

**THE UNIVERSITY** *of York*  
**DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY**

**Minutes of the Athena SWAN Working Group held on Wednesday 22 February 2012**

Present: Helen Coombs - Chemistry (HC), Fiona Frame (FF), Jane Hill (JKH),  
Hilary Jones (HJ), John Pitchford (JWP), Debbie Smith (DFS)  
Apologies: Neil Bruce (NCB), Janina Pirozek (JCP)  
In Attendance: Andrea Johnson (AJJ)

**12/001 Minutes of the meeting** of 31 October 2011 were agreed.

**12/002 Matters Arising from the Departmental Athena Swan meeting of 31 October 2011**

*(i) Clarification of current situation*

JKH confirmed that since the last meeting of the Athena Swan Working Group the Gold application had been submitted and the outcome would hopefully be known by the end of March 2012. JKH will notify the Biology Athena Swan group of the outcome by email, once this is known. **JKH**

*(ii) Terms of Reference*

It was noted that the Biology Athena Swan website is now up and running, and Biology's involvement with Athena Swan will therefore be more visible to staff in future. One of the things that still needs adding to the website is the Terms of Reference for the Athena Swan Working Group. HC advised that Chemistry intends to issue a monthly newsletter to their staff which will incorporate Athena Swan issues and progress. As a result of this initiative they will be drafting Terms of Reference for their Athena Swan Group using an historic document to base them on. HC will let JKH have a copy of this document for information in due course so that Biology Athena Swan group could in turn use them as a base for their Terms of Reference. **HC**

*(iii) Timings of Meetings*

The timing of future Biology Athena Swan meetings was discussed and it was agreed that meetings should be held mid-term once a term (i.e with the meeting taking place during week 6 or 7 of term) to get the best attendance. Additional meetings could be held over the summer if this was deemed necessary at any point.

**12/003 Action Plan: Update on Progress Made**

JKH suggested that the Working Group went through the Action Plan to see what had been achieved so far, and what was still required, and suggested that if there were any suggestions for new ideas these could be incorporated accordingly.

- **Staff benefit from women/STEM activities.**

The website contains current material relating to Athena Swan, although it was noted that the Gold submission is not currently on the website. The Working Group agreed that this should now be added (including the Action Plan), and AJJ will update the website. **AJJ**

Similarly it was noted that information arising from the Department's Athena Swan initiatives could be fed back to staff via Academic Staff meetings and the Away Day as appropriate.

- **Beacon of good practice for women in STEM**

JKH reported that she and JCP had met up with people from Hull (HYMS) who were just setting out with their Athena initiative. JKH and JCP had given them some pointers and had emphasised that academic 'buy in' would be required. It was noted that other departments are at a similar stage and JKH advised that she would be able to help/advise any Departments if required.

- **Improve staff-related data collection and provision from Central HR Department**

It was noted that obtaining staff-related data was a long-running issue. One of the things that had been difficult to obtain was information relating to job applications, interviews and offers and it was hoped that this would be better in the future now that new Central HR software was in place.

- **Support for running Athena committee and collation of gender data**

Data collection is ongoing and AJJ will shortly be contacting the student offices as appropriate for up-to-date information. For student data, it was noted that the 31st December was the relevant date for showing statistics captured within each academic year. Data collected will be fed back to the Athena Swan Working Group in due course. **AJJ**

- **Continue to collate and monitor UG, PG and staff data by gender**

It was noted that Athena Swan likes to see how Departments are doing relative to other Departments and Universities and JKH reported that Biology data should continue to be monitored against HESA baseline data. The intention was to compare staff gender ratios with the 1994 University Biology Departments and extend the review to the Russell group. In the past JKH has retrieved the relevant information from the internet, but following a discussion with JCP, proposed that the HR Departments of the Universities concerned be contacted directly for the information. It was not known whether the Universities concerned would be willing to release this information (or if it could be retrieved easily), but was felt to be worth investigating as it was essentially their HESA data that was being sought and therefore not confidential. JKH will discuss the proposal with JCP and will proceed accordingly. **JKH/JCP**

- **Reduce loss of women at transition from UG to PG. Provide support to final year UG with applications for further PG study**

HJ confirmed that she runs a support group for those individuals who are putting in applications for PhD study, and that she was able to provide data in relation to this for the last two years which would show who had attended the support group and the gender split. It was felt that it would be beneficial to have this information and HJ will supply the previous two years figures to AJJ accordingly. AJJ will then collect this on an annual basis from HJ in future. **HJ/AJJ**

It was noted that careers days are held for first/second year students and a separate one for final year students. These include visits by inspirational speakers who discuss their own careers. It was felt that there was generally a good mix of speakers and across gender, and HJ would be able to supply a list of the speakers as appropriate. It was agreed that this information should also be collected on an annual basis in future. **HJ/AJJ**

- **Monitor UG degree success (# of 'good degrees') by UCAS entry tariff and by gender**

JKH advised that one of the intentions last year was to look and see if there is any difference in the success of undergraduates by gender. More 'good' degrees go to women than men, and data can now be linked from the UCAS entry tariff to the final degree. JWP agreed to discuss this further with Thorunn Helgason and see what information can be obtained. **JWP**

- **Assess the value and practical implications of offering 'Springboard' training to post-graduate students and post-doctoral researchers**

Springboard is a personal development programme specifically designed for women and is currently only available to women in Grades 1 to 5. HJ and JCP had previously discussed widening the programme so that it can be offered to female researchers and HJ will investigate whether female research staff would be interested in attending such a programme. If so, HJ would be able to run an 'in house' course specifically for research

staff. It was noted that there would need to be a minimum of 15 attendees to make the course viable, and HC suggested that if Biology had spare capacity the course could be offered to female research staff from Chemistry. It was proposed that HJ place an advert in the Biology bulletin initially to gauge the level of interest in the Department, and then, depending on numbers the course could be widened to Chemistry. The possibility of running two sessions was suggested if a lot of interest was generated.

**HJ**

HJ cautioned that PoD may wish to have some involvement or feedback bearing in mind that the course was originally intended only for women in grades 1 to 5. It was also felt that the cost of running such a course would need to be kept as low as possible, but as the expense will be limited to staff time and the cost of refreshments/lunch, this was not thought to be a problem.

- **Use University staff surveys, ASSET2010 and CROSS12 surveys to assess recognition of good practice among staff and students, and dissemination of information. To highlight areas for improvement**

It was noted that staff needed to be encouraged to take part in all staff surveys on a regular basis. One will be coming up shortly and JKH/JCP will encourage staff to participate accordingly.

- **Members of short-listing interview and appointments panels have gender balance**

JKH confirmed that keeping a check on the gender balance will come through from the data collection

- **Promotion processes for staff are transparent and criteria are clear and fair; provide support and feedback to promotion applicants**

It was noted that promotion is for all ART staff (including teaching fellows), although most promotions affect academic staff rather than research staff (who are usually employed on shorter contracts with limited funding). It was agreed that the current Biology system (which relies on staff putting themselves forward for promotion) is not good practice and other departments have different approaches. HC advised that under the Chemistry system there are Academic Group Leaders for different areas of research who would then look at the academic staff under their remit to see if any of them are at a stage where promotion was possible. Staff are then encouraged to go for promotion at the appropriate time, and it was noted that Chemistry have a high success rate for promotions submitted.

As Biology does not have a system where there are academic group leaders, as a first step JKH had proposed that she and JCP gather information from other departments to find out what other systems are in place and if there are any processes that can be adopted in Biology. One such process, which HC advised that Chemistry were going to re-introduce within their Department, was the running of 'Promotion Seminars'. The aim of the seminars would be to take people through the promotion process and give advice on preparation for promotion. It was felt that this would be a good initiative for Biology to adopt and it was proposed that the summer term would be the best time to run such a seminar in Biology. Newly promoted staff could be asked to attend and talk at the seminar about their experiences. JKH will discuss this with JCP and DFS in further detail.

**JKH/JCP/DFS**

It was concluded that Biology will need to move to a system which is more proactive, and staff will need to be prepared (i.e have an up-to-date CV). HC advised that within Chemistry this is flagged at Performance Review, and Chemistry staff are encouraged to submit an updated CV with their performance review paperwork. JKH will discuss further with JCP whether a similar system should be encouraged in Biology (although it was noted that performance review is separate from career progression).

**JKH/JCP**

- **Introduce summer student scheme for postdoc researchers**

JKH confirmed that the summer student scheme is in operation and it allows for the employment of undergraduate students over the summer, to provide experience of running independent research projects. This initiative is ongoing.

- **Seek funding to replace Wellcome VIP funds in order to maintain 12-month Departmental fellowship scheme**

Due to the current economic situation, it was noted that external funding is not currently available to maintain the 12-month Departmental fellowship scheme.

- **Maintain high visibility & support for Post-doc Society, encourage and enable their contribution to the Researcher community and wider Dept.**

FF confirmed that the Post-doc Society has been regenerated. There had been a good turn-out for the re-launch of the Society and some good feedback had been received. JKH suggested that someone from the Athena Working Group could, in the future, attend the Post-doc Society to talk about Athena issues.

FF advised that one of the intentions of the Post-doc Society was to start up a buddying system for new researchers. The Post-doc Society had also noted that the mentoring scheme run by PoD was unfortunately no longer operating as planned. FF to update Athena Working Group on progress of the buddying system in future.

- **Monitor participation in annual Performance Review. Check that development needs are met where required.**

Checks have and will continue to be put in place to ensure that performance review is completed by everyone as appropriate.

- **Monitor participation in Research Excellence Framework**

Concern had been expressed nationally that the REF may disproportionately affect women in terms of them not being submitted. JKH confirmed that help is available to staff in order to 'up' their REF return, and that data is available to illustrate that there is no gender bias in Biology.

- **Mentoring for staff and researchers**

The provision of mentoring for researchers was an issue as it was thought that the mentoring scheme is no longer in place. Clarity is required regarding what is available, and FF agreed to investigate accordingly.

FF

- **Improving networking among staff, PDRAs and PGs**

HJ organises 'Coffee and Careers' events for staff. Attendance lists are kept at these events and it was suggested that these should be collected as they demonstrate that the events were used, were popular and had a similar gender split relative to the number of Biology postdocs. HJ will supply AJJ with the latest information and AJJ will collect annually from HJ in future.

HJ/AJJ

- **Staff teaching and Admin workload allocation is fair and transparent**

DS confirmed that this is on the Agenda for the next Heads of Sciences meeting, and the issue will be discussed there.

It was noted that clarity needs to be given to staff as to how workloads are managed in the Department and Biology staff need to be made aware of the excel database that is maintained by Jenny White and Belinda Wade. JKH and DFS will do some work on this over the summer so that a presentation can be given at the Departmental Away Day in September about what goes on the database, how things are weighted and what people may like adding. It was felt that it would be beneficial to have more open discussion on workloads, and it was suggested that it could also be taken to an Academic Staff meeting in due course.

JKH/DFS

- **Improve social aspects of Department**

Reinvigorating the Departmental Social Committee was an ongoing aim and DFS will investigate the progress of this and encourage the Committee to hold department-wide events accordingly.

JCP/DFS

- **Individual's teaching contributions are valued**

Staff with excellent student feedback scores for their teaching receive letters of congratulation from the Head of Department. It was proposed that lists be maintained on who received these letters and the gender split. AJJ will contact Belinda for details of letters sent out in 2011, and collate data in future.

**AJJ**

- **Arrangements for staff taking sabbaticals is open and transparent**

New procedures for taking sabbaticals have been introduced and information has been posted on the web. It was proposed that Departmental records be kept regarding who takes sabbaticals and it was proposed that JCP was in the best position to maintain this information.

**JCP**

- **Career breaks**

It was noted that a female member of academic staff currently on maternity leave will be acting as a guinea pig to demonstrate that the system in place in Biology operates smoothly.

HC reported that Chemistry recently revamped their maternity procedures so that all issues and implications are discussed with their employee and their Line Manager at the outset. This has also been extended to cover paternity leave so that the new legislation is clarified to all staff prior to commencing their leave. The new maternity/paternity procedures in Chemistry have also been widened to cover graduate students in that Department. HC will let JKH have a copy of the updated Chemistry documentation so that the process can be checked against the Biology procedure.

**HC/JKH**

JKH proposed that progress made on the Action Plan be discussed at the next meeting. Data collected could also be brought to the meeting, and a decision could then be made what to do with the data collected and what the next steps were.

#### **12/004 The University of York and Athena Swan**

JKH expressed concern that the University needs to take a more proactive approach in relation to Athena. There is a lack of information centrally, and it was felt that more help should be available to Departments from the centre. Moreover the University Athena Swan website is out of date and needs amending

JKH will contact Brian Fulton in her role of Chair of the Biology Athena Swan Working Group to see what progress can be made centrally.

**JKH**

#### **12/005 Date of Next Meeting: Week 6/7 of Summer Term (to be arranged).**