

DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

**Minutes of the Athena SWAN Working Group held on Monday, 21st July 2014**

Present: Keir Bailey (KB), Helen Coombs (HC), Rebecca Furmston (RF), Thorunn Helgason (TH), Jane Hill (JKH), Janina Pirozek (JCP), Jon Pitchford (JWP), Melanie Smee (MS), Richard Waites (RW),

Apologies: Boris Bongalov (BB), Neil Bruce (NCB), Adrian Harrison (AH), Betsy Pownall (MEP), Ian Graham (IAG), Lorna Warnock (LW)

In Attendance: Thorunn Helgason [on behalf of Adrian Harrison] (TH), Sarah Knight [on behalf of Lorna Warnock] (SK), Andrea Johnson (AJJ)

**14/006 Welcome and Introduction to New Members**

For the benefit of those who had not attended previous meetings, the Working Group members introduced themselves and stated in what official capacity they attended meetings.

JKH confirmed that Biology had been successful in its recent Gold application. A trophy had been received, and this is now displayed in the cabinet near Reception. Official photographs will follow on the website in due course.

**14/007 Future meetings of the Group**

It was noted that the membership of the Biology Group had grown considerably and it was proving very difficult to identify dates for meetings that suited everyone.

In view of this JKH proposed that a set date/time in Week 6 of each term be chosen and adhered to irrespective of members’ individual availability. Inevitably some members of the Group would not be able to attend, but as the membership had been expanded over recent months, it was anticipated that there would still be good representation. This would be put in place with immediate effect, with the next meeting taking place in Week 6 of the autumn term.

**14/008 Minutes of the Meeting of 27 February 2014**

The minutes of 27th February 2014 were agreed as an accurate record.

**14/009 Matters Arising from the Meeting of 27 February 2014**

Updates were given on the action points from the meeting of 27 February 2014:

1. ***14/002 (viii) Staff Data – female:male ratio of academic staff***

At the meeting in February the Russell Group data for academic staff had been discussed and it had been queried whether it would be useful to contact each of the Russell Group Biology Departments to ask for more detailed information.

However, in hindsight it was felt that a better approach is to use the freely-available HESA data (which could be searched by Russell Group). It would not, therefore, be necessary to approach the Russell group independently as the HESA data are an appropriate benchmark and the Russell Group data is derived from HESA. No further action is therefore required.

1. ***14/002 (xii) Applications for promotion and success rates by gender and grade***

The Working Group had debated whether age had any consequence in relation to promotion and it was acknowledged that one issue that will be addressed will be the length of time served at each grade. In relation to this it had been suggested at the last meeting that data should be collected to see if there were more women right at the top of their scale than males.

Following on from this, JCP reported that work was being done centrally on this issue. Salaries would be analysed centrally and JCP had spoken to Alex MacFarlane in Central HR who had confirmed that it would be a staged process. The first ones to be looked at

**Action**

would be professorial staff, and it was noted that there may be confidentiality issues arising from this due to the small number of professorial staff (which would make it easy for individuals to be identified).

In view of the work being done centrally, it was proposed that the issue should be looked at further in 2-3 months’ time when hopefully the outcome from Central HR would be available. JCP would report back at the next meeting accordingly **JCP**

1. ***14/003 (i) Springboard Training***

At the February 2014 meeting, the Working Group had felt that Springboard Training should be run for both postdocs and postgraduate students. It had been proposed that a joint course could be offered, and if good feedback had been obtained this could then be used to persuade the University to put on and run the course from the Centre in the future. JCP had agreed to liaise with Hilary Jones (now at Sheffield University) about putting this in place.

JCP reported that she had subsequently had it confirmed that the University will not run the course centrally. However, Hilary Jones is still coming back to York to deliver Springboard training privately and courses will be advertised prior to running as appropriate. It was noted that the next Springboard course run by Hilary has already been advertised; one person enquired and signed up and their attendance will be funded from the Biology Training Budget. It was noted therefore that Springboard would still be available, but would be offered to postdocs via a different way in the future (i.e by those interested attending an external course run by Hilary in York).

1. ***14/003 (ii) Mentoring for staff and researchers***

It has previously been recorded that records of those taking up the University coaching scheme would be available from the Centre (Learning and Development). The Working Group had deemed it important that the data retrieved be kept by gender if it is not already being done.

JCP reported that this was still to be ascertained. She would look into it further, and report back to the next meeting with her findings. **JCP**

1. ***14/003 (iv) Valuing individual teaching contributions***

It had been proposed at the last meeting that Jenny White should be asked to put a checkbox on the student feedback forms querying if the respondent was male or female.

JKH had subsequently spoken to Jenny, but it was not possible to amend the current feedback form in the way wished to enable useful and comprehensive comparisons. Instead, it was evident that the whole feedback form and process needed to be re-written and this should be managed by the Department rather than Centrally. This will lead to a new piece of work for the new Associate Head (internal) or Teaching Quality group Chair to take up, and the issue will need to be put ‘on hold’ until then. In the interim it was noted that the only analysis that can be done is to determine whether students give similar feedback to female staff as they do to male staff. **JKH**

1. ***14/003 (v) Update on the provision of statistics – staff leavers***

Information was circulated to the Working Group showing leaver destinations. The information had been gathered from the completed postdoc leavers’ “next destination” forms (the charts had been generated by Fiona Frame following JKH’s discussion at a Postdoc Society meeting). It was noted that the charts that were presented were useful in showing a general picture of what postdocs went on to do (and that women were more likely to go into “non-science”), and in light of this it was suggested that the information should continue to be gathered via the “next destination” forms.

In addition, JCP reported that there is currently an intern in Central HR who is looking at exit surveys and it was felt that the issue would be best left until the intern had finished the analysis to see what conclusions have arisen. JCP will report back in due course. **JCP**

**Action**

1. ***14/003 (vi) Updated Biology Action Plan***

At the previous meeting, JKH had proposed adding an extra column to the Action Plan so that progress made could be identified against each item.

Subsequent to that meeting JKH and JCP had debated a system whereby once an item had been satisfactorily completed then it would be moved to a separate Action Plan which showed completed tasks/issues. Ongoing actions that occurred annually would need to remain on the original version so that they did not get forgotten from one year to the next. Both Action Plans (ongoing and completed) could be made available on the Biology website. This would enable the Biology Athena Swan Working Group members to see what they were responsible for progressing (and when by), as it was noted they will need to take ownership of their areas/tasks.

1. ***14/004 (i) Action: Further indepth analysis of student gender statistics***

A target on the Action Plan was to “present student gender stats to the BoS annually and include classification analyses by gender” with the aim of raising awareness of gender issues in our undergraduate students.

The Working Group had previously discussed when would be the best time to present this information to the BoS, and it has been agree that this should be done at the time of the Annual Programme Review (APR) which takes place in the autumn.

It was confirmed, at the meeting on 21st July, that this was still the intention and data will be provided for the Annual Programme Review accordingly. **JKH**

1. ***14/004 (ii) Action: Review application processes for u/g, PGT and PGR to ensure gender neutral text in adverts/course information, career information and additional positive images of women.***

It was noted that some work had been done in relation to looking at the undergraduate data along with UCAS tariff, but that further analysis would be required and TH would report on this later in the meeting.

1. ***14/004 (iv) Action: Increase communication and flow of information between ASWG and PDRAs in order to address loss of female PDRAs from academia.***

In view of the staff survey, it had been previously suggested that PhD students should be surveyed in 2014. JKH reported that she will prepare and put out a survey for the PhD students and will pass the link on to the PhD student reps when it is made live so they can encourage students to fill it out. A free cookie would also be offered to those completing the survey to encourage a good response. **JKH**

1. ***14/004 (vi) Action: Better understanding of support needs of undergraduate students.***

JKH reported that she had discussed some issues with BB prior to the end of term. BB has some ideas of how an activity could be put in place in the post-exam period to raise awareness of Athena Swan. This could involve getting students to discuss famous scientists and this could be competition-based with free cookies given to those who take part. BB was keen to initiate some sort of activity in this way that would spark a discussion about gender and would discuss this further at the next meeting. **BB**

**14/010 Other Matters Arising: LinkedIn**

SK suggested that the use of LinkedIn would be a good way in which to keep in touch with alumni informally (i.e a LinkedIn group for those individuals). The majority of PhD students are on it, as are postdocs and it could be used to generate discussions and to identify what people are doing 6 months on from finishing at York.

It was noted that individuals can come and go from LinkedIn, but there is currently about 212 people in the group that SK accesses (comprising of current staff/students as well as those who have left). Inevitably there will be a good range of careers and experiences within the group. LinkedIn can be used to contact people directly and SK had done this via the LinkedIn group. However, it could also be used just for initial contact, with longer discussions taking place

**Action**

outside of the group either by individual email or telephone, and in this way could be used to ascertain what people are doing a year or so down the line. On-line CVs are available on LinkedIn and, providing the profiles/CVs are kept up to date these may be really useful. For example, it should be possible to identify 5 men and 5 women from those who left a year or so ago and find out what they are doing now, which would provide a useful comparison between genders.

However, some drawbacks were noted. Unfortunately there is no process in place to get people to sign up to LinkedIn, and it is often used by people leaving academia. In order to address the first point it was suggested that encouragement to join LinkedIn could be done via the letter that MEP sends out to PhD students when they graduate (i.e please contact ….. regarding joining the Biology LinkedIn Group). Similarly the Graduate office should be able to let SK have a “way in” to the Masters’ students.

It was debated how postdocs could be encouraged to sign up to LinkedIn. This could be done when someone joins the Department, and something could be incorporated in the induction pack that is used by new research staff. In addition the Biology Post-Doc Society could also be asked to remind postdocs about this. JCP will progress this accordingly. **JCP**

**14/011 Postdoctoral Survey regarding Athena Swan activities following on from recent Biology Post-Doc Society meeting**

JKH had talked to the Post-Doc group about Athena Swan and the drop off between postdocs and lecturer and stressed the importance of addressing that issue. In relation to this JKH had showed the postdocs data extracted from the Gold submission. JKH had stressed to the group that overall the data were positive, and will be kept an eye on to ensure that good practices continue.

Arising from the discussion, JKH reported that she had left the postdocs to think about some topics which could be taken up for further investigation and analysis, namely:

1. The use of LinkedIn as a tool (discussed in minute 14/010 above).
2. Why do people apply to York (someone had suggested having a page on the web specifically aimed at postdocs, but also of interest to PhD students saying “You should come to York because ….”)
3. Setting up mentoring networks for postdocs detailing what is required and asking individuals who they would like to be mentored by.
4. Initiating a scheme where postdocs mentored PhD students
5. An analysis of named researchers on grants.
6. A workshop for postdocs applying for Fellowships (Neil Bruce would hopefully have involvement with this).
7. A session on the use and application of bridging funding for research leaders.
8. Training to sit on recruitment panels when required.

It was proposed that MS go the Post-Doc Society and ask them to debate this further and find out what their priorities would be from this list. Some of those listed could be grouped together, for example the web page for postdocs, mentoring networks and scheme in which postdocs mentor PhD students could be one topic. The analysis of named researchers, use of bridging funding and workshop for postdocs applying for a Fellowship could be a second topic. Recruitment training could be a third topic. Ultimately all of the topics will be taken up (and it was noted that the postdoc meeting with an update on Athena Swan will take place annually), but MS agreed to speak to the Post-Doc group and report back at the next meeting regarding priorities for the 2014/15 academic year accordingly. **MS**

**14/012 Update on Mentoring**

Clear guidelines are required about what is required by both mentors and the expectations of postdocs (mentees) and some written guidance about “being a mentor” will be available (along with training) by the end of this year.

**Action**

It was noted that mentoring is different from performance review and individuals can be mentored for a specific reason (e.g. someone applying for Fellowships), or just as part of an ongoing arrangement. A person’s mentor could be from within the same Department, or external (i.e someone from another science department). There were some concerns that some academic staff may be reluctant to take on a mentee who was not within their own group, so the list of mentees may need to include Grade 7 researchers, laboratory heads and volunteers. It was deemed important that mentees need to be matched up to the right mentor.

It was queried whether postdocs could be given the opportunity to spend time out (i.e a 3 month period) from their post at York that they could use to develop opportunities (eg Fellowship applications). However, HC advised that Chemistry had discussed this, but when individuals are employed on grants this can cause problems. It may be possible to cost such a period into a grant, but this would need input at the grant application stage.

**14/013 Review of the Biology Athena Swan website and suggestions for improvements**

A revision of the website had been undertaken, and improvements made to it, and this was shown to the Working Group for approval.

The Group liked the greater use of images, and further suggested that the tabs should be re-arranged so that Achievements appears on the first tab and is combined with the News tab. The first tab is the one which is primarily visible and should show current events and happenings in the Department. The other tabs that could be selected would be ‘Biology Group’, ‘Documents’, ‘Case Studies’ and ‘Links’. It was also proposed that the tabs should be visible from the Athena home page as it was not good protocol to have to scroll down to access them. AJJ will update the website to incorporate the suggestions accordingly. **AJJ**

It was noted that more work would be done on the website, and Working Group members were reminded to let AJJ have new items for inclusion and examples of female success stories and achievements/awards (along with photographs where possible) on an ongoing basis.

**14/014 Feedback from the University Athena Group**

The last University Athena Group had taken place earlier in July, and this had essentially been a run through of the University Action Plan. Things that came up included the role of Equality Champions in Departments and the remit of the 9 protected characteristics and how these could feed back. A smaller Working Group will look at this issue accordingly.

Discussion also took place in relation to promotion and the current situation (with factual reports and confidential reports), and whether this was fair, and whether a mentor should be involved.

Recruitment panels were discussed, and in particular the number of females available in some smaller departments made it difficult to have a panel where both gender were represented. It was felt that it was more important to have someone on the panel who understood how unconscious bias works and who can speak up about this at the appropriate time. Similarly someone could be involved, who wasn’t part of the panel, but who could ensure the wording is fair, etc. This issue has gone away for further discussion, and it was noted that it was not an issue for Biology to be concerned about.

Pay data were also brought up. It was noted that Heads of Departments have access to pay differentials, but not the length of time spent on grade. It was queried whether this should be made available, although there were confidentiality issues in relation to this.

A concern had been that the general University Athena Swan logo appears to be being missed and at one point appeared nowhere on the University jobs webpage, and a discussion is taking place with Corrine in Central HR about this. It was further noted that the Departmental individual logo (i.e Biology’s Gold) needs to be on the candidate briefs for each job submitted to ensure that the award is visible. The Biology Working Group felt that an eye should be kept on Biology posts appearing on the jobs website, to ensure that the logo is not omitted by the Centre at the point it is entered on the main University website, and JCP will ask Glenda Foster to keep a check on this. **JCP**

**14/015 Feedback from Athena Panel Meetings and examples of good practice for Biology to implement**

JKH reported that the panels were getting stricter and stricter about what they expected for relevant awards. JCP also felt this to be the case; at her panel meeting 3 silver applications and 1 bronze application had been reviewed. Of those 2 of the silver applications achieved a bronze award - the others did not get anything.

In terms of good practice that could be adopted, JCP reported that one institution had said in their application that they did periodic visual audits of their Departments in which they physically walked round and looked at noticeboards/displays to ensure nothing was biased, and that might be a useful thing for to Biology to consider.

It was emphasised that any good practice that is adopted should benefit both males and females. MS advised that she had been talking to a male colleague about Springboard who had queried ‘what was there for men?’. However, it was noted that this was the only thing that the Department did specifically for women; everything else listed in our Gold application is of benefit to both genders.

Setting up of a forum had been discussed by the Centre which would include women from academic departments who would be able to disseminate key information back to their departments (for example the confidence gap regarding promotion, negotiating starting salaries, etc). It was queried what the remit of the Forum would be, and it was noted that it would essentially be a networking group.

**14/016 Feedback/update in relation to the Chemistry Athena Group**

HC reported that Chemistry were currently looking at maternity/paternity and adoption leave, and were looking particularly at the provision for graduate students. It was apparent to Chemistry that less and less funding comes from research councils and two students may be working side by side but not have equal rights/entitlements for maternity/paternity leave, as it was dependant on where they were funded from. Chemistry were therefore trying to put a plan in place to address this issue, and investigating whether something could be built into the MTP.

It was noted that Biology may also wish to look into this provision, and the Working Group felt that it was a University issue to ensure equality across departments. It was further noted that there is a similar issue in relation to postdocs; although PIs can apply for funding from central funds (when a research grant will not meet maternity leave costs), it was pointed out that the available funding from the Centre usually runs out mid-way through the year.

**14/017 Action Plan – Agreed timetable of activities for the next three months**

JKH updated the ongoing Action Plan at the meeting on the 21st July with items that had been concluded and actions still required, as these were discussed. Attention was given to the activities that need to take place over the next three month period and those which had been completed. The relevant actions from the Action Plan which will need progressing were:

1. **1.3 *Further in depth analysis of student gender statistics*** and ***1.4 Review application processes for u/g, PGT and PGR to ensure gender neutral text in adverts/course information, career information and additional positive images of women****.*

It was noted that the two targets were linked to the analysis work TH will do. Maths may be having an impact on the apparent decline in % female u/g over time and TH will analyse the data including the changes in pattern of offers and acceptances to female u/g student and report back to the autumn meeting. **TH**

As per minute 14/009 (viii) above, data on the student gender stats will be provided to the Annual Programme Review in November.

In relation to 1.4, JKH reported that she had discussed some issues with BB prior to the end of term, and they had felt that it would be good to create some Athena publicity (an Athena flyer and Athena bookmark) showing the Gold logo and a couple of quotes and get this distributed to new students. Similarly an ‘Athena’ banner could be created which could be displayed at events like Open Days. The flyer and bookmark, once designed by Biology Graphics, could be reproduced from Campus Print and Copy, probably relatively inexpensively. It was felt that the bookmark in particular was a good idea and the Working

**Action**

Group agreed that it could be inserted into the ‘free text book’ given out to new students. Similarly the flyer could go into the Open Day packs. JKH will speak to Phil Roberts in Graphics about the design of the flyer, bookmark and banner. **JKH**

1. ***1.7 Annual review of ASWG progress on Action Plan reported to Staff committee.***

This target has been achieved. JCP will send an annual report to Staff Committee in spring of each year, and it was noted that the Biology ASWG minutes also go to Staff Committee (who in turn go through them). Staff Committee ultimately reports to Strategy Group. **JCP**

1. ***2.2 To embed our improved promotion processes within departmental culture***

A target for October 2014 was to ‘obtain and maintain data on gender distribution with in professorial pay-bands’ and it was acknowledged that Biology needs to wait for the University to provide the relevant information.

A target for September 2014 was for ‘Annual lunchtime information sessions increase the number of academic and research staff applying for promotion.’ JKH will discuss this with Jen Potts accordingly. **JKH**

1. ***2.3 To ensure academic job adverts attract strong female applicants.***

It was confirmed that adverts state that academic posts are potentially available as part-time or full-time positions and that contact details for informal inquiries now always include a female member of staff.

1. ***2.5 To reduce loss of women from student to senior staff, by providing improved mentoring for PDRAs and PhDs.***

A target was that ‘all PDRAs are aware of the Post-doc Soc, have attended at least one event, and are aware of mentorship possibilities.

It was noted that this had been completed and postdocs had been made aware of the Post-Doc Society and of mentoring at the Biology postdoc meeting in June 2014.

1. ***2.6 Increase communication and flow of information between ASWG and PDRAs in order to address loss of female PDRAs from academia.***

The target under this heading was to ‘carry out online survey of PDRAs to identify specific issues and develop new solutions. **MS**

MS would canvass opinion on PDRA priorities for taking further as per minute 14/011 above. JKH/JCP would also analyse the staff survey results once the data come in.

**JKH/JCP**

1. ***3.1 To recognised and address reasons for staff not being returned in REF.***

The success measure for this item was ‘A sub-group of the Research Committee reviews reasons why some staff were not returned in REF and provides opportunities for mentorship of these staff’.

It was noted that a discussion on this needs to take place with IAG/NB/Jen Potts and JKH will alert them to this accordingly. **JKH/IAG/NB**

1. ***3.2 All academic staff encouraged to take advantage of new sabbatical procedure.***

Staff returning from extended leave expected to take a sabbatical. This expectation is explicitly included in maternity return-to-work letter, and in checklist of items to discuss at meeting prior to taking maternity leave.

The Working Group noted that this would be added to the letter sent to academic staff returning from extended leave accordingly.

1. ***3.3 Departmental Peer Review Colleagues encourage, mentor and support staff in grant application process.***

Target: Maintain no difference in gender balance of staff applying and successfully obtaining grants.

**Action**

In relation to this, JKH advised that data would be provided at the spring meeting for discussion. Furthermore, it would be collected on an on-going basis, and would be reviewed by Research Committee.

1. ***3.7 Investigate request for PDRA researcher salary bridging funds.***

Target: Survey to assess if there are gender differences in bridging funding requests. JKH reported that Research Committee would collect this data accordingly.

1. ***4.1 Staff teaching, admin and marking workloads are transparent and information is easily accessible to all academic staff.***

June 2014 Target: Data analysis reveals continued lack of gender differences in workload allocation. JKH noted that this would need Associate HoD (internal) input in due course.

1. ***4.2 Student feedback on teaching shows no difference in satisfaction in relation to gender of teaching staff.***

October 2014 Target: Data analysis of online student feedback shows no gender split in student assessment of staff teaching quality.

It was noted that the Working Group needed to wait for the new feedback forms. JKH would analyse staff feedback data. **JKH**

1. ***4.3 Process for requesting flexible teaching is clear and transparent.***

There were two targets for October 2014: Firstly that all reasonable requests are agreed if associated with caring responsibilities. Staff agree that requests are dealt with in a fair and transparent way. This has been achieved and CW will collect requests by gender.

Secondly, to monitor flexible working requests and offer training sessions for line managers, and a training session will be organised by HR. **JCP**

1. ***4.8 Improvement in departmental understanding of implications of flexible working policies being taken up more widely.***

The target for September 2014 was: Lunchtime briefing sessions set up and to be held annually to inform line managers of flexible working practices and to develop their understanding of their role in supporting them, and HR will organise accordingly. **JCP**

1. ***4.9 Robust method for recording paternity leave is rolled out.***

The Target for October 2014 was: Increased awareness of need to formally request paternity leave, and men do not rely on flexible working at this time.

JCP confirmed that this would be highlighted by HR at the next academic staff meeting. **JCP**

1. ***4.11 Better understanding of support needs of undergraduate students.***

The Target for June 2014 was: Feedback from female u/gs informs further action planning.

BB will address this issue in the autumn term. **BB**

1. ***5.1 Set up working group network with WR and N8/northern Universities to discuss AS and STEMM issues that are particularly relevant to Biological Sciences staff and students.***

The Target for October 2014 was for a network to be established with >20 members and agreement to meet twice a year and JKH and JCP will progress this accordingly. **JKH/JCP**

1. ***5.2 Invite QUB Biology staff to network to share good practice of a Gold department.***

The target for September 2014, was for resources committed to travel and networking. 3 new initiatives developed in relation to discussion of good working practices at QUB JKH will progress this accordingly. **JKH**

**14/018 Date of Next Meeting**

Week 6 Term, 2014 (to be confirmed).

*AJJ - 19/08/2014*