

University of Bedfordshire: Athena SWAN Bronze Award May 2008

The context

The University of Bedfordshire was formed in 2006 from the merger of the University of Luton and the Bedford campus of De Montfort University. The University is committed to providing opportunities and widening participation with vocationally focused curricula. The University has over 1,000 staff and 13,000 students. Over half of all staff are female (58%) and less than half (44%) academic and research contract staff are female. The proportion of staff in SET disciplines is currently less than 20%, not including Nursing departments.

What the data indicates

- 55% of all research contract staff at the university are female, however within SET departments female representation is almost halved (26%).
- There are no female SET staff at grade 7 (Lecturer).
- The Department of Computing and Information Systems has the lowest proportion of female staff.

Support for women at key career transition points

- A series of workshops for post-doctoral researchers was organised in 2005 to explore their key concerns. As a result, Directors of Research Institutes were asked to give serious consideration to the transfer of key research staff from fixed term contracts to standard contracts. Directors were expected to base their decisions on the quality and value of the individual to the research institute, the expectation that research programmes in the relevant field would continue to be part of the Institutes portfolio, and the future opportunities for external grant income. The University supported such actions by providing 'bridging' funds to Research Institutes to cover the salaries of identified staff.
- The University's Research Graduate School launched a Personal Development Planning (PDP) programme for all research students in 2005. It was designed to encourage research students to reflect on learning by assessing their progress and making plans to improve their understanding and skills.

Changing the culture and gender balance in decision making

- The University has already a number of women in senior management positions, including the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic), one of the Pro-Vice Chancellors, the Director of Human Resources and the Director of Quality/Deputy Registrar. There are also 8 female Heads of Academic Departments (29%). The University has 7 female professors (16%).
- Flexible working policies are to be reviewed with the aim of promoting flexible working options across the University. The gender equality audit showed that although flexible working policies are available, there has been little uptake.
- Data indicates that women are under-represented in senior decision-making posts so the University is identifying women for leadership training programmes.