

DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

**Minutes of the Athena SWAN Working Group held on Thursday, 21st November 2013**

Present: Jane Hill (JKH), Janina Pirozek (JCP), Jon Pitchford (JWP), Melanie Smee (MS), Debbie Smith (DFS), Katherine Wilson (KW)

Apologies: Neil Bruce (NCB), Helen Coombs (HC), Hilary Jones (HJ)

In Attendance: Andrea Johnson (AJJ)

**13/021 Purpose of meeting**

JKH proposed that the focus of the meeting should be to concentrate on the Department’s Gold application which has to be submitted by Friday 29th November 2013. It was agreed that, in view of the proximity of the submission date, other Agenda items such as the minutes and matters arising from previous meetings, should be discussed at the next Working Group meeting.

**13/022 Clarification of Current Situation**

JKH advised that our Gold application would be looked at by the Athena panel members to identify what we have achieved since our Silver award, and to judge the ambition of our targets and forward planning in our Action Plan. It was felt that the application was a good one. It has been considerably revamped following our last submission and is much more visually appealing with the inclusion of photographs and detailed colour charts.

JKH has sent a copy of the draft application to Paul Walton in Chemistry for his feedback, and was currently waiting to hear back from him. It was noted that Paul Walton would be an excellent person to give informed advice due to his involvement with both the Chemistry Gold submission and the University application. JKH advised that she had also seen other Gold applications, some of which have similar layouts to Biology’s application. It was noted that other institutions that had Gold awards included the Queens University Belfast, Imperial College and the University of Edinburgh.

It was emphasised that the amount of work involved in preparing the submission had been immense. JKH had fed this back to the Loughborough Survey when they visited the Department recently and had suggested that more visits of this kind to Universities and Institutions engaging with Athena should be made so that Athena understand the huge requirement on institutions and departments.

JKH suggested that the Working Group should now go through the application and graphs to confirm that data have been interpreted correctly and that the right conclusions had been reached, and Action points/targets agreed. If anything was missing from the application this would then hopefully become evident although it was noted that the application form is quite constrained regarding what is required (eg data over a 5 year period and comparator data, word count limitations).

In relation to additional data, MS advised that she had received an email yesterday from the Postdoc Society about mentoring, which could be added into the Athena Swan submission once it is received. **MS/JKH**

**13/023 Gold Submission Application Form**

1. ***Section 1***

Under Section 1 of the form, a letter of endorsement from the Head of Department is provided. It was noted that this picks out key points of interest, and what we are doing in terms of gender equality. Key points picked out included gender parity in appointments, the fact that there are more promotions, Sue Hartley being appointed to YESI, the new workload model, the REF2014 process,

DFS proposed that a statement should also be included to show that female staff are embedded in every layer of management in the Department, and at all levels, and agreed to give further thought to her supporting statement. **DFS**

**Action**

It was also proposed that DFS’ promotion to Pro-VC should also be incorporated.

1. ***Section 2***

Section 2 of the form outlined the self-assessment process.

It was felt that it would be a good opportunity to widen the self-assessment team so that it included the Director of the Graduate School Board and the Chair of the Board of Studies, who clearly have an interest in relation to the student data. It was further agreed that it would be useful to also have someone from the Biology Admissions Team on the Working Group, and it was proposed that Adrian Harrison would be the most suitable person as he also has an associated remit in relation to outreach. Inviting an u/g student rep onto the committee was also agreed. JKH will contact the relevant people accordingly. **JKH**

It was emphasised that the text also clarified the reporting structure for the Athena Swan Working Group (i.e that it fed into Staff Committee, who in turn reported to the Departmental Strategy Group). Reference is also made to the fact that we act as a ‘critical friend’ for other Department and Institutions applications to demonstrate our ‘beacon’ status.

1. ***Section 3***

A picture of the Department was provided under this section. Who we are as a Department is visually demonstrated here which was thought to be effective. Reference is made to the size of the department and to the University’s anniversary celebrations.

There is also a paragraph given here in relation to how our data are presented, what the comparator is (Russell Group) and what the data are based on (headcount unless FTE is more appropriate).

All the data and charts are then presented in a standard format. A summary is given in a box for clarity with text underneath providing further details. The charts are standardised to the same design so that ‘% Female’ is shown on the ‘y’ axis and ‘year’ on the ‘x’ axis. The charts are shown in colour, and colour copies of the document will be submitted to Athena. Text associated with graphs include any actions required, linked to the Action Plan.

1. ***Student data – undergraduate male and female numbers***

The text in the summary box noted that our % of female undergraduates has shown a slight decline over time, and is now similar to the UK average.

JWP felt that the wording should be changed to state that ‘the % of female undergraduates is consistently above 50% and approaching the Russell Group average even with increasing student numbers’. The Working Group approved this and JKH will amend the wording accordingly. **JKH**

JWP had to leave the meeting at this point, but indicated that he would be happy to talk separately to JKH about the figures if this was deemed helpful.

It was noted that there are likely to be reasons for the slight decline in female numbers (eg the increase in UCAS tariff) and it will important to get Richard Waites’ thoughts on this as Chair of the Board of Studies.

1. ***Student data – postgraduate male and female numbers completing taught courses***

The text in the summary box here noted that our % of female PGT students was lower than the UK average but shows no clear trend over time.

It was noted that courses that have a predominantly higher number of females (eg Ecology) are only counted as 50% fte. However it was felt that this was balanced out by other courses and presenting the date as headcount would not make a difference to our conclusions.

The Department offers some masters courses that tend to be male orientated. It is well known that some taught postgraduate courses have a lower percentage of females than the national (i.e those which are interdisciplinary into the physical sciences) and, as two of our masters courses fall into this bracket, DFS suggested that this should be reflected in the text, a. JKH will adjust the text accordingly. It was also felt that the need to increase applications overall should be emphasised in the text (and not just female applications). **JKH**

**Action**

Longer term, it was noted that discussions will need to take place with Admissions to ask what we can do to increase the number of applications we get.

1. ***Student data – postgraduate male and female numbers on research degrees***

It was noted here that the % of female PGR students was similar to the UK average and shows little change over time.

No specific issues were discussed in relation to these data.

1. ***Ratio of course applications to offers and acceptances by gender (undergraduates)***

Although it was noted that a higher proportion of applications, offers and acceptances were from women, it was also noted that the % of women accepting offers decline over time. This translated to an action to monitor the % females accepting our offers.

It was noted that no comparator data are available, but JCP suggested that this information could be shared at the next meeting of the Northern Group to see if others have similarly noticed this. It was further suggested that although information about catchment is available, we do not know about gender breakdown and Thorunn Helgason/Admissions may be able to help with this.

***(viii)*** ***Ratio of course applications to offers and acceptances by gender (masters)***

No issues were discussed in relation to this data, and no specific action needed.

***(ix)*** ***Ratio of course applications to offers and acceptances by gender (research)***

No issues were discussed in relation to this data, though an action point was to maintain high visibility of female staff and students at Open Days, and on web pages/literature.

***(x)*** ***Degree classification by gender (undergraduates)***

It was noted that further analysis would be useful. It was agreed that it would be useful to mention in the text that these data are being collected and JKH will add text accordingly. **JKH**

***(xi)*** ***Degree classification by gender (masters)***

No issues were discussed in relation to these data, and no action needed other than continue to monitor.

***(xii)*** ***Staff Data (female:male ratio of academic staff)***

This chart and supporting text demonstrated that the % of female lecturers has increased and the balance between Lecturer and Professor has been maintained. Paul Walton, as a critical friend, thought that this should be strongly shown in the text and that it should be emphasised that Biology compared favourably with the Russell Group (which was based on combined academic grades).

***(xiii)*** ***Staff Data (female:male ratio of research staff)***

The summary box emphasised that there has been a 10% increase in female researchers over time and no drop off in the % of females between PGR and PDRA.

Biology continues to be better than the average (Russell Group).

***(xiv)*** ***Staff Data (turnover by grade and gender)***

No graph was appropriate for this section and no new action needed.

***(xv)*** ***Staff Data (job application and success rates by grade and gender – academic recruitment)***

The summary box highlighted that there was gender parity in Academic appointments but only approximately 30% of applicants are female.

**Action**

It was noted that HR recently changed the format for the candidate briefs which are attached to advertised posts. Unfortunately the format for the new brief omitted to contain details of the Athena initiative and JCP confirmed that she had picked this up with Central HR & it has been changed.

***(xvi)*** ***Staff Data (job application and success rates by grade and gender – research recruitment)***

The summary box noted that there was overall gender parity in research appointments and interviewees and near parity in applications. The current year showed no notable drop off between PhD and researcher.

***(xvii)*** ***Staff Data (applications for promotion and success rates by gender)***

A graph was not felt to be appropriate, but the text clearly demonstrates that more people overall have gone for promotion since the Silver renewal award.

It was also reported in the text that a similar initiative will be put in place for research staff as it is for academic staff (i.e with the HoD and Chair of DRC encouraging research staff to discuss with the Line Manager their career stage and promotion readiness). DFS reported that promotion applications were currently ongoing in respect of 2 members of research staff and 8 members of academic staff and Belinda Wade would be able to provide details of gender if required.

***(xviii)*** ***Staff Data (recruitment of staff)***

There is a need fir interview panels for postdocs to be gender balanced, and researchers may need to get trained so they can sit on panels. This has been written into the text about recruitment accordingly.

***(xix)*** ***Staff Data (support for staff at key career transition points)***

The graph provided in the document here reflected on %females at different career stages. It is evident that the greatest drop off is at lecturer level, and our actions are focussed on trying to reduce this. It was noted that the text at the beginning of this section emphasises this.

It was noted that the Department’s philosophy throughout is that the aim is to put processes in place that will help everyone irrespective of gender.

***(xx)*** ***Staff Data (female:male ratio of academic and research staff on fixed term contracts and open-ended [permanent] contracts)***

The graph provided demonstrated that there was no difference between males and females in this respect and no action was needed.

However it was suggested that a horizontal line could be included in many of the graphs to mark the 50% figure. This would be valuable when demonstrating that Biology’s figures matched or exceeded 50%. MS agreed to prepare a few examples and discuss with JKH accordingly.

**MS/JKH**

***(xxi)* *Staff Data: Involvement in outreach activities***

The data show that women were neither under-represented nor over-represented for outreach activities and no new action was needed.

***(xxii)* *Staff Data: Research staff on part time and full time contracts***

It was noted that most of the part time contracts are held by women. Full time contracts are held by a similar percentage of both males and females.

***(xxiii)*** ***Cover for maternity and adoption leave and support on return***

It should be clarified that the section relating to cover for maternity and adoption leave and support on return which details the procedure relates to staff only. A separate process is in place for students, and this needs to be clarified and added as appropriate in the section detailing support for female students. JKH will check the arrangements with Julie Knox and update the application form accordingly. **JKH**

**Action**

It was noted that issues relating to undergraduate students whose maternity leave have been recorded as ‘LOA’ was in hand and taken up at University level.

**13/024 Additional Information for Application**

It was noted that the form was the Department’s opportunity to sell themselves, and it was suggested that the renaming of B/K018 to the Dianna Bowles Lecture Theatre should be incorporated into the application. JKH will add this to the application. **JKH**

JCP queried if something should also be added to the self-assessment process to say we have engaged with the Loughborough Project, and hosted them as we felt it important to understand attitudes towards Athena.

JKH reported that all the information was now available so there was still time for reflection and to incorporate any comments/suggestions of things to pick out. JKH would be forwarding the draft document to DFS for comment along with the updated Action Plan. **JKH**

It was noted that MS, JKH and JCP would meet separately to fine-tune the submission over the following week. **MS/JKH/JCP**

**13/025 Follow-on Actions following Submission**

A possible meeting with research staff and postgraduate students was discussed as it would be useful to get their input and show them the Action Plan and ask for suggestions. It was agreed that it would be good to see if there was anything in particular that they would like to see put into place in the future. It was noted that a support network would be valuable for postdocs for preparing them for Fellowships. To this effect mentoring has been discussed and referred to in the Action Plan, but wider discussion may be needed.

It was proposed that another meeting of the Working Group be held once the submission has gone in. The next meeting could then concentrate on the Action Plan in detail to fine tune who is doing what and when it will be required for.

It was also queried if there was a forum where this could be presented to PhDs students; a joint postdoc/PhD meeting could be held if need be. MS advised that the appropriate forum for postdocs was one of the ‘coffee and careers’ sessions. For PhD students GradShare was suggested, and JKH advised that she would be happy to come to the sessions to talk about gender issues to the appropriate bodies. **JKH**

It was also acknowledged that the on-line survey results needed to be added to the Biology Athena Swan website, and JKH would write some supporting text to add alongside this. **JKH**

**13/026 Date of Next Meeting**

To be confirmed.

*AJJ - 06/12/2013*