

ATHENA PROJECT

Case Study No 10

UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

SWAN BRONZE AWARD MARCH 2006

The University of Plymouth, a founder member of the Athena SWAN Charter, was awarded Bronze SWAN recognition in March 2006. The recognition award is valid until March 2009

THE UNIVERSITY

The University of Plymouth is one of the UK's largest universities, with 30,000 students representing a hundred different countries. It has seven faculties: arts, architecture and humanities; science; technology; health and social work; social science and business; education, and University of Plymouth Colleges, a partnership between the University and further education colleges in Cornwall, Devon and Somerset which provides university education, facilities and resources in a community setting.

The University has developed, in collaboration with the University of Exeter and the NHS, the Peninsula Medical School – one of the UK's first new medical schools for 30 years. It is the main provider of training and education for nurses, midwives and podiatrists in the South West, with sites at Plymouth, Exeter, Taunton and Camborne.

Many of Plymouth's SET courses have been rated 'excellent' or equivalent by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and all are continually updated in line with industry requirements. The University of Plymouth consistently ranks amongst the UK's top three modern universities in published league tables and was one of the top three modern universities in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise.

BACKGROUND

Plymouth's two main SET faculties are the faculty of science and the faculty of technology. However, staff from SET disciplines are also based in other faculties. The University has already undertaken considerable work to improve the number of women in top academic posts in SET and the process of applying, being granted and sustaining SWAN Charter recognition provided a welcome opportunity to extend and embed this work. Plymouth's aim, having achieved bronze status, is to focus on supporting and further developing good practice in its two main SET faculties to enable them to apply for recognition in their own right in the near future.

The University had previously worked with Athena with its South West Local Academic Women's Network and more recently, by taking part in the 2003 ASSET Survey and the subsequent production of a report on Plymouth's ASSET results, comparing their results with the national results. Much of the work done by the University has been across all its faculties, but informed by their collaboration with Athena and the results of the ASSET survey.

WORK IN SUPPORT OF CHARTER PRINCIPLES

In 2000 the University established an equality and diversity unit with a remit for staff and students, to take forward the work of the equality and diversity committee and an annual system for reporting staff equality data. The equality and diversity committee is chaired by the VC's nominee and reports to the Board of Governors

The equality unit provides equality staff data reports and works closely with the personnel and development department, and with Deans, to implement strategies to improve the number of women in senior academic posts. This work is driven and supported by the HR Strategy, which established the targets for these posts in 2002. The head of equality and diversity, the director of personnel, the training and development manager and the employee relations manager all work closely together to deliver the strategy.

Data analysis and reporting

These reports enable the University to judge its progress and serve to raise awareness across the University. Annual reports include:

- baseline data
- HR targets summary
- HR gender targets by faculty
- application data
- senior committees gender balance
- promotions
- annual equality action plan Reports.

These are submitted to the equality and diversity committee and circulated to other committees and senior managers and are posted on the intranet for all staff. The equality unit's work in mainstreaming and raising awareness of the equality agenda through research and data analysis has contributed significantly to raising the profile of equal opportunities throughout the University.

From the first data report it was obvious that women were under-represented in senior academic grades in all faculties. In particular the drop was very noticeable between senior lecturer and principal lecturer. Action over the last few years had particularly focussed on the career transition to principal lecturer, but other grades were not neglected and progress has been made in all.

The significance of the action taken over the last three years has been demonstrated by small, but distinct, annual improvements:

Grade	Year	Gender				Total in Grade
		Female		Male		
		Actual	Percent	Actual	Percent	
Academic SL	2003	168	39.53%	257	60.47%	425
	2004	174	41.33%	247	58.67%	421
	2005	210	46.26%	244	53.74%	454
Academic PL	2003	32	19.16%	135	80.84%	167
	2004	32	19.51%	132	80.49%	164
	2005	38	21.47%	139	78.53%	177
Senior Manager Academic	2003	24	18.90%	103	81.10%	127
	2004	28	20.14%	111	79.86%	139
	2005	39	24.68%	119	75.32%	158

The table conceals some particular difficulties in improving the situation in both the faculties. Although science has shown some good improvement, there are still only 18% women PL's and none at all in technology. The technology faculty is the only faculty in the university where women make up a greater percentage of the staff population than the student population. The faculty is undertaking initiatives to encourage more women to take up their undergraduate courses.

Gender targets

The data gathered by the analyses in 2001 provided the information on which to base the University's gender targets in 2002 for the three under-represented academic grades. Improvement, based on the first targets, as well as an acceptance into university culture of the concept of targets, enabled more challenging targets to be set in 2004.

The setting of targets provides a basis for tackling inequalities and has helped to clarify aims and objectives on gender inequality. In 2004-5 HR gender targets in academic grades were embedded into the strategic planning process and faculties are required to set their own targets and develop strategies for their achievement. This process is supported by the equality and diversity unit who developed a simplified good practice checklist, based on the Athena checklist and offering suggested strategies for faculties. The E and D unit also provided an information file for every dean and a university-wide briefing paper on positive action to try to reduce misunderstandings on the difference between that and positive discrimination.

Plymouth has recently embedded its gender targets for senior academic grades into a new strategic planning procedure for faculties. This process recognises that the best way to achieve such university-wide targets is to support faculties to set their own targets and develop local strategies to achieve them.

Promotion

Plymouth has undertaken a series of investigations, actions and supporting measures to try to improve the number of women Principal Lecturers in all faculties. Investigation of the data for the 2000/01 and 2001/02 internal promotion rounds to Principal Lecturer revealed that women were far less likely to apply for promotion than men, even when eligible.

A semi-structured survey was sent out to a random sample of half of the women and men who were eligible to apply in the next promotion round. The survey format encouraged respondents to include additional qualitative information on their perceptions and experiences. The report came up with a number of barriers and enablers, including the perception that the promotions policy and procedures lacked transparency and adherence to the policy and process. Informed by this, the promotions policy and procedures were revised. The actions that followed focussed on the criteria for promotion to PL, trying to ensure that all eligible applicants and line managers were clear about the promotion criteria, process and the expectations of PL's.

Plymouth looked at the results for the 2002/03 promotion round and found that the change in policy and process had made little difference: women were still less likely to apply. A letter about the 2003/04 promotion round went from the equality and diversity unit to Deans. It alerted them to the gender imbalance in the eligible applicants and for the first time included faculty specific information on the numbers of eligible men and women and the current gender balance of Principal Lecturers in the faculty. The letter encouraged Deans to take action to increase the number of eligible women applying for promotion. It also alerted Deans to the positive measures that would be required in the revised strategic planning process due to be implemented in 2004/05.

Following the 2003/04 round there was a significant increase in the numbers of women applying and being promoted. In the 2004/05 round a letter was sent to all eligible applicants encouraging applications from women. Again there was an improvement and the numbers of successful women went up by 14%. The Faculty of Science showed considerable improvement in the promotions figures for 2004/05, with 43% of eligible women applying with a 67% success rate. The percentages of both applicants and successful applicants were significantly higher than most other faculties. In the Faculty of Technology only 17% of eligible women applied and none were successful, but only a small number of women were eligible.

THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Plymouth's Vice Chancellor has committed to the six Athena principles and supported the SWAN Charter application. The Pro Vice Chancellor (research) has been involved in the self-assessment process and endorsed the recognition submission. The University's Human Resources Committee, chaired by a Deputy Vice Chancellor, also endorsed the decision to apply for SWAN Charter recognition.

Because the University wished to encourage and support its two main SET faculties to work towards SWAN Charter recognition in their own right, staff from both the faculties made up the team, the male and female team members came from different backgrounds and were at different career stages. The application and self-assessment process were given active encouragement by the Deans of both the science and technology faculties.

Prior to their first meeting, members were sent a sizable information pack of representative documentary evidence, organised by the key areas for assessment. The papers included a tabular, chronological account of the work on gender targets in senior academic grades. The final draft of the submission was circulated for approval to all members.

The team members were aware of most of the documents and felt they were indicative of the good practice that has already been established. They felt that the work already undertaken had made a real difference in their faculties. While recognising that more needed to be done, they felt that the self-assessment form did reflect the way things were done and were enthusiastic about taking this forward in their own faculties and supporting their future applications for recognition in their own right.

The process of applying for the Charter provided a useful catalyst for developing action plans. For example, the faculty of technology designated a member of staff to take this work forward and she has already produced a report and recommendations for action based on interviews and consultation with women members of academic staff.

The self-assessment process provided an opportunity to spread the word about the work of the University and Athena more widely and to consult with and involve women staff. The Faculty of Science has recently appointed a pilot equality champion in the School of Psychology and the Faculty of Technology has designated an individual to take forward their faculty's recognition submission.

DEVELOPING THE ACTION AGENDA

Through the Athena SWAN Charter Plymouth will build on the work that it has done already, by engaging more staff in working directly towards Athena's aims. Enthusiastic SET staff at all levels, supported by the championing force of the equality and diversity unit, will help the university to focus on developing more good practice in the SET faculties. To do this they will make further use of their ASSET results. They will build on the impetus that the application process has started, by engaging even more academic staff in the SET faculties and making use of the information recently gathered in the faculty of technology as part of this process. Plymouth recognises the need to carry the message that good practice is of benefit to everyone, whilst bad practice is particularly detrimental to women.

Plymouth's code of practice and working methods for the selection of staff for inclusion in the RAE 2008 submission has been approved and a mock RAE exercise in 2006 will test the code of practice.

The University is also implementing a new pay framework which aims to modernise pay arrangements to improve the recruitment and retention of staff, to ensure equal pay for work of equal value, to tackle problems of low pay, to recognise and reward the contribution which individuals make, and to underpin opportunities for career and organisational development. The review of 'job families' followed by the introduction of a single job evaluation scheme will help staff develop a clear career action plan. As part of this project Plymouth will be reviewing and implementing a number of career development initiatives, including a career development policy, as well as setting new gender equality targets for academic grades based on the new grading structure.

THE PLAN

SET baseline and academic profile

1. Extend the analysis of data sets provided on staff applications, short listing and appointments if needed to support SET faculties and schools in monitoring their efforts to increase the number of applications from women for SET where they are under-represented.
2. To use the university's ASSET findings more widely to plan actions specific to SET in support of future SWAN Charter applications by either or both of their two main SET faculties in 2006/07.

Key career transition points

1. Up the first year of faculties-specific equality targets and strategies to ensure they have been set and support SET faculties to develop their own strategies and action plans based on local circumstances
2. Review: as part of Plymouth's impact assessment process all personnel and development policies will be screened and prioritised for impact assessment across all equality strands by 2006/07
3. An appraisal checklist including career development, equality and faculty objectives will be introduced in February 2006 with the annual appraisal information
4. Action plan specifically for post-docs' career development is being drawn up by the graduate school in conjunction with staff development for implementation 2006/07
5. The University will review its HR strategy in 2007, and as part of this process will set revised targets for senior academic grades
6. Extension of the analysis of academic staff promotions to include internal professorial appointments from 2005/06 promotions round

7. Continue to use the findings of the work undertaken in 2002 on promotion to principal lecturer (barriers and enablers) to support deans and heads of schools in implementing good practice to support women's career development within the strategic planning process
8. Follow and revise the good practice checklist, if necessary, for the 2006/07 planning round in consultation with SET faculties

Culture change and gender balance in decision making

1. A champion to ensure good practice continues to be developed in the Faculty of Science as a result of the work by the University's South West Local Academic Women's Network. To support women in the Faculty of Science there is now an ongoing initiative to include more women speakers in the faculty seminar series.
2. Part of the role of the head of equality and diversity will be to champion and promote equality initiatives across the University. This will include promoting the work for our SWAN Charter status and supporting faculties to further develop their own actions for submissions.
3. 2005/06 Annual report on equality and diversity to the Board of Governors will cover the progress on the 2005/06 Priority "to apply for Athena SWAN Charter Recognition"
4. Improving the number of women in top academic posts will remain a priority in the annual action plan until the University has reached a gender balance.
5. The Dean of the Faculty of Technology has appointed a member of staff specifically to take forward the future faculty application for a SWAN Charter Award. He has championed this work by including it for discussion at faculty executive and plans to work with Heads of Schools to progress and champion this work in their areas in 2006/7.
6. The Dean of the Faculty of Science is supportive of the SWAN Charter Application and will act as support to the Faculty's future application for Charter recognition in its own right.