

ATHENA SWAN CHARTER

KEELE UNIVERSITY, SCHOOL OF PHYSICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL SCIENCES

SWAN SILVER AWARD MAY 2007

Keele University, a member of the Athena SWAN Charter since 2005, was awarded Bronze SWAN recognition in October 2006. The School of Physical and Geographical Sciences was awarded Silver recognition in May 2007, valid until December 2010.

THE SCHOOL OF PHYSICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL SCIENCES

The School of Physical and Geographical Sciences was formed in August 2005 following amalgamation of the former School of Chemistry and Physics and the School of Earth Sciences and Geography. It is the largest School within the Natural Sciences Faculty. The School is one of the leading earners of research income in the university and many staff are pursuing internationally recognised research.

Substantial growth in undergraduate numbers has been achieved in the last two years through a variety of policies and strategies, which has enabled a large number of new academic appointments to be made. 50% of these new appointments have been female. There are currently 45 academic staff and 25 technical and administrative staff at the School, 26% of whom are female.

There are nearly 1000 students in the School, more than 50% of which are female. The School runs degree courses in Chemistry, Medicinal Chemistry, Forensic Science, Geography, Human Geography, Physical Geography, Geology, Earth Systems Science, Applied Environmental Science, Physics and Astrophysics, as well as contributing to degree programmes from other Schools. The School regularly updates the curricula of its courses, ensuring they are relevant to student interests and the needs of employers. The School also does valuable school outreach work and runs tailored courses for training and upskilling new and existing science teachers.

BACKGROUND

Partly because of the distinctive Dual Honours system, there is more centralisation of policies for staff development, mentoring, recruitment and staff appraisal at Keele than in some universities. However, there are a number of initiatives being undertaken within the School over and above the general university framework.

The School runs a number of courses to encourage women into science. The School also has a range of courses for training new and existing science teachers. The demographic of those taking these courses includes a significant proportion of mature female students who have entered university through a non-traditional qualifications route, often with young families. By training these students to teach science, they will provide positive female role models within Secondary Schools to pupils considering taking science and pursuing scientific careers. The School has also just secured funding for pilot upskilling courses for existing non-specialist science teachers to teach Chemistry and Physics at A level.

Substantial growth in student numbers through increased popularity of existing courses and the development of a successful Forensic Science course, coupled with strategic investment in Astrophysics and Human Geography, has enabled the School to grow its staff base significantly in the last two years, from 30 to 45 Academic Staff.

WORK IN SUPPORT OF CHARTER PRINCIPLES

Knowing the baseline and SET academic profile

The trend over the last few years is that, although the proportion of female applicants has remained fairly steady, the proportion of female appointments has increased, and 8 of the last 16 academic appointments have been female. In 2006/7 67% of the new academic appointments made in the School were female, against 29% of applicants for the posts. This has dramatically altered the gender balance within the School.

All recruitment panels at the University are required to have a gender balance.

The School has recognised the lack of female representation at Senior Lecturer level or beyond, and has applied the University's mentoring scheme whereby new staff are assigned a mentor to provide advice and encouragement for their career development. Staff are advised to keep a Personal Development Portfolio and to consider strategies for career progression. The balance of female representation will be addressed over time as career-young staff move further forward in their careers.

The School has a policy of giving positions of responsibility to highly capable career-young staff and two recently appointed female staff have been given positions of significant responsibility.

The unusually high proportion of female students (more than 50%) is in part attributed to the culture and environment of the School and the approachability of staff, clearly evident on Open and Visit Days, in all supporting literature, and in school outreach activities. The School ensures that on its web-pages and advertising literature, a mix of student profiles are featured to include both male and female students. The University's Bronze SWAN Award is incorporated into presentations given to prospective students and their parents at Open and Visit Days.

Key career transition points

The School is implementing a system for the collection of data to improve its information on postgraduate and contract research staff destinations. It is also introducing exit interviews with contract research staff.

The University operates a transparent promotion system which takes account of equal opportunity issues. Promotion is based very much on demonstrating excellence rather than length of time in post.

The School operates an annual staff appraisal system that provides staff with dedicated time for discussion of their development needs and career aspirations. The systematic scheduling of appraisals ensures that all staff have the opportunity to raise any issues and encourages staff to ask for advice and support.

Newly appointed staff are given a significantly reduced teaching and administrative load in their first two years to enable them to establish a strong independent research profile. The teaching and admin load is about one-third in the first year of appointment and about two-thirds in the second.

Upon entry to the University all staff are required to take the Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Programme, which incorporates training on gender awareness. In addition, they are required to take several courses forming the Keele Knowledge Programme, which ensure they are aware of equal opportunities issues.

Culture change and gender balance in decision-making

All committees within the School have a strong representation of career-young staff, including in positions of responsibility. With the significant number of new female appointments this has resulted in a much improved gender balance in decision making, representing a change in culture and ethos.

Work-life balance

The School supports work-life balance policies for men and women.

Champions, responsibilities and accountabilities

There are several female role models at senior levels or in positions of responsibility, in particular career-young staff, setting an example for other aspiring female scientists.

The School's extensive and high profile outreach work in the local region demonstrates that the School is working hard to encourage all schoolchildren to consider studying science at University and raising their career aspirations.

THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

A Self-assessment group was set up to discuss:

- 1 Current initiatives within the School
- 2 Data collection and monitoring for the submission
- 3 How to raise the profile of Athena SWAN within the School

There were seven members of the group, 4 men and 3 women, including the Head of School, a member of the University's Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Panel, and the Athena SWAN contact.

All staff were made aware of the submission at a School Staff meeting.

THE PLAN

SET Baseline and academic profile

- Monitor and report on staffing profile and student numbers at undergraduate and postgraduate levels by gender.
- Monitor the destinations of post-graduate students and contract research staff through an exit interview report/questionnaire and summary of statistics
- Establish a School Athena SWAN group to raise awareness of the SWAN Charter and monitor implementation of action plan
- Appoint Athena SWAN Champion within the School

Key career transition points

- Encourage all junior staff, including women, to raise their profile externally, as well as within the university, attending professional society activities, teaching and research conferences and meetings wherever possible.
- Encourage all staff within appraisals to consider whether they are able to apply for promotion.
- Ensure that the University's Athena SWAN Award is incorporated into advertising for posts to encourage female applicants to apply for these posts.

Culture change and gender balance in decision-making

- Review workload allocation to ensure a fair overall balance of teaching and administration and facilitate time for research
- Provide social space within the School to create a sociable and friendly working environment and ensure that there is always frequent opportunity for staff to meet and discuss issues informally

Work-life balance

- Monitor the impact of flexible working on career development
- Create an environment where work-life balance is encouraged, for example, offering part-time work to women returners from maternity leave

Champions, responsibilities and accountabilities

- Rotate roles and responsibilities for staff to gain experience and give career-young staff positions of significant responsibility at an early stage
- Contribute to activities under Women in Science banner, raising the profile of women scientists at Keele