ATHENA SWAN CHARTER

HERIOT-WATT UNIVERSITY

SWAN BRONZE AWARD MAY 2007

Heriot-Watt University, a founder member of the Athena SWAN Charter, was awarded Bronze SWAN recognition in May 2007. The recognition award is valid until December 2010.

THE UNIVERSITY

Heriot-Watt University focuses mainly on Science, Engineering and Business and is based in three campuses in Scotland – Edinburgh, the Scottish Borders and Orkney – and a campus in Dubai.

The University is organised into Schools and Postgraduate institutes, emphasising preparation of students for graduate level employment. Each programme contains a number of different courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level (except for the Edinburgh Business School and the Institute of Petroleum Engineering which are exclusively postgraduate).

Five Schools are covered by the award: Built Environment; Engineering and Physical Sciences; Life Sciences; Mathematical and Computer Sciences; and the Institute of Petroleum Engineering.

The overall numbers of academic staff in the School of the Built Environment has remained stable, as has the proportion of women. But the number of researchers within the School has fallen overall, so while there is a greater gender balance between male and female researchers, there are a smaller number of women in research positions in 2007 than in 2001.

The position is similar in the School of Mathematical and Computer Sciences where the percentage of female researchers has fallen from 18% in 2001 to 15% in 2007. However, there has been an increase from 10% to 14% of female academics within the School.

The School of Life Sciences has also seen a decrease in the number of female research staff from 56% in 2001 to 40% in 2007.

The School of Engineering and Physical Sciences has very small numbers of women both amongst research and academic staff. Just 12% of researchers are women and the percentage of academic staff has remained under 1%.

The Institute of Petroleum Engineering has seen an increase in the percentage of female researchers from 9% in 2001 to 19% in 2007. The percentage of female academics has also risen from 0 in 2001 to 4% in 2007.

BACKGROUND

Heriot-Watt has been working with the Athena Project since 2000. An Athena SWAN Co-ordination Group brings together representatives from across the University to recognise and use the diversity of the institution and to help spread good ideas and practice.

In 2001 the university was awarded a Development and Retention of Academic Women (DRAW) grant by the Athena Project. The grant aimed to encourage strategies, promote good practice and offer incentives to improve the access, participation and promotion of women in SET in higher education. The research found the following issues in terms of barriers to promotion:

- Pro-rata women were as likely as men to get promotion once they applied, however only 37% of women were aware of the promotion procedures

- 63% of women perceived barriers to promotion
- 47% of women perceived barriers being specific to Heriot-Watt
- Personal barriers in the form of perceptions (very few women academics seemed to achieve promotion and it was assumed that achievements for promotion were higher for women than men), shifting criteria for promotion, family commitments and lack of information.

The research also found that, although a high percentage of women enjoyed their job, a large percentage expected to be working elsewhere in 5 years' time.

WORK IN SUPPORT OF CHARTER PRINCIPLES

Many policies and initiatives are in place, but Heriot-Watt acknowledges that staff are not aware of the existence of many of these. So communication is now a priority which the University will address in a specific Communications Strategy.

In October 2005 the Institute of Physics (IoP) made a site visit to the School of Engineering and Physical Sciences. The main observation of the visit was that despite no obvious bias in recruitment procedures, there were no female physics academics at the University. As a result the School strategically advertised a new appointment in the nano/bio physics area and succeeded in having an all-female short-list. Other activities undertaken following the IoP visit included seeking out and inviting female academics as speakers and informing all staff, including men, of their paternity rights.

Work is planned to help Research Associates progress to Lecturer and they will be advised through mentoring to take a selection of courses to aid their transition. A targeted leaflet is being developed offering courses on strategies for research success and also courses to help staff new to supervising PhD students.

The School of Engineering and Physical Sciences is undertaking a pilot project to tackle student gender balance in conjunction with employment-related issues. A Working Party has been established to develop activities to encourage girls into the School. At pre-application stage, these activities include a one-day annual event for school pupils, an ongoing newsletter targeted at girls, and an e-mentoring scheme. Applicant visits are linked to student involvement and demonstrate the benefit and value of diverse student populations. The Peer Mentoring Programme is being extended to include isolated female students in SET. If successful, the pilot may be extended to other areas of the University.

THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The Self-Assessment Process was led by the Athena SWAN Co-ordination Group which met approximately once a month in the run-up to the submission. The membership of 11 was made up from across all the Schools in the University with each member providing a conduit to their School. The Director of the Postgraduate School, the Director of HR and the Equality and Diversity Officer were also involved. The Co-ordination Group answered to the Athena SWAN Steering Group consisting of members of the Senior Management Team who provided a link to the management and strategic structures of the university.

DEVELOPING THE ACTION AGENDA

A Staffing Strategy Committee was created and a number of initiatives undertaken. These included Springboard, an Equal Opportunities Policy and Action Plan, a pilot investigation with researchers in Petroleum Engineering, and SET for students. The action plan was drawn up to address remaining barriers identified by the DRAW and Institute of Physics research.

In addition, a Support Audit and Participants' Survey were undertaken to build a more detailed picture of equality issues for females in research and academic positions. Along with the Gender Equality Questionnaire and Workshop in preparation for the Gender Equality Scheme, these helped identify current barriers to females.

THE PLAN

SET baseline and academic profile

- Undertake a census style exercise of staff
- Ensure that appropriate information is collected and kept up to date
- Collect baseline information on who accesses in-house training and external training support
- Review Performance and Development Review process and ensure that it takes full account of equalities issues
- Incorporate exit interviews across the University to map both reasons for leaving and destination of leavers

Key career transition points

- Provide better training support for male and female researchers and academics
- Survey female research and academic staff to find out current attitudes and link to Equality Impact Assessment Activity
- Improve mentoring processes for probationers, linked to Personal Development processes
- Improve communication with staff and students, eg, through new Equality Pages on website
- Monitor success of undergraduate recruitment activity within School of Engineering and Physical Sciences and roll-out to other Schools.

Culture change and gender balance in decision-making

- Ensure full buy-in from Principal Management Executive to Action Plan
- Principal to take on Gender Champion role and raise awareness of issues affecting women's careers across the University
- Academic women to be represented on staff recruitment and appointment committees.