

DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

**Minutes of the Athena SWAN Working Group held on Tuesday, 18th June 2013**

Present: Neil Bruce (NCB), Helen Coombs (HC), Jane Hill (JKH), Hilary Jones (HJ), Janina Pirozek (JCP), Jon Pitchford (JWP), Melanie Smee (MS), Debbie Smith (DFS), Katherine Wilson (KW)

In Attendance: Andrea Johnson (AJJ)

**13/012 Minutes of the meeting** of 14 February 2013 were agreed.

**13/013 Matters Arising from the Departmental Athena Swan meeting of 14th February 2013**

1. ***13/002 (vi) Springboard Training***

HJ reported that she was still waiting to hear from FERA (as the next session of Springboard would be dependent on when they wanted it to run). It was also noted that the session would be joint with York City Council. It was emphasised that Springboard gives participants the opportunity of evaluating where they are at in their lives and set some goals. Some excellent feedback had been received following the last session, and HJ will phone FERA to try and agree an appropriate timescale for running it again. **HJ**

1. ***13/002 (ix) Mentoring for staff and researchers***

HJ advised that she had recently sent a message to the Postdoc Society asking them to remind their members about the new coaching scheme and the new Vitae one-day career development programme for women. It was agreed that HJ would keep records of the number of individuals who take up/attend these schemes, split by staff group and gender. **HJ**

1. ***13/002 (viii) Staff teaching and admin workload allocation***

JKH reported that progress with the Biology workload model was ongoing, and would be in hand soon. It was confirmed that information will now come directly from the timetable rather than done by hand from module synopses, and will therefore be more reliable. Staff will be able to find information more easily on the web, which will allow for greater flexibility and engender confidence that the system is robust. JKH will update the Working Group further when the new system is up and running. **JKH**

***(iv)*** **13/002 *(xi) Feedback from the University Athena Group***

The University Athena application will be discussed later in the minutes. However, it was noted that JCP and JKH were feeding back from their panel work, and the experience would be valuable for the Department/University.

1. ***13/002 (xii) Biology Action Plan – seek feedback from Academics currently on maternity leave as to process and approach***

JKH reported that the Action Plan was ongoing and the individuals referred to at the last meeting had not yet been approached to be case studies for the Action Plan. JKH explained the principles behind the Action Plan and why maternity leave would be a useful area to include.

The previous minutes had noted that the ‘maternity process for PhD students was not known’. It was noted that this was incorrect - there is a maternity process for PhD students, but the issue was instead that maternity leave for PhD students is classed as ‘leave of absence’ and this was not felt to be appropriate. The University group is discussing this topic.

1. ***13/003 (vii) Student and staff culture surveys***

JKH advised that both second year undergraduates and Biology staff had been surveyed and a good response had been received. Summaries of findings will be posted on the Biology Athena web site. **JKH**

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1. ***13/003 (ix) Promotion processes***

HC had passed a copy of the presentation that Chemistry ran on the promotion procedure for their ART staff on to JCP, and JCP confirmed that further thought/discussion would take place in relation to this accordingly. **JCP**

1. ***13/003 (x) Summer Student Scheme for Postdoc Researchers***

NB reported that the Summer Student Scheme for Postdoc Researchers was very well received this year and some very good applications had been received. A total of 15 applications had been received and the three that were awarded were all to females.

It was acknowledged that the scheme had been pushed by the Postdoc Society which had led to the good response.

1. ***13/003 (xii) Grants Awarded to Females***

It was noted that information is kept by Jane McCarthy about the number of grants applied for by males and females, the amounts asked for and the numbers being awarded to males and females. These data will be included in the gender data collected each year.

1. **13/003 (xiv) *Valuing Individual Teaching Contributions***

It was confirmed that data were available relating to the number of congratulatory letters sent to females achieving good student feedback scores for their teaching. Currently data are available for the 2010/2011 and 2011/2012 leave years. Data have also been received for the autumn term of the 2013/2014 leave year.

JKH advised that she had spoken to Adrian Mountford about feedback scores from students and can look at the teaching quality spreadsheets to explore this further to assess whether female staff receive similar feedback scores to male staff. It was debated whether this could be used to examine how male and female students vary in their feedback, but was agreed that it would be difficult and time-consuming to extract this information and that it would be preferable to find out that information in a different manner. It was noted that it was not known whether female students get as much out of specific courses as male students do, and it was suggested that feedback from under-graduate students could be obtained to discover this. This might also tie in with the culture survey, and discussions could be held with Jenny White to ascertain what is possible. **JKH**

1. **13/004 *Update on the Provision of Statistics – Staff Leavers***

HJ reported that she was looking at the exit survey that postdoctoral researchers complete with information of what they go on to do after finishing their employment in the Department. The current system was considered not to be fit for purpose as only a small percentage of leavers actually complete the questionnaire. Accordingly HJ was looking at how the whole process works and would try to identify if there was a better way of gathering information.

It was noted that HJ runs a ‘LinkedIn’ group and individuals could be encouraged to join this prior to leaving the Department It was felt that this would be a good source of getting data after researchers have left (in many cases future destinations are not clear at the point of leaving). HJ advised that once an individual updated their profile on LinkedIn then it would be possible, after an interval of time has elapsed, to see what individuals have gone on to do. JCP was also exploring whether central HR can send out something with their exit survey to postdoctoral leavers. It was acknowledged that it would be useful to have it established how similar information is gathered in relation to students, as whatever system is in place needs to be effective.

The issue was therefore ongoing and HJ/JCP will report back with their findings and conclusions in due course. **HJ/JCP**

1. **13/005 *Feedback from the University Athena Group – Flexible Working***

JCP reported that Biology HR were starting to keep numbers of flexible working requests received by individuals. However, so far it has been difficult to establish whether a contract change has been requested because of lack of money on the project or because of a request

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from the individual. JCP advised that email confirmation will be sought when no explanation is given when contract variation forms are received in future.

1. **13/006 *Feedback from the Chemistry Athena Group***

HC confirmed that Chemistry have now submitted an application for a renewal of their Gold Award.

1. **13/008 *Research Councils and Athena Swan***

It was noted that Research Councils are still talking about linking funding to engagement with Athena SWAN and more Universities are signing up with Athena Swan.

1. **13/009 *Proposal to Change the University Terms***

JKH confirmed that she had fed back to Richard Waites the Working Group’s concerns and preferences in relation to the proposal to change the University terms.

**13/014 Data Collection and Statistics**

The provision of statistical data from the Centre is still a problem. Student statistics are in the main still only available as ‘FTE’ rather than ‘headcount’. If the Department has to use the figures available centrally (which will be in line with other Departments and what the University wishes) then the only option may be to use ‘FTE’. HC advised that Chemistry had not been able to get ‘headcount’ figures from the Centre, despite trying to obtain these. JCP thought that there was a chance that the FTE versus headcount issue could be resolved within the next few weeks, and she would contact Alastair Knock to see if this is possible. The Working Group agreed to ultimately leave the decision about whether to use FTE to JKH/JCP. **JCP/JKH**

It was also noted that staff statistics were improved but there were some abnormalities that needed ironing out. Alex McFarlane in Central HR has been asked to look into these accordingly.

An example chart had been drawn up by MS (following discussion with JKH), showing student numbers and this was presented to the Working Group to demonstrate what layout was preferred. Essentially the charts would always show the split (% of females), how this changes over time and a comparison against benchmark data. Total numbers would also be included for comparison. It was noted that the chart provided by MS displayed all the relevant information and could be used as a template for the other charts where possible.

Clarification was required regarding whether to use the Russell Group or HESA for benchmark comparison. HC advised that when looking at benchmarking for their Chemistry application, HESA information had only been available for two years previously and ultimately Chemistry had used little of the HESA data. They had instead got theirs from the Royal Society of Chemistry. The Working Group queried whether the Institute of Biology might be worth contacting for similar data relating to Biology. It was obvious that further thought needed to be given to what benchmarking data Biology should use and JKH/JCP will discuss and agree accordingly. **JCP/JKH**

Data relating to the number of female academics obtaining good feedback scores were presented, and it was emphasised that the data would need to show, out of all of those who received letters, what proportion were female. Other data collection is ongoing, and updated charts will be prepared and pasted into the Athena Gold application form in due course.

**13/015 Feedback from the Culture Survey**

Academic staff and second year undergraduate students have been surveyed. The aim of the survey was to aid with finding new initiatives as well as discovering how people felt about the Department. No areas of concern had come out of the survey of academic staff, and staff had seemed generally happy, so it was difficult to see where to go to improve things. A total of 62 individuals had answered the survey out of academic and teaching staff, so a high return had been received. The only area that was picked up in the survey of academic staff was Performance Review. Although most people had felt that this was satisfactory, it had the lowest percentage of agreement. JCP reported that she would be raising this at the forthcoming staff

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meetings and would be asking for positive suggestions from staff about what they would like to see in the scheme, and it was hoped that some feedback would be received. **JCP**

In relation to the student survey, JKH reported that the students generally seemed very happy and do not feel that females or males get preferential treatment. A total of 83 students had responded out of about 200. The only concern that had arisen related to a question in the survey about career prospects in STEM. In particular, participants were asked if they thought that males and females were equally likely to have a successful career in STEM, and 40% of the respondents had thought that females were less likely than males to achieve this. It was noted that Chemistry had found that this to be a similar issue with their students, and JKH felt that it was an area that Biology should give further thought to addressing. Putting together the survey had been relatively straightforward, and further groups of individuals could be surveyed (eg third year students and PhD students) in a move to engage more with students and understand what it is that generates this perception, particularly as it was females rather than males that think females are less likely to have a successful career and succeed. Various options for addressing the issue were discussed. It was queried whether women taking up technical positions would see that as not being successful, and a more in-depth survey or focus group particularly for female students may be useful. Alternately talks addressing this issue may be a way of moving forward. Another option would be to wait and interview the second year students later on to see if their views had changed.

JCP and JKH agreed to discuss the options further outside of the Working Group and bring back their decisions to the next meeting. **JCP/JKH**

**13/016 Update on the Biology Athena Swan website**

The new website is now up and running and the new layout was shown to the Working Group accordingly. It was noted that case studies could be added to the website in due course.

News and events would also feature on the website and JCP asked if anyone had any suggestions regarding what should be included. JKH will recently be involved in a ‘soapbox science’ type of session, and it was felt that it would be useful to include such initiatives. JKH will send the link to AJJ for inclusion on the website and it was emphasised that any other appropriate links/information should be forwarded to AJJ for adding to the website. **JKH**

**13/017 Feedback from the University Athena Group**

JCP reported that she and others had met with Brian Fulton and had given some feedback to Brian about their reservations about the University’s approach and that the University Group did not have much engagement with senior figures in the University. It emphasised that the University group provided good peer support for Departments but was not giving the University application the attention it needed.

Following that meeting some changes to the University group had been proposed and a decision has been taken quite recently that the University group will report through the Equality and Diversity Committee (and David Duncan) which was deemed to be a good move. It was noted that Joan Concannon (Director of External Relations) would also be involved and it was anticipated that some events would be put on. JCP advised that the changes will be put into effect pretty quickly, and there was also a ‘submission writing group’ which included JCP and key staff involved with the University submission. It was hoped that Paul Walton would also join this group.

JCP reported that the feedback that has been received indicates that the University is not in a position to currently submit for a silver level award, and may need instead to apply for a renewal of their bronze award. A final decision would be made over the next couple of months about which level to go for. The submission writing group has being doing a lot of work, but some things need to be put in place and senior people (and associated resources) were required to push things further. It was noted now that there is a reporting line through to the University’s Equality and Diversity Committee (which meets regularly) and so Athena issues will have a higher profile. The University Athena Group is looking to put something together to do on the International Women’s Day next year. It was pointed out that a HR Manager from the Centre is now spending a day a week on Athena issues, and this would help things move in the right direction.

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**13/018 Wider Departmental Engagement**

KW advised that she had recently been speaking to a fellow PhD student who had expressed interest in getting involved with the Athena Swan project.

The Working Group felt that it may be useful to ask the PhD students in general whether there was anything in particular that they thought the Department should be doing and it was suggested that HJ could talk to the individual concerned to see if they (and any others) would be interested in setting up a focus group with the aim of devising a survey that could be rolled out to the PhD students to engage more with them. However, it was agreed that this should be put on hold at this point until it is evident what the Working Group needs to find out from this group.

In the interim it was agreed that KW would feedback to the student concerned that their interest was welcomed and the Working Group would be in contact with them in due course. **KW**

**13/019 Updated Biology Action Plan**

JKH informed the Biology Athena Group that she would be working on the Action Plan over the coming weeks and this would be circulated to the membership in due course. **JKH**

The next meeting in the autumn term will therefore focus on the Action Plan and what initiatives the Department will be putting in place.

**13/020 Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Biology Athena Group will take place in the Autumn Term, and proposed dates will be circulated in due course.

*AJJ - 27/06/2013*