

ATHENA SWAN CHARTER

UNIVERSITY OF YORK, DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY

SWAN GOLD AWARD MAY 2007

The University of York, a member of the SWAN Charter since 2005, was awarded Bronze SWAN recognition in October 2006. The Chemistry Department was awarded Silver SWAN recognition in March 2007 and Gold SWAN recognition in May 2007. The recognition award is valid until December 2010.

THE UNIVERSITY

The Chemistry Department at York has 49 full-time members of academic staff, almost 500 undergraduate students, approximately 150 graduates (mainly studying for a PhD degree) and 87 research staff. The Department was rated 5 in the 2001 RAE.

The University has a collegiate rather than a faculty structure, which encourages strong inter-departmental working and easy input for departments into university decision-making. The Department of Chemistry has excellent collaborative links with several other departments in the University and has three joint appointments (all female).

BACKGROUND

York University has an Athena SWAN Working Group where the Chemistry Department is represented by its Head and the Chair of the Departmental Athena SWAN Working Group. In addition, there is a departmental SWAN Working Group. In 2005 the Chemistry Department set up an 'Inclusiveness for All' Committee to identify and address gender and ethnicity issues within the Department so that all staff can reach their full potential.

After the publication of the 2003 RSC report on 'Recruitment and Retention of Women in Academic Chemistry' a working group was set up to explore what could be learned from the report. Its recommendations were implemented immediately and continue in practice today. After the 2004 Royal Society of Chemistry/Athena report on 'Good Practice in University Departments', in which the Department was involved, a group was appointed to investigate how the Department matched up to the report's checklist. The Department recently hosted a dissemination event with the RSC for all science departments.

WORK IN SUPPORT OF CHARTER PRINCIPLES

Baseline and SET academic profile

York has a significantly higher percentage of female academics than the national average for chemistry departments in 2005, with 10 female academic staff, made up of 2 professors, 1 reader, 1 senior lecturer, 4 lecturers, and 2 independent research fellows.

The recruitment data for academic and research posts in 2005 shows that of the 17 appointments made, there were almost equal numbers of male and female appointees (M:9, F:8).

York has a lower proportion of female undergraduates but a higher percentage of female postgraduate students than the national average. In contrast to the national data showing that the increase in the percentage of female chemistry students is actually due to a decrease in male students, York has maintained its absolute numbers of both sexes.

The Department supports junior female academic staff through collaboration on joint research grants and studentships with more senior colleagues. For external academic appointments, potential female candidates are identified and encouraged to apply. The advertisement always emphasises a family friendly policy and opportunities for part-time working or job-share. Interview panels always contain at least one female academic.

An outreach coordinator provides a visible female role model in schools and helps to maintain a healthy undergraduate intake with good numbers of females.

All UCAS applicants are interviewed, and female candidates are interviewed by female members of academic staff, as a demonstration of female role models. The aim is to increase the percentage of female applicants with conditional/unconditional offers from York accepting their offers.

Key career transition points

The Department operates a transparent academic promotions policy, running promotions seminars and actively encouraging those who may be reluctant to put themselves forward. A designated 'Champion' on the Departmental Personnel Group also provides promotion support via constructive criticism of draft CVs.

The Department has an excellent record in retaining women at the early transition points:

- Undergraduate (46% female of those graduating) to postgraduate student (47% if those gaining postgraduate qualification are female)
- Postgraduate student to postdoctoral researcher (40% female)
- PDRA to early career lecturer (38% of lecturer grade B are female)

The Department has appointed a Graduate and Postdoctoral Training Officer to support post-graduate students and post-doctoral researchers with advice on career and professional development and opportunities. The post is designed to address the negative impact of short-term contracts, particularly on women, and to tackle obstacles in the transition from PhD into an academic career. The Officer has written guidelines for contract researchers and principal investigators, emphasising the need for career development; promoted training; and provided advice on CV writing and interview practice. A new postdoctoral mentoring scheme was introduced in October 2006. A career planning meeting will now be held 6 months before the end of a contract and a self-help group for long-term researchers has been set up.

New academic staff are offered a departmental mentor to provide support in the early years of their career at York; a mentor is required at lecturer level.

All staff undergo performance review and discussions include: changes in job role, courses or training, career development and expectations, any unresolved issues from the last review, support in work environment, and realisation of objectives.

Culture change and gender balance in decision-making

There is female membership on all the Department's key decision-making committees, encompassing staff at all academic grades, not just at professorial level, and the membership changes regularly. The Finance Group is chaired by a female member of staff. Membership of key committees is known to all staff and is for a fixed term.

Independent research fellows are fully engaged in the management of the Department, serving

on the Board of Studies and on departmental committees, albeit with a reduced load.

The achievements of women in the Department are regularly promoted in the departmental newsletter and in the university magazine and annual report. A conscious effort is made to invite female chemists as external speakers for Departmental seminars and guidelines have been issued to seminar organisers about the importance of ensuring a greater number of female external lecturers and visiting professors.

Information is disseminated to all staff via a Departmental website and a web-based newsletter. A survey was recently conducted to review how staff would prefer to receive departmental communications. The Head of Department and other senior staff regularly remind Department members of the importance of gender/ethnicity issues.

Work life balance practices

Flexible working practices are open to all staff and operate at all levels. There have been examples of internal promotion of women working part-time, including one to senior lecturer grade. Several members work on part-time contracts including research fellows, administrative staff and 2 academic staff. Family friendly policies are evident in all appointment material.

Champions, responsibilities and accountabilities

The Department's commitment to the Athena SWAN Charter has been championed by the Head of Department and his predecessor, both in the Department and in the University.

The Department has appointed two female external examiners for the undergraduate course. The University has appointed a distinguished French female scientist as an honorary visiting Professor and she delivers a graduate course in the Chemistry Department.

THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

A departmental working group of 6 was set up to:

- Identify and evaluate Departmental initiatives supporting Charter principles
- Identify the key data/statistics needed for self-assessment process
- Formulate and disseminate the Athena SWAN process within the department
- Formulate a strategy/timetable towards submission
- Evaluate the data/statistics collected and identify key barriers
- Formulate new initiatives

The group met on a regular basis and all academic and non-academic staff were consulted at an open meeting in October 2006. Staff forums have also been informed about the process and outcome. Further dissemination of the action plan and consultation will be held in 2007.

DEVELOPING THE ACTION AGENDA

The key challenges identified from the statistics were:

- To increase the number of female undergraduates to gain parity with males
- In recognition of female academics being clustered in lower academic grades, to aim for similar representation at all grades
- Improved communication of policies and practices

The following action plan was developed with responsibility for achieving the goals allocated to named individuals and with clear timelines.

THE PLAN

SET baseline and academic profile

- Presentation of percentage of female staff at all academic levels annually to Departmental Personnel Group and Head of Department's Advisory Group. Long-term target: 50:50 F:M academic staff by 2020
- Presentation of data on female graduate students and researchers to HoD Advisory Group and Graduate School Chair with the target of 50:50 F:M graduate students by 2015
- To achieve 40% F applicants by 2010
- More individual identification and encouragement of female candidates to apply for positions
- Continue to use female interviewers for female UCAS applicants and monitor effectiveness

Key career transition points

- Monitoring of destination statistics at HoD Advisory Group
- Analyse impact of career breaks through a returners' policy and increase awareness of returner fellowships, highlighting successful role models
- Provide information on funding opportunities for researchers and academics returning after a career break
- Monitor male/female promotion statistics at Personnel Group to measure progress towards the target of senior lecturer/reader and improve communication and awareness of promotions criteria further and take pro-active approach to promotion
- Development of questionnaire for women postgraduates and PDRAs about a career in academia and perceived barriers
- Explore ways to maintain funding for Graduate and Postdoctoral Training Officer after current funding stream finishes in 2008
- Broaden career development mentoring for researchers to include both academic and industrial careers.

Culture change and gender balance in decision-making

- Develop web pages on women in science and review departmental web pages to gender balance and promotion of women
- Publicise examples of non-standard academic career pathways in promotions seminars and encourage awareness of performance reviewers of different models up academic grades (eg team working)
- Continue high involvement of female staff on all key committees with a target of women chairing more than 20% of key departmental committees by 2010
- Monitor female membership of external undergraduate examining panel and increase the number of female postgraduate examiners by more than 30% by 2010
- Regularly collect statistics on female visiting professors, sabbatical visitors and external speakers to measure progress towards a target of more than 30% women by 2010.
- Invite women chemists prize winners to give departmental seminars and become long-term visitors
- Encourage female staff to contribute to internal and university publications
- Keep Athena SWAN processes active

Work life balance practices

- Establish more inclusive departmental social activities, including a family party/open day in summer 2007

- Establish a flexitime working group (which includes administrative and technical graded staff)
- Encourage flexible working patterns with a view to 10-20% staff working part-time by 2010
- Improve scheduling of meetings to take account of flexible working patterns

Champions, responsibilities and accountabilities

- Head of Department to report regularly to all staff on Athena SWAN and other gender/ethnicity issues within the Department