

DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

**Minutes of the Athena SWAN Working Group held on Thursday, 27 February 2014**

Present: Boris Bongalov (BB), Neil Bruce (NCB), Helen Coombs (HC), Rebecca Furmston (RF), Jane Hill (JKH), Janina Pirozek (JCP), Jon Pitchford (JWP), Betsy Pownall (MEP), Melanie Smee (MS), Richard Waites (RW), Lorna Warnock (LW),

Apologies: Adrian Harrison (AH)

In Attendance: Thorunn Helgason [on behalf of Adrian Harrison] (TH), Andrea Johnson (AJJ)

**14/001 Welcome and Introduction to New Members**

JKH introduced the new members of the Working Group, and welcomed them to the first Biology Athena Swan meeting of 2014. JKH explained to the new members that the Working Group met once a term and advised that an application for a Gold award had been submitted in November 2013 (outcome not yet known). It was noted that if the Department were not successful in their Gold application, then it was likely that their Silver Award would be renewed for a further 3 year period.

JKH proposed that the first half of the meeting should be spent looking at the submission document and explaining the current situation to the new members of the Group. She suggested that the second half of the meeting should then be spent looking at the Action Plan, incorporating feedback on this from the Group and forward planning.

**14/002 Summary of Gold Application**

It was acknowledged that detailed data are required for Athena, and the graphs used were standardised to show the relevant information. JKH explained that each of the graphs focusses on percentage females, shows data for the last 5 years and incorporates benchmark data (the Russell Group was used as a comparison). JKH reviewed some of the conclusions arising from the data with the Working Group, namely:

1. ***Undergraduate student numbers***

This graph indicates how the total numbers have changed over a 5 year period. The summary from this graph was that more than 50% of undergraduate students are female which is above the average for the Russell Group, but there is a slight decline in female numbers.

1. ***Masters student numbers***

The summary from this graph was that gender proportion has fluctuated over time, but there is no clear trend. However, the percentage of females was approximately 10% less than on undergraduate programmes and lower than the UK average.

1. ***Research student numbers***

Again, there has been some variation in the percentage of female research students over the last 5 years, but no clear trend. Although an average of 50% of postgraduate research students are female (and this is in line with the UK average), this is approximately 10% less than on undergraduate programmes.

1. ***Undergraduate applications, offers and acceptances***

More females apply and accept offers than if there was gender parity. It was deemed that the higher percentage of women at undergraduate level was a consequence of the higher percentage of women applicants. It was noted that a higher percentage of females than males accept offers, but this has declined slightly recently. It was further noted that the pattern of offers and accepts by females was different in 2013/14.

The reason for this change of pattern in 2013/2014 was discussed by the Working Group. This could be a one-off blip, but it was also suggested that the change could be because of the introduction of Maths ‘A’ Level as an alternative entry requirement. Formerly entry requirements were Biology and Chemistry (at least to AS Level), but it was noted that now the entry requirements are either Biology and Chemistry ***or*** Biology and Maths. It was noted that more

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males sit Maths ‘A’ Level, and potential female applicants could be wondering if there is a large mathematical element, and perhaps that could affect the figures in the proportion of acceptances that are from women.

However, it was acknowledged that our entry requirements are now in line with others elsewhere, and that with this in mind we should simply be keeping a check to ensure that there is nothing we are doing that has changed.

1. ***Masters and Postgraduate applications, offers and acceptances***

The conclusions arriving from both the Masters and PhD data on applications, offers and acceptances show that the percentage of females accepting our offers have not deviated from 50:50 at either Masters level (average 50%) or PhD level (average 49%). It was noted that there was fluctuation in these data but no clear trends over time. Gender parity will be maintained by monitoring and improving our good recruitment practices.

1. ***Degree classification by gender - undergraduates***

The graph highlighted that a higher proportion of females get a 2i and there is no difference between males and females when looking at distinctions. A previous analysis has assessed this and degree classifications are in line with UCAS tariffs. It was suggested that this should continue to be monitored to check that what we are doing is not preferentially favouring males or females.

1. ***Degree classification by gender - masters***

The data indicated that a similar percentage of female and male Masters students have been awarded distinctions, and a slightly higher percentage of passes have been awarded to females. There are fluctuations but no clear trends over time.

1. ***Staff data – female:male ratio of academic staff***

It was noted that the percentage of female lecturers has risen. Furthermore the University Athena Group picked out that the first and last bars of this graph (i.e % of female lecturers and % of female professors) were fairly close to each other so it is evident that there is nothing to prevent women in the Department rising to senior levels. It was noted that the Biology statistics were better than the Russell Group, and show progression.

The Russell Group data for academic staff was discussed. This just shows an average across all academic staff, and the Working Group discussed whether it would be useful to contact each of the Russell Group Biology Departments to ask for more detailed information. It was felt that this might be a good approach to adopt, unless data can be extracted from AS submissions on Institute web sites. **JCP**

1. ***Staff data – female:male ratio of research staff***

The percentage of female research staff has shown a 10% increase over the last 6 years. There was reasonable gender parity across the grades; we have retained females better than males and have more female researchers than the average given for the Russell Group.

1. ***Turnover by grade and gender***

It was noted that average turnover of female and male academic staff was similar, and low. The average turnover of male and female research staff is similar. There is fluctuation over time, but no discernable pattern.

1. ***Academic and research recruitment***

The academic recruitment figures look good, and show gender parity over the last few years. Similarly research recruitment shows good data and also demonstrates the huge rise in recruitment in 2013.

1. ***Applications for promotion and success rates by gender and grade***

There has been an increase in staff applying for promotion, and the pro-active approach to academic promotions introduced during our silver award has resulted in more academics being promoted recently.

The Working Group debated whether age had any consequences in relation to promotion, and it was acknowledged that one issue that will be addressed will be the length of time served at

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each grade. In relation to this it was suggested that data should be collected to see if there were more women right at the top of their scale than males. **JKH/JCP**

1. ***Representation of females at different career stages***

It was noted that there are two major drop-off points for female representation in the Department. One was from Researcher to Lecturer and the other was from Undergraduate to Postgraduate. It was acknowledged that grades could be broken down further to get more detail, and that might be something that could be looked at in the future.

1. ***Female:male ratio of academic and research staff on fixed-term contracts and open-ended (permanent contracts).***

This issue is having decreasing relevance and it was acknowledged that in future providing this information will not form part of the Athena criteria.

1. ***Staff involvement with outreach activities***

The outreach data showed that over the last 5 years, an average of 34% of staff involved in outreach were women, reflecting the proportion of females in the Department and showing that females are neither over-burdened or under-represented in this respect.

1. ***Staff on part-time and full-time contracts***

There were only two staff on part time contracts (one male and one female) so these data were not included. In relation to research staff, those holding part-time contracts were predominantly female, although there has been a decline recently.

1. ***Summary of Achievements***

JKH drew the Working Group’s attention to the final page of the Gold Submission document, which showed a summary of what had been achieved since our silver award and the successful targets achieved from the 2006/2010/2011 Action Plans.

**14/003 Minutes of the Meetings of 21 November 2013 and 18 June 2013**

There were no matters arising from the meeting of 21 November 2013, as this meeting concentrated solely on the impending submission of the Gold application.

The Working Group considered the minutes of the meeting of 18 June 2013, and the matters arising from this, namely:

1. ***13/013 (i) Springboard Training***

It was noted that Hilary Jones has now left the Department, and it was queried what would happen in relation to Springboard training in the future.

JCP advised that Hilary is still coming back to run a couple of cohorts this year, so could still provide this training for the Department, but there would be a fee for this now that she is no longer a member of University staff. It was debated whether anyone from within the University could provide this to avoid the cost implication, and HC reported that in a recent discussion she had had with Kate O’Sullivan, Kate had confirmed that Springboard was not supported by the University. It was noted that when Hillary had run the course it had been offered primarily to Biology staff although more recently Hilary had offered it to FERA and the City of York Council.

The University position is that Springboard is an expensive course to run; the Centre felt that similar courses were already available within the University and they did not think that Springboard was particularly effective. However, JCP advised that when the University had run the course, it had been too diverse a mix across staff groups (originally it was aimed at administrative staff although it has now moved more to research staff). It was also quite investment-heavy for the Centre. JCP suggested that the course could still be offered to Biology staff, and could be funded from the Departmental Training budget in the short term, but she was not sure how sustainable this would be.

It was agreed that Springboard should be run again in the Department, and feedback obtained. MS thought there would be a demand for the course amongst postdocs. It was noted that 15 or so individuals would be required to make running the course effective, and to get this number it was proposed that a joint course for postdocs and postgraduate students could be offered. The

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Working Group felt that this would be a viable approach and if good feedback were obtained it could be used to persuade the University to put on and fund the course from the Centre in the future. JCP will liaise with Hilary to put this in place accordingly. **JCP**

1. ***13/013 (ii) Mentoring for staff and researchers***

It was emphasised out that there are essentially two different schemes in force. Firstly there is a Mentoring Scheme for newcomers (which acts like a buddying scheme), and then there is the new University Coaching Scheme which new members of staff can access. In relation to this the University has invested in training up a network of volunteer coaches. An individual signing up to this is unlikely to get a coach from their Department, but the aim of the scheme was to provide a sounding board and provide development support.

At the meeting in June it had been agreed that Hilary would remind postdocs about the University coaching scheme and Hilary had agreed to keep records of the number of individuals who take this up, split by staff group and gender. Although Hilary has now left, it was noted that records of those taking up the scheme would still be available from the Centre (Learning and Development) and JCP agreed to look into this accordingly. It was deemed important that the data retrieved be kept by gender if this is not already being done. **JCP**

MS also reported that a coffee/pastries session had been held a fortnight ago, and coaching had been mentioned at the session so there should now be a greater awareness of the coaching scheme by postdocs.

1. ***13/013 (iii) Staff teaching and admin workload allocation***

JKH reported that the new workload model was ongoing, and would be rolled out in due course.

1. ***13/013 (x) Valuing individual teaching contributions***

This issue is also ongoing. JKH confirmed that she will try and analyse whether female students get as much out of specific courses as male students do. To determine this she would ask Jenny White to put a checkbox on the student feedback forms querying if the respondent was male or female. **JKH**

1. ***13/013 (xi) Update on the provision of statistics – staff leavers***

It was noted that the University Action Plan incorporated an initiative to look at exit surveys for staff which they can disseminate to Departments. The Centre will put this in place accordingly which should in turn impact on Departments.

Hilary had intended to use LinkedIn to ascertain what researchers were doing at a given point in time after they left the Department (eg six months on from leaving). LW reported that this could still be done as contact is maintained with alumni, and she would give further thought to how this could be achieved. **LW**

1. ***13/019 Updated Biology Action Plan***

JKH queried how the Working Group would use the updated Action Plan to record progress made. Specifically she queried whether progress made should be summarised at the end of each Working Group meeting. It was decided that an extra column should be added to the Action Plan to detail this accordingly. **JKH**

**14/003 Feedback on Action Plan and Forward Planning**

1. **Action: Further in depth analysis of student gender statistics**

*A target to present student gender stats to the BoS annually and include classification analyses by gender, was outlined on the action plan with a timescale of ‘by June 2014’ with the aim of raising awareness of gender issues in our undergraduate students.*

The Working Group discussed when would be the best time to present this information to the BoS, and RW suggested that this should be done at the time of the Annual Programme Review (APR), which takes place in Autumn. This was agreed by the Group accordingly. RW will request data from ASWG when preparing the APR documentation. **RW**

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1. **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**

*A target to analyse changes in pattern of offers & acceptances to female undergraduates with a timescale of June 2014 with the aim of increasing the % of applications from females was discussed.*

JP reported that he would look at the undergraduate data along with UCAS tariff. In relation to this TH confirmed that information is put into the database about subjects taken and predicted grades and this could be retrieved from SITS (from the Administration database). Monica Bandeira would be able to help with this. **JWP**

It was noted that a target was to increase the % of female PGT applications by 10% was also identified, and the consequences of the recent move to a new PGT admissions process will be reviewed in the autumn.

It was noted that there has been/will be a review of the Admissions web pages and it was felt that these were balanced in terms of images of males/females. It was queried how this could be evidenced for Athena Swan. One option would be to introduce a checklist to help prompt this. However, it was agreed that it should be sufficient for appropriate minutes about the content of the student web pages and related text to show that consideration has been given to ensure that the website and course information represents our student population. **TH**

1. **Action: Annual review of ASWG progress on Action Plan reported to Staff Committee**

*A target was to ensure that a template for reporting was set up and the first review provided at the Spring Term Staff Committee meeting, with a Deadline of March 2014.*

This issue would be addressed, and detailing progress made on the Action Plan has been covered elsewhere in the minutes.

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

*The target under this action was to carry out an online survey of PDRAs to identify specific issues and develop new solutions by February 2014.*

In 2013 academic staff and second year students were surveyed using SurveyMonkey. It had been proposed on the Action Plan that a similar survey should now be rolled out to postdocs and, JKH queried if another group in the Department should be surveyed at the same time.

However, it was noted that the University Staff Survey is due to run again between the beginning of May and June this year. Postdocs will be included in that survey so it would not be appropriate to do them separately at this point. It was noted that the Staff Survey will provide the results in a format that can be mixed and matched. This would make it easier to cross reference between gender, grade and groups, and JCP advised that she would be encouraging all staff to complete the Staff Survey.

In view of the Staff Survey it was agreed that PhD and Graduate students should be surveyed instead. Using something other than SurveyMonkey was also discussed (i.e. Google), as it was felt there are better alternatives to SurveyMonkey available. BB is familiar with one such alternative, and JKH will talk to BB separately to discuss how to set this up. It was also noted that consideration would need to be given as to when the best time would be for the PhD and Graduate students to be surveyed, in order to get a good response. **JKH/BB**

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

*A target was that data analysis reveals continued lack of gender differences in workload allocation with a target date of June 2014.*

JKH confirmed that the new workload model was in hand and has been referred to elsewhere in the minutes.

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1. **Action: Better understanding of support needs of undergraduate students**

*A target was that feedback from female undergraduates informs further action planning with a target date of June 2014.*

JKH advised that one of the things that had been evident from the survey of second year undergraduates in 2013 was that female undergraduates felt that they were less likely to succeed in academia than male students. However male undergraduates felt that both males and females had the same chance of succeeding in academia and it was apparent that male and female undergraduates had different perceptions. JKH proposed that the Working Group should try and address the perception of female students; and queried was there anything in particularly that the Working Group could do, or information that should be passed on to aid this?

Previously the Working Group had thought that a Focus Group could be set up, and this was still thought to be a good way of addressing the issue. JKH could then distil this down to the undergraduates to get some comments. It was felt that the female perception may be ‘historically based’, but if so JKH would be able to demonstrate that patterns over time do show improvement, and this may make female perceptions more positive. It was also noted that the fact that the introductory lecture given to new students in the first year is given by both male and female senior staff – and this should continue so that students are given positive images at the start of their time here.

It was acknowledged that Athena may wish to see the Department running support groups specifically for our female students. However, it was felt that this should not be the Department’s philosophy – and that support groups should be open to both male and females. Similarly it was suggested that if more women in the Department were trained as coaches, then females may choose to go to a female coach. However this is not known.

BB agreed to think of when and where it would be appropriate for JKH to talk to undergraduates; this would be an opportunity to get some ideas out. He suggested that it would be better to do this after the exams and BB/JKH would think of ways in which to encourage people to turn up (eg putting on a pizza session). **BB/JKH**

**14/004 Conclusion of Meeting and Next Steps**

JKH proposed that the next set of Action Points from the Action Plan be addressed at the next meeting of the Working Group, and thanked MS for the work involved in compiling the graphs for the Gold Submission.

JKH will update the Working Group with the outcome of the Gold Submission in due course.

**14/005 Date of Next Meeting**

Summer Term, 2014 (to be confirmed).

*AJJ - 06/03/2014*