

ATHENA PROJECT

Case Study No 9

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

SWAN BRONZE AWARD MARCH 2006

The University of Oxford, a founder member of the Athena SWAN Charter, was awarded Bronze SWAN recognition in March 2006. The recognition award is valid until March 2009

THE UNIVERSITY

The University of Oxford is a large research-led institution with significant SET presence in maths, physical sciences, medicine and life and environmental sciences. The University employs some 2,700 contract researchers, 91% of whom are scientists.

BACKGROUND

One of the most significant changes over the past decade is the extent to which gender equality has become a mainstreamed responsibility, and is now embedded in the University's planning and reporting processes. As a leading research-led university, Oxford recognises a responsibility to more than its immediate academic community. Many of its projects and initiatives are designed not only to benefit Oxford but also to promote the cause of women in science and higher education more generally, in the UK and abroad.

Oxford has been associated with the work of Athena since the Project began in 1999. Over the years the University has worked on a range of projects and initiatives, and now has in place good baseline information and monitoring, and is progressing both general policy change and a number of more focussed programmes.

WORK IN SUPPORT OF CHARTER PRINCIPLES

Data analysis and reporting

Appointments are monitored by the diversity officer at application, short-listing and appointment stages by gender, ethnicity, disability, nationality, part-time status, length of UK residence and age. This information is reported annually to the personnel committee and heads of divisions. Many of the action programmes described were generated by consideration of this data. Oxford can access good long-term data on the relative success rate of women and ethnic minority candidates, and can analyse patterns at job, departmental, divisional and university level as required.

Women in senior management and decision making

Oxford has recently appointed women to the roles of registrar, head of division and two pro-vice-chancellors. These very visible and high-level appointments were made with the strong personal support of the Vice-Chancellor. There are 12 such posts in the most senior academic management of the University, which means that 30% are now held by women.

An independent study by the AUT on gender and the 2001 RAE found that nationally, men were 1.6 times more likely to be counted as 'research active' than women. The figure for Oxford was 1.1. A recent ESF study '*Improving women's representation in senior positions in the HE sector*' noted that that Oxford's near-parity in research output was one of the best in the sector and concluded that,

although it appeared relatively difficult for women to gain access to the University (they make up only 21% of lecturing staff), once they were in, they were well supported in their research careers.

Promotion

At Oxford, there is no promoted lecturer grade. Tenured academics progress through a pay scale which takes them to a salary higher than the top of the 'national' lecturer scale and professorial minimum. Progress through the scale can be accelerated, and this is monitored by gender in the equal pay audit.

They can apply at any point for advertised professorial posts, or for the title of Reader or Professor with no change of duties or pay.

An internal review of the application for title alone showed that given the choice of professor or reader, women were less likely than men to apply for the professorial title, but when they did, they were more successful. Subsequently the Vice-Chancellor wrote to all staff encouraging women to apply for the higher title, and the rate of female applications for this increased significantly.

Equal pay review

The University's equal pay review in 2004 analysed pay in grade and found that historic pay gaps in grade had been addressed. Pay differences related to area of work and seniority. Measures, including a leadership development scheme, were put in place to encourage women into more senior positions.

Networks

Females in engineering, science and technology (FEST) is a group of female graduates, post-docs and academics working in the sciences in Oxford. It meets regularly to discuss issues of common interest and concern and serves as a networking and discussion forum. The Oxford Women's Network (OWN), originally the women tutors group, now includes all women employed in the collegiate university who wish to join it. It has three groups; academic and contract research, support staff, and administrators. Each group has its own convener, who consults members on topics for meetings. Some e-mail discussion topics and meetings will be of interest only to one group, while others will be made available to all members.

Consultation

Oxford's staff consultative forum extends the formal consultation with unions to a group of disabled, ethnic minority and female staff, at which all recognised unions and staff representatives are represented. Consultation covers specific EO issues, and any potentially major changes to staff terms and conditions. The forum also sees monitoring information. The forum not only gives members' own views but is also charged with deciding when to go to further consultation with staff. Their website enables staff to post their views and questions for the forum's consideration. The forum reports to the personnel committee and to the joint union committees.

Career Development Fellowship Scheme

The scheme was developed as a 'stepping-stone' between research posts, a high proportion of which are held by women and lectureships, a high proportion of which are held by men. It was a response to research evidence from an Athena-funded study, which demonstrated that women were appointed to academic posts at least in proportion to their applications, but that the rate of applications from women was low, and that talented junior researchers at Oxford, or elsewhere, were likely to perceive academic posts at Oxford and similar universities as being at too senior a level for a first permanent appointment.

The scheme promotes equality of opportunity by creating a more diverse pool of candidates for academic posts. 12 fellows were appointed for 2002-4. All were women and 8 were from minority ethnic or national backgrounds. A further tranche of 15 fellowships was authorised for 2005. These will be appointed for three years (the evaluation of the first scheme found that two years was too short).

The fellowships have both a research and a teaching component. A training and development package is defined for each fellow, and they undertake the University's postgraduate diploma in learning and teaching in HE. The fellows have group review meetings with a professional development adviser and professional career development advice is provided throughout the fellowship. Each fellow has a sponsor or 'mentor' within her department or faculty and an attachment to a college

This is an innovative project which is seen as having a wider application in HE. Early indications are that the project has succeeded in its aim of widening and diversifying the recruitment pool for academic posts. At July 2005 11 of the original 12 fellows had found their next academic posts: three at Oxford, 7 at other Russell Group Universities and one in her country of origin.

Divisional career development support

In 2005 the Mathematical and Physical Sciences division established a working group on academic career management to consider career management for scientists. The group of senior male and female academics had a variety of full-time and part-time working patterns and varied in their family responsibilities. Their recommendations included practical suggestions on relief of administrative burdens, the teaching system, college aspects of workload, flexibility of departments and colleges, and the support of research.

The division's latest projects are a family friendly scheme with a fund to support childcare and travel costs for children when attending conferences, a review of the funding of maternity leave by departments, a review of the advertising of academic posts and an innovative maternity leave swap between two scientists employed by the University, which allows the mother to continue immediately with her research and the father to benefit from her University maternity leave entitlement.

Springboard

The University's Springboard programme is available to all. A recent evaluation found that to date: 88 percent of respondents report an improvement in their confidence at work

71 percent report an improvement in relationships at work

75 percent of respondents have clarified their career goals

47 percent of respondents had applied to have their post re-graded and 62 percent of these applications have been successful

64 percent of respondents had applied for higher graded posts and 67 percent have been appointed to such posts

79 percent of respondents reported initiating other changes in their current role, for example taking on additional duties.

Work-life balance

A work-life balance workshop, chaired by the Pro Vice Chancellor for Personnel and Equal Opportunities, was attended by teaching and research staff and senior managers, who between them had experience of a wide range of working patterns and requirements. A panel of University officers and an external consultant who were present prepared a report.

The report's clearest finding was that work-life balance discussions in themselves were ineffective, without a recognition that the fundamental issue was the workloads themselves. The flexibility which already existed in academic contracts did not need strengthening; what was required was a method to allow staff to make use of it. This has been taken forward in a number of ways. The University's HR strategy set an objective of reducing or varying the burdens on academic staff. £2.3 million was set aside over two years for allocation by divisions to meet local pressures. The changes they made included special research leave, reduction of bureaucratic burdens on academics, support for new academics, and a reform of teaching loads.

Childcare

Oxford currently has 250 children in subsidised nursery places across six nurseries and offers a full range of tax savings schemes for this and other forms of childcare. In addition, four Colleges run their own nurseries offering around 120 places. University nurseries are open 50 weeks of the year from 8am to 6pm, including bank holidays on which the University is open.

This year Oxford introduced a network of registered quality assured childminders who offer a full range of flexible hours. The University's co-ordinator tries to find a child minder for any parent who works or studies at the University. They do not have to be employed by the University, and applications are welcomed from people arriving on sabbatical leave, requests for flexible hours, wrap-around care for older children at school, children with special needs, children who do not yet speak English, and childcare outside Oxford. People employed by the NHS and MRC, or other external employers, but who work in the University, are welcome to apply.

There is a University holiday play-scheme, which takes children up to 14, and is currently assessing demand to raise the age limit to 16, directly in response to parents' difficulties in finding holiday care for children over 12.

It is now University policy that all new buildings and developments where significant numbers of staff and students will be based, shall consider childcare provision as a key planning criterion. Funding for new nurseries is generated from the tax savings schemes.

THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The self-assessment process itself demonstrated a widespread awareness of the issues and documented a large number of high-level projects across the University. The process brought together the work of a large number of self-assessment teams spread across the University, who were already engaged in a similar process as part of the Corporate Plan.

THE PLAN

SET baseline and academic profile

1. Recruitment monitoring reports will continue to be submitted to the personnel committee.
2. The next equal pay review is in progress.

Key career transition points

1. The contract research staff working group is sponsored and chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research. The group has been asked to consider, recommend and develop initiatives on:
 - the integration of CRS staff into the governance and decision-making structures of the University
 - the professional and domestic disruption caused by the short-term contract culture
 - means by which a better, more transparent, career structure can be created.

Its members include a head of division, a head of a College, two Academics, two Pro-Vice-Chancellors, two contract research staff, an AUT representative, a departmental administrator, careers, professional development and personnel staff. The group is advised by the University's diversity officer.

- 2 Oxford's centre for excellence in preparation for academic practice provides programmes for post graduate research students and post-doctoral researchers and is an initiative designed to address the key issues for women in SET:

- the lack of a well-defined career structure

- the lack of access to high-quality mentoring and personal development at an early stage of their academic careers.

The centre is funded by HEFCE (56% of Oxford's DPhil students go on to academic posts). A key feature of the Centre will be support for the career progression of under-represented groups by development of programmes of positive action to address the "leaky pipeline" of women, ethnic minority and disabled staff.

- 3 The Task Force for Academic Employment is a major exercise led by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Personnel and Equal Opportunities) which will report to the Vice-Chancellor and Council. Members include the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for research, heads of colleges and divisions, and representatives of academics at all stages of their career. Their review will include consultation with all academic staff and will cover the effect of current and possible alternative arrangements on individual workload (in respect of teaching, research and other duties) and career structure and career development including the implications for titles, remuneration, duties, and other general terms of employment and the role of developmental appraisal.