

## **ATHENA SWAN CHARTER**

### **UNIVERSITY OF YORK, PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT**

#### **SWAN SILVER AWARD MAY 2007**

The University of York, a member of the SWAN Charter since 2005, was awarded bronze SWAN recognition in October 2006. The Psychology Department was awarded Silver recognition in May 2007, valid until December 2010.

#### **THE UNIVERSITY**

The Department of Psychology at York is one of the leading centres for research and training in experimental psychology in the UK. It was founded in 1974 and has 30 members of academic staff, 20 research associates and fellows, and 30 PhD students undertaking research across a broad range of topics within experimental psychology, from Social Psychology through to Cognitive Neuroscience.

The University of York has a collegiate rather than a faculty structure and individual departments operate with considerable autonomy and direct links to central university administration.

#### **BACKGROUND**

The Psychology Department has been involved with the Athena SWAN initiative at York University from the start and is committed to implementing the action plan proposed at university level. In autumn 2006 the Department set up a working group to consider issues specific to the Psychology Department.

#### **WORK IN SUPPORT OF CHARTER PRINCIPLES**

##### **Knowing the baseline and academic profile**

The baseline data for the Psychology Department show a clear majority of women at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, suggesting that, in terms of teaching, there is a successful engagement of the students' interest, and the large proportion of female research assistants and PhD students suggest it is perceived as an attractive career option. Around 80% of students at undergraduate and MSc levels are female and the proportion of female students at PhD is 69%. These figures have remained stable in recent years. The PhD completion rate is almost 100%. The female majority seen at student level in psychology is maintained for research staff at the pre-doctoral level where 9 of the 10 research associates are women. However, there is a steep drop at the post-doctoral level with the proportion of women in the last 5 years either at or below 50% (7 out of 16).

Only 27% of the academic staff are women (8 of 30). There are more women at lecturer level (4 women and 2 men in 2006) but more men at higher levels (4 women and 20 men at senior lecturer and above in 2006). The department has historically had very low turnover and a large proportion of staff at senior levels. The beginning of a decline in the transition to post-doc and in the transition to lecturer both point to the importance of supporting the early stages of career development for women in academic psychology.

HESA figures suggest that the proportion of female academic staff in psychology and the behavioural sciences has risen slightly from 50% in 2001-2 to 56% in 2005-6, indicating that the Psychology Department at York has a smaller proportion of female academic staff than the national average.

## **Key career transition points**

The Psychology Department has a number of support mechanisms for new staff:

- Allocating a light load of teaching and administrative duties to new appointees to allow them to manage the transition to a new job and to set up research projects in a new environment
- Each new appointee is assigned a mentor from the academic staff to help with settling in and to provide longer-term support
- All staff undergo an annual performance review – the last academic year saw a 100% return rate
- Funds are allocated for external training courses
- Annual individual progress meetings are held with the Head of Department

The Department takes a pro-active approach in encouraging staff to apply for promotion, in line with University-wide policy. An open promotions seminar is held near the beginning of the academic year, providing a forum for general discussion and queries about the transition to senior posts. This is followed up with individual meetings to assess readiness for promotion and areas that might need further development.

The Athena SWAN self-assessment exercise revealed that post-docs often find themselves isolated, both socially and academically, and find it difficult to create wider networks within the department. An Early Career Researchers Forum has, therefore, been set up for postgraduates, Research Assistants and junior lecturers. More than 30 people attended the inaugural meeting and have suggested a range of activities, from informal social events to psychology-specific training events, such as grant-writing workshops, and a Question and Answer session with senior members of staff on careers in psychology. Funds have been allocated to support the development of the Forum.

The Department has also carried out a destination survey of PhD students and post-docs who have left the Department within the last five years. This showed that, despite overall larger numbers of women completing PhDs and Post-docs, a much smaller proportion of these continue on to a further research post, compared to men. This may reflect the relatively large proportion of women (22%) completing PhDs who re-trained in a related field, such as clinical psychology; none of the men did this. In contrast, women who completed a post-doc at York were slightly more likely to be in a lectureship post than men.

## **Culture Change and Gender balance in decision-making**

The Department promotes an open and transparent culture. All full-time teaching staff are members of the Board of Studies. Committee minutes are available to all staff on internal web-pages. Administrative responsibilities, as well as student supervision and marking loads are also transparent.

Departmental resources are allocated according to a points=prizes formula whereby awards are made in proportion to the level of each person's research activity. There is a baseline level for each full-time member of staff (pro rata for part-timers) so that nobody ends up with nothing. Publications, staff and grant applications are also taken into account. The point to pound conversion depends on the resources available each academic year. Staff are regularly updated on departmental allocations and spending.

Key academic and administrative roles are rotated, including Head of Department changing every four years, and Chair of the Board of Studies every two years.

Interview panels for academic positions always have female representation. Generally, women are well-represented in decision-making, for example, the Chair of Examiners is female, as is the

incoming Chair of the Research Committee. However, there are several key committees with no female academic staff represented at all.

### **Work-life balance**

Although the Department is responsive to people's changes in circumstances, it is virtually unknown for job applicants to request part-time work and the Department does not make it explicit in job advertisements that part-time work or job-sharing may be possible. Nor are there any examples of academic staff taking long-term career breaks, whether for maternity or any other reason. The Department will now address these issues.

### **Champions, responsibilities and accountabilities**

The Psychology Department has a number of high-profile and visible role models among its female staff. The Department hosts an external seminar series which is well attended. The number of women speakers is monitored and as far as possible proportional representation is maintained. The Department is also planning to join with other SET Departments at the University to organise and participate in a regular 'Women in Science' Day.

### **THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

The Departmental Athena SWAN working group has high-level support from within the Department, as evidenced by the involvement of the Head of Department, and includes 7 members, both male and female, from all stages of an academic career, from PhD student to professor. The aims of the working group were:

- To discuss the data relevant for the self-assessment process
- To identify existing instances of good practice within the department
- To propose new initiatives that will promote good practice in line with the Athena SWAN Charter Principles.
- To feedback from the University Athena SWAN working group and to discuss relevant issues raised in those meetings

The departmental submission was actively encouraged by the Vice Chancellor and by the Pro Vice Chancellor for Research.

### **DEVELOPING THE ACTION AGENDA**

The self-assessment exercise identified a number of issues which the Athena SWAN Working Group has incorporated into the Action Plan. In some cases, additional research was undertaken, for example, the Destinations Survey, and further work will now take place. The self-assessment also highlighted several areas where continued monitoring would be advisable, including female representation in senior decision-making committees, the appointment of female external examiners, and the number of female speakers invited to the departmental seminar series.

### **THE PLAN**

#### **SET baseline and academic profile**

- Following on from the Destinations Survey, contact as many leavers as possible to gather information on the factors that have informed their career choices
- Monitor promotions, especially with respect to gender
- Monitor progress of internal staff at senior lecture/reader level

### **Key career transition points**

- Evaluate up-take and effectiveness of Post-Doc Forum over first year
- Create website for Forum
- Engage Forum in Induction of new early-career research and academic staff each October
- Develop and regularly update supplement to Staff Handbook 'Things I wish I'd Been Told', based on existing work
- Consider inclusion of post-docs on appropriate interview panels

### **Work-life balance**

- Conduct opinion survey on part-time work and explore possibility of advertising jobs with part-time option
- Assess recent history of career breaks for different levels of staff: whether they have returned, and why (or why not)

### **Culture change and gender balance in decision making**

- Monitor composition and leadership of senior posts, including female representation in senior decision-making committees and the appointment of female external examiners
- Continue to monitor the number of female speakers invited to the Departmental seminar series
- Ensure that recently appointed female lecturers are encouraged to take up roles as Deputies to the Board of Studies and Chair of Examiners
- Circulate updated data on staff teaching contact hours
- Join with other SET Departments to organise and participate in 'Women in Science' days
- Promote success of female prize-winners and monitor the impact in terms of their career trajectory