

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*
DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

Minutes of the Athena SWAN Working Group held on Tuesday, 20th November 2012

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

12/011 Membership of Group

JKH welcomed Melanie Smee (MS) and Katherine Wilson (KW) to the Biology Athena Swan Working Group. It was noted that MS replaced Fiona Frame as post-doc representative, and KS replaced Tom Brabbs as PhD representative.

12/012 Minutes of the meeting of 28 June 2012 were agreed.

12/013 Matters Arising from the Departmental Athena Swan meeting of 28 June 2012

(i) 12/007 (ii) Terms of Reference

JKH confirmed that she had put together some Terms of Reference for the Biology Athena Group, based on those in force for the University Athena Swan Working Group, which JCP had sent her. The Biology Group agreed that the Terms of Reference proposed were suitable, and JKH will forward an electronic copy to AJJ for publication on the Biology Athena website. **JKH/AJJ**

(ii) 12/007 (iv) Beacon of Good Practice

It was noted that JCP has agreed to be paired with Archaeology if they want someone to attend their Athena meetings in future. In addition, JCP/JKH will continue to go to Chemistry Athena meetings so that good practice can be shared amongst departments.

(iii) 12/007 (v) Data Collection

JKH advised that in the past data have been collected only when applications have been submitted for Silver and Gold awards, but there is now a need to move to a situation whereby data are collected more regularly. Thought also needs to be given to how these data should be presented to the Athena group, and what was subsequently done with them. The original intention was that data should be brought to the autumn term meeting of the Biology Athena Swan Group, but this has proved difficult as the majority of the data are not received in time.

JCP confirmed that in the past there has been a lack of usable data available centrally. However this has been recognised at University level and Brian Fulton, in his role of Chair of the University Athena Swan Working Group, has been driving forward improvements. There is now every assurance that there will be readily accessible data from the 1st December (which will be the audit date), presented in the form of a tableau workbook which should be ready by mid December. Updated data will be available to departments at the same time each year in future.

It was noted that there are some data not collected centrally which will need to continue to be collected at departmental level, and that in another case (flexible working requests) the provision of central data could not be relied on to be accurate (due to the fact that many flexible working requests are actioned by a straightforward reduction in hours rather than completion of a formal flexible working request application). It was agreed that a list of data that will not be provided centrally should be compiled, and AJJ will draw up this list accordingly. **AJJ**

A selection of statistics was tabled at the meeting, which included student data from the 2011/2012 leave year and departmental statistics not available centrally. JKH proposed that the Group look at some of those in more detail and think about the actions that need to be taken to allow other people to feed back. In this regard, it was noted that the Biology Athena Swan Group will feed to the newly formed Biology Staff Committee

Undergraduate Student Numbers: it was noted that the percentage of female undergraduates still considerably outnumbered male undergraduates, although the 2011/12 figures showed a slight drop in female students and a corresponding increase in male ones. It was suggested that as our UCAS tariff has increased, this may be putting off some prospective female undergraduates, and this needs to be monitored.

Postgraduate Student Numbers on Taught Courses: it was noted that there was already a drop-off in terms of gender ratio at this level from under-graduate level.

Ratio of Undergraduate Course Applications and Offers: the data provided for 2012/12 were very similar to the data shown for 2011/12. It was acknowledged that these data could be passed on to the UCAS Admissions Team, who could be asked to confirm that all our advertising has a good female presence (although it was acknowledged that women were well represented here).

Degree Classification by Gender – Undergraduate Students: the difference in degree classifications between males and females was noted, and it was felt that it would be useful to see whether this alters when our intake and UCAS tariff changes. It was apparent that more females are getting good quality degrees, and this leads to the question “Why are there not more females doing PhD study across the board?”. It was acknowledged, however, that many Biology undergraduates do go on to do PhD studies at other Universities.

HJ reported that she did support current students who are thinking of going on to PhD study, and speaks to approximately 30-40 individuals per year. It was recognised that others may approach PIs themselves, and that driven and focussed individuals may not necessarily make use of the departmental support available. It was agreed, however, that it was worth registering that this support is available to those who need it.

It was not known how Biology's ratio of female firsts and 2is compared with other Universities, and it was agreed that it would be interesting to get comparisons if possible, although it was not clear how such information could be acquired. JCP suggested that she and JKH should follow this up accordingly, perhaps through contacting members of the national Athena Group discussion board.

JCP/JKH

Staff Numbers: the statistics tabled included staff data as at 21/12/11 retrieved from the HoD's Gateway, and compared Biology against other Science Departments at the University. It was noted independent research fellows were included within the 'Research' group rather than the 'Academic' one. JCP reported that the data will be presented in a better format in future, and the figures supplied were only an example of what could be provided.

It was felt that it would be useful to know which Science Departments were included in the comparison and JCP will establish this accordingly.

JCP

Performance Review statistics: an area for concern was the relatively low number of academic and research staff apparently undertaking an annual performance review. It was hoped to achieve a higher completion rate in 2012, especially as it had been recognised in the Staff Survey that females in particular appreciate having an annual performance review.

Female Representation on Committees: it was acknowledged that females (which includes female professional support roles) are well represented on Biology committees and many committees were also chaired by females.

Outreach Activities: the data supplied covered the staff who had replied to the academic census (which was targeted at academic staff and research fellows), and as such it was felt that there was no cause for concern as the percentage split was a fair reflection of the percentage split in staff gender.

Disseminating the Information: it was proposed that the monitoring of the data be moved from the autumn to the spring term (when more up-to-date information would be available). Although it was queried if the student statistical information should be taken to the Board of Studies, it was agreed instead to take both student and staff data to an Academic Staff Meeting in the Spring term. Although such meetings are not necessarily conducive to open debate and may not be very inclusive, it was felt that it would be worth presenting the data there initially, and if this was not thought to be valuable then further consideration could be given as to what should be done with it and how to get feedback.

JCP/JKH

12/007 (vii) Springboard Training

HJ had previously agreed to re-visit the situation relating to the provision of Springboard to researchers in the Department, and confirmed that she would be running a joint programme with FERA next year which will also be advertised to Biology postdocs. There may be some members of staff who decide to take this up (it was noted that a good response had been received from FERA).

JCP advised that we have also received information from Vitae about a one-day career development programme for women which focuses on them getting their academic career underway. Vitae will provide the materials to deliver this locally, and accordingly we have asked to see the information so that a decision can be made as to whether it is worth putting on as well as Springboard. JCP/HJ will report back on the outcome in due course.

JCP/HJ

12/007 (viii) Promotion processes for staff

At the last meeting, DFS advised that staff had been emailed and encouraged to book one-to-one meetings with her if they were thinking about promotion. She would then meet further with NB after the individual meetings had taken place.

DFS confirmed that as a result of putting this initiative into place 8 members of academic staff are going forward for promotion in 2013. There is no obvious gender imbalance relating to the staff who have been to see her, and the initiative had been put in place because it was good practice generally, and not because there was perceived to be a problem. It was noted that the number of people going forward may be higher than usual for a number of reasons (eg the recruitment at Chair level that has taken place in the Department may be making individuals think more about their career in general).

It was agreed that the practice of holding one-to-one meetings should continue next year.

12/007 (ix) Mentoring for staff and researchers

Fiona Frame had agreed to find out what mentoring schemes were available, and she had reported to JCP that she had discovered that the University is no longer focussing on mentoring but instead has moved towards 'coaching' which is available for all members of staff. The University have invested in this and have already trained people to be 'coaches'. It was agreed that Biology research staff should be notified of the new coaching scheme, so that they are aware of how to access a coach from the University if they wish. HJ agreed to advertise the initiative to research staff accordingly.

HJ

12/007 (x) Staff teaching and admin workload allocation

It was noted that this was ongoing, and there would be hopefully more to report at the next meeting. The associated issues are being picked up by Brian Fulton and will also be brought to Head of Department meetings. In the interim it was agreed to carry on with the present Biology model (which can be easily tweaked if need be).

JKH reported that she would be attending meetings to join in the wider debate, and would report back to the Athena Swan Working Group as appropriate.

JKH

12/007 (xi) Social aspects of the Department

It was acknowledged that social aspects of the Department have improved lately and a recent quiz night event will become a regular feature in the future.

12/007 (xii) Arrangements for staff taking sabbaticals is open and transparent

The arrangement for staff taking sabbaticals appears to be working well, but passing the information on to others regarding who is taking sabbaticals needs further work.

It was noted that the sabbatical applications should be sent to JCP (for recording purposes) as well as JKH. They then need to be sent to Richard Waites (as Chair of the Board of Studies), and then to Julie Lord. It had previously been agreed to publicize who is taking sabbaticals the following term at the summer term academic staff meeting and it had been agreed that this should be a standing item on the agenda in future. JKH will ask Belinda Wade to ensure that

Action

the relevant people are kept informed about sabbatical applications and that the summer term academic staff meeting includes this as a standing item. JKH will also ask Belinda to arrange for an appropriate entry to be placed in the Bulletin as appropriate

JKH

It was also noted that it is important that individuals who are thinking of applying for a sabbatical give sufficient notice of their plans (although they should not apply too far in advance). Other points to bear in mind in relation to sabbaticals were the frequency of them, how long they could be, and to emphasise that a report was required at the end of the sabbatical period, outlining what had been achieved. In this regard, JKH agreed to let JCP know who has gone on sabbatical in the last year and JCP will contact them to ask for the appropriate report.

JKH/JCP

In relation to the frequency of sabbaticals, JCP reported that she was current re-writing the University Sabbatical Policy in conjunction with others, but that this was more of an enabling policy and does not spell out how frequently sabbaticals can be taken (although it was felt that the normal expectation would be not more than one term every 3 years). It was therefore decided that at the academic staff meeting in January an update should be provided that covered all these points.

JKH/JCP

JCP advised that anyone wanting to see a draft of the new University Sabbatical Policy and Guidelines should contact her.

12/014 Engagement with undergraduates, masters and PhD students

JKH reported that she had previously been to a GeCo (Gender Equality Competences) meeting through WISE at which a student culture survey had been discussed, which University departments can import and use if they chose to do so. It was debated whether Biology should do this and, if so, what we would do with the data.

It was proposed that the survey should be trialled with the Masters and PhD students initially, although it was acknowledged that if there were a lack of people taking part this could be a problem. To address that possibility, clarification should be given from the outset regarding what the intention was for running the survey. Timing of launching the survey was also felt to be important, as was feeding the results back, and it was proposed that the end of November/early December would be the preferred time to run the survey. To encourage the students to complete the survey it was proposed that the survey be tweaked so that users could enter their email address if they wished to collect a free coffee and cookie in appreciation for their participation. It was hoped that the survey results would give some indication of gender awareness within the chosen group, and the bottom line would hopefully reassure the Working Group that there were no major issues that needed resolving. JKH and KW will discuss and arrange the rolling out of the survey to the Masters and PhD students accordingly.

JKH/KW

12/015 Feedback from the University Athena Group and Chemistry Department Athena Group

JCP reported that unfortunately she had not been able to attend the last Chemistry Athena Group meeting. However, she had recently attended a meeting of the University Athena Group, and it was acknowledged that it was good to see that this has been revitalised. A lot of new Departments (eg Economics, Archaeology, Health Sciences) are forming Athena groups and, even though not all of these departments will be submitting for awards in the near future, the sharing of experiences will be valuable.

JCP advised that Brian Fulton was very keen to develop Daphne Jackson Fellowships within the University, and may take this through the Committee in due course. Another initiative discussed at the University meeting was the White Rose Women in Leadership Network. It had been suggested that this might be something that the University may wish to have some involvement with. It includes a mentoring scheme for senior women and an annual conference to showcase good projects. It was noted that someone from the network will be invited to talk to the next University Working group about the initiative.

The University is proposing to go for a silver award in April next year, and JCP reported that Biology have been asked by the University group to complete a questionnaire about our experience about putting in an application and what has changed as a result of that. Work has also been ongoing with the University Athena website, and unsuccessful Athena applications have been removed. JCP advised that she has also been tasked in creating a standard web template for other Departments to use which she will progress accordingly.

JCP

12/016 Biology Action Plan – Points Addressed, or Action Required:

(i) 4,5 Explore potential for part-time graduate study

The Biology group noted that part time graduate study already happens and there are students working on this basis in the Department.

(ii) 2,7 Ensure newly-appointed academic staff undertake diversity & recruitment training in their first year

JCP confirmed that new members of academic staff were now booked on to the relevant training courses as part of their induction. It was also noted that mixed gender interview panels were in force for all appointments.

(iii) 5,28-30 Seek feedback from Academics currently on maternity leave as to process and approach

It was agreed that the Working Group should seek feedback from Julia Ferrari who has recently been on maternity leave and JKH agreed to follow this up with Julia and ask for her comments/views.

JKH

Similar feedback has been sought from research staff, and JCP reported that positive feedback has been received from this staff group about the maternity meetings that now take place in the Department. In these a member of Biology HR staff meets with the pregnant employee and their Line Manager to discuss the process and respond to any queries that either the employee or their Line Manager might have.

It was noted that it would be useful to clarify what the maternity process is in relation to students and JCP will investigate accordingly.

JCP

12/017 Athena Assessment Panel

JCP advised that both she and JKH have volunteered to be on the Athena Assessment Panel, and will be viewing other institutions applications when they are going for an award in the future.

12/018 Biology Application for Gold

There is an opportunity for Biology to go for a gold award in April. Brian Fulton is keen for Biology to do this, and it was felt that feedback received last time can be addressed comprehensively.

It was therefore decided that two meetings of the Biology Athena Working Group should be held next term. At the first meeting (which would need to take place fairly early on in the term), all the statistical data should be available and can be presented to the Group. Following on from this a decision about whether to go for a gold award can be made. If it is decided to proceed, then at a second meeting the Action Plan and narrative can be looked at in more detail.

12/019 Date of Next Meeting: In view of the above, the next meeting will take place in Week 3/4 of the Spring Term (to be arranged).