

University of Manchester: Athena SWAN Bronze Award May 2008

The context

The University of Manchester is the largest single site university in the UK and comprises four Faculties, three of which are dedicated to SET disciplines. There are over 3,100 academic and research staff and nearly 20,000 students in the three SET Faculties.

What the data indicates

- There is a higher proportion of women than men on fixed-term contracts.
- Even when the numbers of men and women at lecturer level are similar, they diverge markedly at professorial level.
- There is a very wide range in the percentage of women across the SET disciplines, from 11% in Mechanical, Aerospace and Civil Engineering to 75% in Psychological Sciences.

Support for women at key career transition points

- The Women in Leadership project identified some of the obstacles to women's career progression and provided informal career development workshops for women academics on topics such as, 'Establishing and developing your profile in science', 'Making your voice heard and your opinions count', 'Developing an international research reputation in science', 'Combining an academic career with childcare responsibilities', 'Dealing with challenging situations in the workplace'.
- The University amended its regulations, so that part-time (usually female) academics can supervise PhD students. It is extremely difficult to be promoted to a senior lectureship or a chair without evidence of successful PhD supervision. Also an academic who has not supervised is often debarred from being an external examiner of doctoral theses. As women who have young children experience great difficulty attending international conferences or working abroad, they need to be able to compensate for this, and being a successful PhD supervisor and external examiner can strengthen their CV.

Changing the culture and gender balance in decision making

- In order to discover how widely the University's Flexible Working Policy was known and implemented in the SET Faculties, the working group conducted a web-based survey of academic line managers and academic and research staff with caring responsibilities. Seven of the nine Heads of School were aware of the policy, whereas only half of the 33 Heads of Group were. As these are managers who have operational responsibility for their staff it is clear that more needs to be done to increase awareness at that level. The majority said that they did not experience difficulties with staff working flexibly. Indeed, the general view was that the benefits by far outweighed any disadvantages, with respondents describing increases in motivation and productivity and a more positive working environment.