

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

**Athena SWAN**

**Minutes of Departmental Athena SWAN Meeting held on Monday 31 October 2011**

Present: Thomas Brabbs (TB), Neil Bruce (NCB), Fiona Frame (FF), Jane Hill (JKH), Hilary Jones (HJ), Janina Pirozek (JCP), Debbie Smith (DS)  
In Attendance: Andrea Johnson (AJJ)

**11/001 Membership of the Athena Swan Working Group**

JKH advised that Robin Perutz and Helen Coombs have been invited to join the Biology Athena Swan Working Group and either JKH or JCP will attend the Chemistry Athena Swan group in a reciprocal arrangement.

**11/002 Minutes of the meeting** of 12 November 2010 were agreed.

**11/003 Matters Arising from the Departmental Athena Swan meeting of 12 November 2010**

*(i) Clarification of current situation*

JKH asked for agreement from the Working Group that the Department should still put forward a submission for a Gold Award in November 2011. This was agreed, and the purpose of the meeting will therefore be to reflect realistically on the progress made to date, and on what is still outstanding bearing in mind the submission deadline of 30<sup>th</sup> November 2011.

No further specific points from the meeting of 12 November 2010 were discussed, although some ongoing issues would be discussed under other Agenda items.

It was suggested that it may be beneficial for the Biology Working Group to meet more frequently in future, although it was noted that informal meetings had taken place over the course of the year that did not necessitate a formal meeting. The Working Group acknowledged that it would be useful to document the degree of what is/has been done and that making available minutes of the Working Group on a 'Biology Athena' website would be an effective way of demonstrating this.

**11/004 Asset Report launch meeting - London, 20<sup>th</sup> November**

JKH reported that she had attended the Asset Report launch in London. Asset stood for the 'Athena Survey of Science, Engineering and Technology', and the remit of it was to ask specific questions in relation to Athena. The response to the survey had been good and data could be extracted that could be further broken down, and would allow Biology to make useful comparisons. JKH had given a 10 minute presentation at the launch to show how the Asset survey could be used, and it was recognised that it would be advantageous to raise York's profile by championing such Athena activities.

**11/005 Going for Gold meeting - London, 7<sup>th</sup> September**

JKH had also attended a meeting on the 7<sup>th</sup> September at which some comprehensive suggestions had been made about what departments should be doing in order to get a Gold Award. JKH advised the Working Group that most of the suggestions had already been acted on, and Biology were in a good position in this regard.

**11/006 Athena self-assessment process and checklist**

Caroline Fox had emailed an 'Athena Good Practice' checklist to JKH, which was helpful, and this - combined with the Action template - is what Biology essentially needs to do in order to put forward a strong application for a Gold Award.

**11/007 Chemistry Athena meeting**

JKH confirmed that either Robin Perutz or Helen Coombs will come to Biology Working Group meetings in future when they can and will update Biology on Chemistry meetings. As a result of

a recent Athena Chemistry meeting it had been established that Chemistry have a new document on maternity leave, with the aim being to add to the information and guidance already provided by Central HR. JCP confirmed that individual meetings are now held within Biology with all pregnant women and that she would crosscheck Biology's system with the Chemistry initiative to ensure that all relevant information is incorporated into the Biology process.

**JCP**

JKH reported that many other things that Chemistry do also appear to be done by Biology, and that the reciprocal arrangement of attending each others meetings will be useful for sharing good practice and ideas.

### **11/008 New web presence for Biology Athena**

A new web page will be developed for Biology Athena. The Biology Athena page would go as a sub-section under the 'About the Department' heading once this is up and running. It was noted that the Biology Athena site will need to go live before the Gold Award bid is submitted.

There were issues relating to the Athena logo on the main Biology website, which will need further work, and Christine O'Dea is looking into this accordingly.

### **11/009 Update on sabbaticals**

JKH confirmed that the Sabbatical Policy has now been reviewed, and information is now available on how to take a sabbatical for academic staff. This also links into encouraging women coming back from maternity leave to take a sabbatical.

### **11/010 Promotions processes**

It was acknowledged that the promotions process needed clarification, and this would be discussed under the Athena Good Practice checklist.

### **11/011 Athena Good Practice Checklist**

JKH advised that the checklist supplied by Caroline Fox is not the final version, but is the direction that Athena are moving in, and the expectation was that the Biology Action Plan would follow this checklist. It was emphasised that there are basically two elements to the Gold submission. Firstly there is the data collection and analysis, and secondly there is the putting together of an Action Plan, and it was agreed that the Working Group should refer to the Good Practice checklist and develop their Action Plan from this.

The Working Group agreed to go through the checklist and note/comment on problem areas or agree where further clarification was required.

- Action Area 1, Domain 1A (3). It was felt that this could be demonstrated from the website. In addition, the Asset Survey showed a number of people who thought they had benefitted from Athena Swan.
- Action Area 1, Domain 1A (5). It was noted that Terms of Reference need to be written up for the Working Group in line with all the other Departmental Committees which have terms of reference. Similarly minutes of meetings would be placed on the web and thus widely available. Attendance at meetings could be demonstrated (eg by postdocs) and it was felt that Resources Board could be the parent committee for the Biology Athena Working Group, and minutes could be sent there. Reaching PhD students was discussed (eg GradShare), and it was noted that global emails are often used as a method for disseminating information. Induction during the first week of October and Skills Week were discussed, but it was felt that the 'coffee and careers' sessions run by HJ may be a more appropriate vehicle of reaching individuals. JHK asked anyone to let her know of any additional suggestions they had for disseminating information.
- Action Area 1, Domain 1A (8). It was noted that the HR budget and Postdoc Bridging scheme related to supporting key transition stages.
- Action Area 1, Domain 1B (16). HJ currently talks to final year undergraduates and supports them in their applications for graduate study. However, it was felt that the Department needed to identify which graduates do not go on to further study. Exit

surveys are currently sent to postdocs, but not for students. The Working Group felt that some similar service/information should be retrievable from the University, and JKH will discuss this with Anna Grey accordingly.

**JKH**

- Action Area 1, Domain 1B (18). The appropriate surveys were pinpointed to be the Asset Survey, the Staff Survey, and re-running Cross. It was noted that presently the data from the Staff Survey is not broken down by staff group or gender but further information may be available in due course (January/February 2012). This could go on the Action Plan for the future, as the response from academic and research staff would need to be identified for this to be relevant.
- Action Area 2, Domain 2A (25). It was queried whether anything would be done/recommended if a shortlist did not have women candidates. JCP advised that she does draw this to the attention of the shortlisting committee. It was noted that the appointment panel is always a mixed gender panel.
- Action Area 2, Domain 2A (26). It was queried whether promotion outcomes are compared with like departments, and it was noted that this is not currently done although data is kept about who puts themselves forward. It was felt that the current system (where the onus is on the individuals to apply) is not good practice, but it was not known what other Departments do. NB thought that Chemistry took a proactive approach and had a panel to look at promotions. It was suggested that an Action Group should be formed to investigate the situation in Chemistry and other Departments, and JKH and JCP agreed to meet separately to look into this in further detail. Points 28-36 would then all be considered by the Group.

**JKH/JCP**

It was felt that it might be considered to be OK for Biology's Gold application to indicate what Biology was doing to address the promotions situation on its Action Plan, rather than to have any new process already in place, and it should not deter the Department from making a bid for the gold award.

- Action Area 3, Domain 3A (40-42). It was noted that these sections related to HJ's role in the Department, and HJ reported that she could keep take up information, etc by gender in the future.
- Action Area 3, Domain 3A (43-45). These sections can be demonstrated via the Performance Review system. Training needs identified at Performance Review will feed back into this process, and HJ advised that she would be meeting all postdocs over the next year to introduce them personally to the new Researcher Development Framework, which also linked into 40 (Action Area 3, Domain 3A).
- Action Area 3, Domain 3B (46-48). It was confirmed that academic staff have a mentor for their first 3 years of appointment (after which time the Performance Review system takes over). For postdocs in addition to the Performance Review process there is an optional mentoring scheme run by POD. It was noted that for the scheme to be effective there needs to be enough willing mentors and the scheme could be better advertised. JKH will talk to Anna Grey about this accordingly.
- Action Area 3, Domain 3B (53). JKH queried if there was anything that could be done better or for initiatives that could be put in place for early career development. It was queried in what way ECRs could be encouraged to get involved in professional and learned societies and it was felt that as part of induction, postdocs should be told about what Societies are in operation. FF reported that the Postdoc Society have new volunteers and have ideas of what the Society could achieve and some discussion has taken place about a postdoc 'research day' to encourage the sharing of techniques, etc. There is no shortage of ideas; it is just a matter of encouraging people to participate. The Postdoc Society has recently been invigorated with new members so it was hoped that this would prove beneficial, in the same way that the graduate students have GradShare as their niche.
- Action Area 4, Domain 4A (57). It was noted that the section relating to Management Systems could be demonstrated although it was unclear what checks were in place to confirm effective communications. It was felt that the Staff Survey is one way of providing checks and that it should be possible to go to the relevant question on the Staff

**JKH**

Survey to see what the response has been once the data has been broken down into gender and staff group. It was felt that this should therefore go on Biology's Action Plan.

An item could also be incorporated onto the Agenda of the Academic Staff meeting.

- Action Area 4, Domain 4B (64-66). Similarly the section on working environment could also be demonstrated by the relevant question on the Staff Survey.
- Action Area 4, Domain 4B (70). This could be demonstrated by the system that is in place where academic staff members get letters from the Head of Department relating to the success/contribution of their teaching.
- Action Area 4, Domain 4B (72). PURE was discussed in this connection, as was the Annual Census.
- Action Area 5, Domain 5A (73). As previously, the Staff Survey could be used to demonstrate flexibility of working.
- Action Area 5, Domain 5A (75). It was thought that the section on 'long hours culture discouraged' could be demonstrated in terms of students.
- Action Area 5, Domain 5B (85-87). The section on career breaks also fits in with the updated Sabbatical Policy and Maternity Policy.

JKH advised that she would go through the checklist and update the information in light of the content of the Athena Swan Working Group discussion.

**JKH**

#### **11/012 Gender Statistics and Data Analysis**

It was noted that the data gathering and preparation of statistical charts was still ongoing and that Case Studies were still required.

#### **11/013 Athena Swan Joining Fee**

JKH informed the Group that the University has to pay £1,000 to join Athena Swan as this is the fee imposed on each institution.

#### **11/014 External Event**

DS advised that she had attended an event in Edinburgh recently which involved an evening dinner and presentations were given relating to women in science with particular focus on Physics and Engineering. The issue of Athena Swan had been raised several times during the course of the evening, and it appeared that Biologists were better versed than those in the area of Physics/Engineering. It had been suggested that in future there may be research council funding constraints on institutions that do not hold Athena Swan status

JKH would be willing to talk at such events/organisations in relation to Biology's statistics and as an 'Athena champion' and DS will pass this on accordingly.

#### **11/015 Date of Next Meeting:** To be arranged.