

ATHENA PROJECT

Case Study No 11

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL

SWAN BRONZE AWARD MARCH 2006

The University of Bristol, 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 was founded in 1876. Bristol consistently appears in the top rank of the national league tables. The overall quality of its teaching has emerged as 'excellent' from the rigorous independent assessment process. Its record as a research institution is at least as distinguished, with 78% of its departments independently judged as world class or internationally excellent. Its students and staff come from over 100 countries and its research links span the globe. The University employs some 1860 staff and had 7200 students in SET.

BACKGROUND

Following an analysis of the results of the 2003 Athena Survey of Science Engineering and Technology (ASSET), and as a first step to initiating a debate on the experiences of women at the university, a meeting was arranged with senior female academics from SET to explore:

- any barriers that might impede women's progression through the hierarchy and
- action the University might take to minimise these barriers

Following a meeting in February 2005 with representatives from earth sciences, physics and biological sciences, a report by the equality and diversity manager was considered by the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Group.

In April 2005, the Vice-Chancellor met members of the senior women's network - an informal network of senior female academics and members of support services across the University

In recognition that the University has much to learn from the experiences of its own staff, the Vice Chancellor asked a former Chair of Council to set up and chair a 'Professional Parity Group'. The group has made recommendations that will assist in ensuring better representation of women in management positions in the University. The University firmly believes that there is potential for disproportionate benefits to accrue for women in SET departments as a result of many of the activities proposed by the University. These activities will build on what Bristol believes are already strong foundations in many areas.

When the University was invited to become a founder Charter member, it recognised that this would enable Bristol to acquire formal recognition for the work it had already planned, to better support women in SET, as well as providing a tangible way to express the University's commitment to supporting women scientists. The Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Group formally endorsed the principles of the Athena SWAN Charter.

WORK IN SUPPORT OF CHARTER PRINCIPLES

The Group which made the recognition submission will also develop and progress an action plan to support the Charter principles. The group will also offer support to those departments or faculties who submit applications for SWAN recognition at silver or gold level.

Data analysis and reporting

Monitoring of staff career progression has been refined. This will enable Bristol to produce improved data on female representation in SET from the application and short-listing stage, through to outcomes. The data will be analysed at meetings of the SWAN Charter Implementation Group, and it is anticipated that this information will also prove useful to those departments/faculties who engage in activity to support the Charter principles.

Career progression

Bristol is introducing career pathways for academic staff. It is anticipated that this will have a positive effect on female representation in SET departments, since a clear career ladder for all academic members of staff will be provided. The University is committed to making Senior Lecturer the 'career grade' for all academic staff with the principle of progression to this level except in cases of demonstrable failure to achieve specified developmental levels of performance.

Appointments

Procedures for convening appointment panels have been revised, and now include the requirement that all appointment panels are better gender-balanced rather than a minimum representation requirement. The make-up of the appointment panels is monitored through personnel.

Returners scheme

In 2004/5, a women returners' scheme was introduced in direct response to the findings of the 2003 ASSET survey. It provides for a period of protected research time for women in SET departments returning from maternity leave. It was recognised that this period of protected research time was critical, particularly in SET, as the scientific landscape shifts so quickly. For a maximum of six months, the returner has no teaching or administrative duties. The success of this scheme will be analysed over the next twelve months, and women who have participated will be asked to feed back their experiences to inform future developments.

Work-life balance

The University's positive work environment initiative was introduced in 2004/05 following a university-wide survey by the Work Foundation. It is an academic staff initiative to improve work life balance and covers areas such as access to more flexibility in the workplace (working patterns), career breaks and maternity leave. http://www.bris.ac.uk/pwe/PWE_action_plan.html

THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Bristol formed a working group to progress the SWAN Charter, with representatives from the relevant faculties. The Pro-Vice Chancellor (personnel and staff development) chaired the group. The Deans of the SET Faculties (science, engineering, and medicine and veterinary science) were invited to join and to nominate members of staff at different stages on the career ladder,

from whom additional members were chosen. This group reports to the equality and diversity committee, which in turn reports to Senate and Council.

DEVELOPING THE ACTION AGENDA

A focus group held with female academics from SET departments, identified the following issues:

- the lack of transparency in the way in which some appointments were made
- the lack of transparency in relation to teaching loads, and the tendency for women to take on administrative and pastoral roles
- inadequate female representation on University Committees
- the need for increased support for women with children, for example improved nursery provision
- the need for a mentoring scheme based in SET
- timings of research seminars can sometimes prevent women (and men) with childcare responsibilities from attending

The SWAN Charter Implementation Group aim is to initiate action at university and departmental level and to monitor progress against the Charter principles. At its first meeting the group identified several areas that required attention to support the Charter principles:

- the lack of confidence in women when applying for promotion
- the need for investment in management and leadership development
- the possibility of expanding current on-site nursery provision
- ongoing evaluation of the quality of data on the staff profiles within SET departments produced to inform decisions on action to be undertaken

The group will use these findings to develop an action plan which will set out the steps the University will take to address the issues identified and to help create a more equitable working culture. The Plan will also attribute actions to individuals within the University, allocating a deadline by which the action should be completed, and progress against the Plan will be reviewed at each meeting of the SWAN Charter Implementation Group, which will meet on average twice a term.

Departments and Faculties who make future submissions will be expected to draw up action plans at local levels to demonstrate how they are working towards creating positive change in their areas. It is envisaged that, if successful in SET departments, some initiatives (such as the introduction of a mentoring scheme) will then be rolled out to other areas of the University.

THE PLAN

SET baseline and academic profile

1. Further Positive Work Environment survey to be undertaken late 2006
2. Ongoing monitoring and review of targets set in 03/04 to increase the proportion of women at Senior Lecturer grade to reflect the proportion at lecturer grade by July 2008

Key career transition points

1. Introduce university-wide mentoring scheme for under-represented groups, including women in SET.
2. Establish teaching Career Pathways (potentially broadens career development opportunities for women in SET)
3. Implement academic development programme underpinning Career Pathways for all academic staff
4. Leadership training programme for managers across organisation to include provision for emergent leaders; senior management training; support and training for Heads of Department; faculty/departmental level support/intervention
5. Increase nursery provision through inclusion in the NUCLEUS Project
<http://www.bris.ac.uk/nucleus/docs/briefnote0505.pdf>
6. Appoint Careers Adviser for all staff groups.
7. Appoint a dedicated Careers Adviser for Postgraduate students

Culture change and gender balance in decision making

1. Concept of the Selection/Search Committee to be re-instigated to ensure the fair opportunity for all staff to become members of Committees.
2. Positive action to encourage more women to volunteer for places on University Committees.
3. Develop a gender equality action plan to address recommendations made by the Professional Parity Group, which will include specific actions to support the University in SWAN-related activity.
4. Action to strengthen application of the Workload policy for academic staff
5. Review of Fair and Effective Recruitment training course to ensure that gender issues are fully integrated