further that should be picked up.

In relation to Performance Review, CD asked members of the ASWG to let him know if they had any suggestions regarding how the current system could be improved. Anything would be welcome for consideration

CD confirmed that he would continue to come back to the ASWG with things that have been picked out from the Staff Survey that may have gender issues.

**15/005 PhD Survey Results 2014**

York Biology PhD students were surveyed using Google Forms over 3 weeks in December 2014 to gather data for the Athena Swan Working Group, and KB subsequently analysed the data obtained. Nearly half of the PhD students had responded, and of those it was noted that twice as many females completed the survey as males did.

There was a discussion and the main highlight from the survey was that 98% of respondents would recommend the Biology Department as a great place to study for a PhD for both males and females.

The majority of the questions showed no real difference between males and females, but those that did – or those that showed interesting results - are detailed below:

***Q7. I am less confident now that I will continue my career in research than I was when I started***.

The responses to this question indicated that men are more confident than women that they will continue in a career in research, so the reasons for this outcome need to be considered.

**Action**

***Q9. After I complete my PhD, I intend to pursue a career in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics)*.**

Approximately equivalent percent of males and females intend to pursue a career in STEM.

***Q11. I think that males and females are equally likely to have a successful career in STEM.***

About half of males are unsure about gender success in STEM careers, and over half of females think females are less likely to have a successful career in STEM as males. It was noted that this perception was the same with undergraduate students too.

It was queried whether there was anything that the ASWG could do about this, and was agreed that the coffee/careers sessions would be the appropriate format for discussion of this. AB confirmed that she would keep a record of attendees to see who turns up in terms of gender. **AB**

***Q13. The Biology Department makes it clear that unsupportive language (e.g. banter that makes you uncomfortable) and behaviour (e.g. bullying) are not acceptable, whether between staff or students (this includes condescending or intimidating language, ridicule, overly familiar behaviour, jokes/banter that stereotype women or men or focus on their appearance).***

It was noted that only 60-70% of students agreed that the Department makes it clear that this is unacceptable, and KB queried whether this should have been a much higher number and should be addressed accordingly.

For postgraduate students it was discussed whether online equality/diversity training could be provided, as is done for staff. JKH will talk to MEP about whether this can be arranged. **JKH/MEP**

In relation to undergraduates, AH reported that he talks to first year students about departmental etiquette, and maybe this could incorporate a statement about equality and diversity. This could be included in the ‘introductory skills’ session to ensure that students are made aware of the existing system and a powerpoint slide, including Athena Swan information, will be put together on this for stage 1 u/gs. **JKH/AH**

***Q19. During my time in the Department, I have experienced a situation where I have felt uncomfortable because of my gender****.*

Out of those who had responded, six (17%) females had experienced this.

It was acknowledged that it would be difficult to follow this up. The highlights of the student survey will be presented to staff at the next academic staff meeting so this message will be disseminated more widely. A follow-up survey will take place at a later date to see if the response to this question improves over time. **JKH**

**15/006 Wider Communication to Staff: Pay Gap Data**

JKH had provided an enclosure about pay gap data, which allowed the Department to investigate evidence for any pay gaps according to gender.

The data show that since 2009, there are few pay gaps, that females were paid slightly more than males, but that difference has declined. Larger pay gaps are evident when data are broken down by grade. At Prof/Reader/Grade8 academic grades, males are paid more than females, but females are often paid more at other grades. It was queried if females got paid more because they spent more time at the top of grades than males did. This will be examined in due course.

The pay scale data, once anonymised, will be presented at the next academic staff meeting. This pay gap analysis will also be added to the Biology AS web site. **JKH**

**15/007 Ongoing Statistics**

JKH reported that the original plan to present staff/student statistics at the spring term meeting had not been possible and the aim was now to present them at the summer term meeting.

**Action** **Action**

A smaller group (JKH, JCP, AJJ and MS) would meet prior to the summer term meeting to ensure that it was on track for presentation at the next meeting. AJJ to arrange meeting. **AJJ**

**15/008 Action Plan – agreed timetable of activity for the next 3 months**

1. ***5.2 Feedback on QUB visit***

It was noted that Queen’s University Belfast is the only other recipient of an Athena Swan gold award for Biology. JKH and JCP had visited QUB in February 2015, with the aim of the visit being to share good practice and get inspiration for new AS activities to roll out at York.

JKH and JCP had felt that they transmitted/shared more information about how things operate at York than was gained from QUB, because it was difficult to compare York with QUB.

QUB shared detail about their Work Allocation Module (WAM) which JKH will speak to CD about. **JKH/CD**

QUB also had a gender initiative group, and good resources to enable them to put things into practice. JCP also gained insight into the QUB on-line Diversity training packing to compare and discuss with colleagues in York.

JKH had provided a document to the ASWG summarising the outcomes of the visit. This will be uploaded on the Biology Athena Swan website accordingly. **AJJ**

1. ***3.3 Analysis of grant application data including bridging funds (3.7)***

Grant application data (obtained from Jane McCarthy) were discussed, together with a supporting document, prepared by JKH, analysing the data.

It was pointed out that in 2013 the number of grants funded to women was unexpectedly low, and JKH will recommend that Research Committee keep an eye on this. Once the 2014 data are available it will be useful to see if 2013 was a one-off.

It was also noted that the numbers of people applying for bridging funds are also low, and it was felt that there is a need to ensure that people are aware that this is available. Similarly summer student numbers are quite small.

JKH reported that she would convey the data to Research Committee along with the comments/ recommendations of the ASWG for Research Committee’s information and action if necessary. **JKH**

The document would also be placed on the Biology Athena Swan website accordingly. **AJJ**

1. ***2.6 Survey of PDRAs***

JKH outlined the history of running culture surveys in the Department. Academic staff had been surveyed previously as had undergraduate students. PhD students have also been surveyed recently. The PDRAs have not been surveyed as a separate group so far for Athena Swan purposes (although an outreach survey was conducted for that group in January). JKH queried whether the two Athena surveys that are now proposed for the PDRA group should be rolled into one large survey (incorporating both a culture survey and a survey identifying training needs). However, MS felt that separate, smaller surveys would be better and would get a better response and it was therefore agreed to keep the two separate in view of the fact that there had not been a large response to the outreach survey.

It was noted that some ‘career type’ questions were raised as part of the staff surveys but questions asked in the PDRA surveys could be phrased in a different way. The frequency of carrying out surveys was also discussed.

JKH and MS will therefore arrange and send out the two surveys (JKH for the culture survey and MS for the training needs one), and this will be progressed accordingly. **JKH/MS**

1. ***2.5 Mentoring***

It has been identified that the Department needs to reinvigorate its mentoring processes to ensure that this is seen to be a positive process. JKH asked for comments on how to develop

**Action**

this, and a smaller group will be convened to take this further, and to agree how to work it in practice. MS reported that she thought a useful mentoring process would be a particularly valuable tool for postdocs.

HC advised that there is a York-wide mentoring scheme in existence, which includes large employers in York. Susan Kane, the University’s Leadership Development Manager, is involved with mentorship training at the University and may know more about this and HC agreed to contact her accordingly. **HC**

It was acknowledged that Susan Kane has provided a new session on mentoring, and the Department will not duplicate anything that is already available.

JKH and JCP will meet to discuss this and will take this forward accordingly. They will report back on progress at a subsequent ASWG meeting, as appropriate. **JKH/JCP**

MS proposed including a couple of questions about mentoring into the PDRA survey, and will let JKH know what those questions will be. **MS**

**15/009 News for the website**

JKH reminded the ASWG to let AJJ know of any events/news that raise the profile of females in the Biology Department. A short description of the event, together with a photo, should be sent to AJJ for inclusion on the Biology Athena website.

AB reported that she would be submitting some information. It was anticipated that UoY staff/students would be again visiting the Yorkshire Museum (at a Sciencegrrl event) and hopefully this would result in information that could be displayed on the website.

**14/010 Items to be Communicated to the Academic Staff Meeting**

It was noted that the Pay Gap data (minute15/006 above) and a reminder about attending diversity and recruitment update sessions would be raised at the next academic staff meeting. **JCP/JKH**

**14/011 Date of Next Meeting**

Week 6, Summer Term 2015 (to be confirmed).

*AJJ - 25/03/2015*