

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

**Minutes of the Athena SWAN Working Group held on Wednesday 28 June 2012**

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

**12/006 Minutes of the meeting** of 22 February 2012 were agreed.

**12/007 Matters Arising from the Departmental Athena Swan meeting of 22 February 2012**

**(i) Clarification of current situation**

JKH confirmed that since the last meeting of the Athena Swan Working Group unfortunately the Gold application that had been submitted had been unsuccessful. This meeting would consider whether the Department should continue to submit applications for Gold status accordingly.

It was noted that the feedback that had been received had indicated that some of the things undertaken by the Department were good, but that they had not been in place for a long enough period to merit a Gold award. Procedural points had also been raised (e.g. that the Action Plan should only cover things that would be done in the future, and not record what has been completed). The Working Group agreed that Biology should continue to aim for a Gold award and applications should continue to be submitted accordingly as long as this repetition would not damage the Department's reputation. It was noted that the Group should continue to meet termly (in week 6 or 7 of term where possible) to discuss progress.

**(ii) 12/002 (ii) Terms of Reference**

HC reported that Chemistry did not currently have Terms of Reference that could be passed to Biology. The framework for their Athena meetings was, instead, covered in their newsletter. In view of this Biology will need to write up their own Terms of Reference and JKH will progress this accordingly.

JKH

**(iii) 12/003 Athena Swan Website/University Athena Swan Committee**

It was noted that the Central University Athena Swan website needs updating. JKH reported that Anna Grey was aware of this and, as the University wishes to aim for a silver award for the University as a whole, this would shortly be rectified.

It was recorded that due to John Local's and Anna's involvement with REF, Brian Fulton (Academic Coordinator for Sciences) would be taking over the chairing of the University Athena Swan Committee. It was also noted that, whilst Anna will still be actively involved with Athena, Linda Whiting in the Equality and Diversity Office will take over the administrative side of the work.

JKH advised that Brian Fulton will need clear information from Departments relating to the structure of their individual Athena Swan working groups, and how they operate. The University Athena Swan Committee will incorporate Athena representatives from each department and more people would be invited to attend meetings as appropriate (eg individuals from Central HR regarding data provision).

**(iv) 12/003 Beacon of Good Practice**

JKH reported that she had spoken to Heidi Baseler who will be involved with the HYMS Athena Swan initiative. JKH and JCP will be in further contact with HYMS to provide help/advice as and when required.

JKH/JCP

**(v) 12/003 Data Collection**

Data collection is ongoing; much of the student data is currently available although degree classification for undergraduates and MRes students is still awaited. Some staff data has been provided centrally and AJJ and JCP will work on this further.

AJJ/JCP

**(vi) 12/003 Monitor UG degree success by UCAS entry tariff and by gender**

JWP reported that he had tried to look at what undergraduate students came to the Department with (i.e their 'A' level scores) and relate that to what they left with (i.e their final degrees). Unfortunately historical information was not available and as the final degree results were not yet known JWP had used the students 3<sup>rd</sup> year mark as a proxy for their degree classification. Only a relatively small sample size had been used, but based on that JWP reported that there was no difference between what final result males and females came out with in comparison to what they arrived with. JWP advised he would continue to work further on this, but felt it unlikely that anything significant would emerge in relation to differences between males and females. This implies that our teaching and assessments do not disproportionately disadvantage males or females, but more data are required, and we will keep checking this. **JWP**

It was queried what should be done with such information, and JKH suggested that the Working Group should be able to advise to whom information/data should be fed back (i.e the Biology Undergraduate Studies Board and/or Strategy Group), particularly if the outcome of collection of specific data was unexpected. It was noted that in this particular instance the Working Group could say fairly certainly that there is no appreciable difference between male/female A level score and final degree result, but in future more data can and will be analysed.

The Working Group discussed the possibility of setting up a timetable (which would involve stipulating a date that the data was required by, then allowing a set period of time for analysis, and then agreeing what actions should be taken). Ultimately it was agreed that the data should be brought to the autumn term Biology Athena Swan meeting, and due to the volume of data that will have been collected, highlights could be picked out for discussion and further reflection. It was also proposed that the Athena Swan application form be updated with the statistics obtained in due course. A decision can then be made at the meeting about what to do with the information and whether to submit an application for a Gold award.

**(vii) 12/003 Assess the value and practical implications of offering 'Springboard' training to post-graduate students and post-doctoral researchers**

HJ reported that she had been charged with finding out whether there would be much interest amongst female research staff in attending the Springboard programme, but unfortunately there was not. HJ reported that some people had been put off by the idea that it was a single gender programme, and unfortunately due to the low number of research staff who had expressed an interest, a separate programme was not warranted.

As recruitment was anticipated to increase over the next year, it was proposed that the situation be re-visited in 6 to 12 months time to see if there is more interest then.

**(viii) 12/003 Promotion processes for staff**

DFS advised that she had picked this up at the Academic Staff meeting, and an email has gone out to all appropriate staff to encourage them to book one-to-one meetings with DFS if they are thinking about promotion. DFS will then meet further with NB/JKH after these individual meetings have taken place. It was felt that the one-to-one meetings would be helpful to staff who are undecided whether they are at a point when they can go for promotion. It was noted that in the past briefing sessions have been popular in Chemistry and HC advised that this year Chemistry are going to re-run these in addition to having one-to-one meetings.

It was noted that the new Biology processes would be a gradual change to see how it works in practice this year. NB advised that in his role of sitting on the University advisory panel for promotions, he noted that Chemistry applications seem to go through more smoothly than other Departments, and HC advised that the process starts quite early with internal deadlines for staff, and individuals are encouraged to go ahead only when they are felt to be ready. Chemistry also look at past promotion applications to see which ones are successful and which not, and look at contributing factors (e.g. grant income) when recommending individuals go for promotion.

JKH reported that she had recently attended a meeting which arose from a project which had been set up to improve Gender Equality Competences (GeCo), and promotion for research staff had been discussed at that meeting which will be covered later in the Biology Athena meeting.

**(ix) 12/003 Mentoring for staff and researchers**

FF had agreed to investigate regarding what mentoring schemes were available, and she

confirmed that she has emailed Kelly McDonald and Karen Clegg (PoD). The Postdoc Society has also queried mentoring schemes with Karen, but FF had not yet received a response.

It was felt that it would be good to know what kind of mentoring would be useful to staff and HJ advised that there had been some discussion about this with the Postdoc Society, who had felt that a list of people that they knew were willing to act as a mentor and who could be approached would be preferable. It was noted that such a list could be kept, but mentors would need to know what it would involve on their part, so some broad guidelines need to be in place.

Historically some information would be available University-wide and JCP agreed to talk to the Centre about what was available. FF advised that she would also report back to the Working Group when she had heard back from Kelly McDonald/Karen Clegg in due course. **JCP/FF**

**(x) 12/003 Staff teaching and Admin workload allocation**

JKH reported that there were a number of things arising from this issue. It is important that staff understand the workload model and the first step is to try and work out whether the Department's current workload model is the best it can be. To ascertain this it would be important to talk to various people to see if it can be improved. It was noted that each Department currently does its own thing and some good points might be learnt from other Departments. There is currently an intern in Central HR, Jenny Stonier, who is working on the issue centrally and who has met with JKH. JCP proposed that she discussed the situation with Paula Tunbridge in HR before any further meetings with Jenny took place. Once it has been agreed what workload models were available, and what they should capture, Jenny would hopefully be able to investigate what other Departments and external organisations are using. JCP and JKH will progress this in due course. **JCP/JKH**

In the interim it was agreed to continue to use the current system until it is known whether a better model would be more appropriate, although it was noted that the current model is out of date and some staff do not seem to have engaged with it. It was also noted that the admin workload spreadsheet is run in a different way as it is also used to allocate jobs. JKH suggested that a debate should take place regarding what activities should be included in the new model (eg outreach) and whether research activities should be included in future. Whilst it was felt that it would be difficult to incorporate research activities, it would not be unreasonable to set some expectations for academic staff (eg number of research grant applications/papers written, over a 5 year period). It was noted, however, that these areas are looked at separately under REF and there may be knock-on consequences of trying to quantify research in this manner. It was queried whether the issue should be discussed further at the next Away Day as part of a more general dialogue about workload models. Such a debate would hopefully enable staff to have greater understanding of the models used and lead to better transparency. JCP agreed to feed back to JKH after she had spoken to Paula Tunbridge and if the timing worked out then the issue would be discussed at the next Away Day (and failing that it would be taken to the next Academic Staff meeting). **JCP/JKH**

**(xi) 12/003 Improve social aspects of the Department**

It was noted that social events are taking place, and the Biology Summer Party was scheduled for the evening of Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> July. Lucy Hudson is acting as Chair of the Social Committee at present.

**(xii) 12/003 Arrangements for staff taking sabbaticals is open and transparent**

JCP reported that she would be re-writing the sabbatical policy for the whole University, and the new policy will come out in due course.

The deadline for sabbatical leave applications is currently February, which allows for administrative and teaching re-arrangements to be made over Easter. It was agreed that it would be useful to have a list of staff on sabbatical at any one time easily accessible. HC reported that in Chemistry, their staff are updated with such information and it has also been placed on their staff intranet site. It was decided to adopt the same process in Biology and accordingly the summer term academic staff meeting will, in future, include a standing item about who is going on sabbatical leave the following term and the information will also be put on the web. **JKH**

**12/008 Update from WISE meeting on gender equality**

JKH reported that the UKRC and WISE are currently working together with the aim of advancing gender equality and diversity in science, engineering and technology and there is now a GeCO (Gender Equality Competences) website arising from this. GeCo is a project which has been set up to develop an online EU Gender Equality Toolkit, aimed at those involved in workforce and student management within industry and higher education institutions. The GeCo website outlines good practices and is a useful place to find out how to improve things (i.e workload models in future). JKH advised that it was still a work in progress, but that Biology might want to contribute to it in the future

Arising from the GeCo project, JKH advised that there would be a student culture survey on the GeCo website shortly, and TB agreed to look at this to see if it would be useful for Biology to take part in. The survey is designed for both undergraduate and postgraduate students, and will be available at the end of July. Whilst the timing for the launch of the survey will not be ideal for undergraduates (and data would only be obtained from those who were about to start either their second or third years), it was felt it may be a useful way of getting information from students and JKH will let TB know when the survey is available in due course. **JKH/TB**

JKH reported that at the same WISE meeting promotions was also discussed. A speaker from Reading was present, who talked about the promotions system at Reading. Their particular institution included a lot of Grade 7 researches (many of whom were on fixed contracts), who were looking at promotion. They had decided the best way to address this and to inform staff about the process was to run career development workshops to help their staff understand the procedure and what they could do to gain promotion. It had been evident that they had a different financial set-up in place, and their department took on the consequences of staff who were promoted but who's funding was limited. Additionally some departments would put in for a higher grade on grant applications so the financial cost of promotions to the Department would be less (eg grant applications asked for funding at the top of grade 6 so that if the person was subsequently regarded to a 7 the cost that the department had to underwrite would be less). Information relating to the process at Reading was available on the GeCo website.

JKH also reported that there was a case study in relation to the Women Academic Returners' Programme (WARP) which was being run at Sheffield University. The University of Sheffield have set aside an amount of money to help women returning from maternity leave to ensure that their research did not suffer whilst they were away. In practice this involves employing a postdoc for 3 or 4 months to run things whilst they were on maternity leave. The Biology Athena Working Group felt that ideally the programme should also cover other periods of staff absence (eg sabbaticals, long term sickness absence), but was essentially good practice. It was agreed that the Department should lobby for central funding to allow for a similar scheme to be put in place in Biology. **JKH/DFS**

**12/009 Update from Chemistry Athena meeting**

The Chemistry Athena meeting had discussed the role of academic co-ordinators. Subject Committee Chairs already had a clear role, and Chemistry are drawing up a list of group leaders which incorporated many responsibilities. It was noted that in Biology we do not have a similar set up, although there are Subject Committee Chairs. It was felt however, that the roles of the Subject Committee Chairs in Biology may not be clear as it was generally a broad role. It was agreed that it would be valuable to make it clear what the remit of the role is. It was felt that this may be better addressed at the next meeting after NB/DFS had had chance to look at this issue in more detail. **NB/DFS**

HC reported that Chemistry are looking at resubmitting for their Gold award.

**12/010 Date of Next Meeting: Week 6/7 of Autumn Term (to be arranged).**