

ATHENA PROJECT

Case Study No 16

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

SWAN BRONZE AWARD MARCH 2006

The University of Cambridge, 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 employs about 8,700 people, of whom around 1,500 are established (permanent) academic staff and 2,400 are contract research staff (CRS). Within the SET Schools (biological sciences, physical sciences and technology) there are about 740 academic staff, 1,500 CRS and 2,100 research postgraduate students. There are a further 700 CRS in the School of Clinical Medicine, which has about 230 academic staff and 260 research postgraduate students. Holders of College teaching posts and College research fellowships are not included in the University figures, unless they hold a University post as well.

Women began studying in Cambridge with the foundation of Girton (1869) and Newnham Colleges (1871). However, they were not formally admitted to degrees until 1948. Until the early 1970s women could study only at women's Colleges. As the formerly men-only Colleges became mixed, the proportion of women among undergraduates has risen steadily, reaching 49% in 2001, a level that has been maintained since then. The proportion of women among postgraduate students has also risen, reaching 45% in 2004-05. The proportion of women among CRS is now 45% and within academic staff it is 23%.

BACKGROUND

WiSETI (Women in Science, Engineering and Technology Initiative) was established in 1999. It is the main initiative for assessing and improving the position and prospects of women in SET in the University. There are activities in departments and colleges which are either independent of, or in conjunction with WiSETI. It reports to the Director of Personnel.

The remit of WiSETI is to improve the recruitment, retention and promotion rates of women in SET appointments and to raise the profile and enhance the self-confidence of women in SET through a range of projects. WiSETI provides support and action at all levels, from undergraduate to senior academics.

An annual report on WiSETI's projects and progress and forward planning is presented to the WiSETI advisory committee which is chaired by the Director of Personnel.

WORK IN SUPPORT OF THE CHARTER PRINCIPLES

Cambridge has a range of up-to-date policies and best practice guides, which are available to all staff on the University's website. Because of the devolved nature of the University, it is difficult to assess take-up of policies such as flexible working; however there are individual examples of such policies working effectively.

The senior academic women's advisory group discusses issues relating to female academics within Cambridge and feeds back findings to the Vice-Chancellor. Programmes to help women develop their leadership and entrepreneurship skills are regularly run, often in collaboration with industry.

Within SET departments, a female member of academic staff is designated as the WiSETI representative, who acts as a point of contact between women in her department and WiSETI. These representatives meet two or three times a year at speaker and networking events organised by WiSETI. WiSETI encourages networking among female scientists, and hosts an annual lecture to showcase successful women scientists and to facilitate networking.

Data analysis and reporting

The head of equality and diversity produces an annual report on progress in equality and is responsible for the University's gender equality action plan. The WiSETI recruitment officers' annual report gives year-on-year statistics for women in the SET Schools. An equal opportunities report of promotions data is produced for each round of academic promotions. To retain anonymity this data is confidential. However, the report for 2005 indicated that there were improvements in the proportion of eligible females who applied for promotion in the SET disciplines. In the physical sciences and biological and medical sciences this proportion exceeded the proportion of eligible men applying for promotion.

Women in senior management and decision making

All University committees are encouraged to ensure female membership, and a policy for guidance on the composition of committees has recently been submitted to the University for approval. Among the University's senior management the Vice-Chancellor and two of the five Pro-Vice-Chancellors are women. There are also several women among the Deputy Vice-Chancellors and among the Heads of House.

Career progression

The large number of contract research staff compared to academic staff vacancies means that much of the career development advice is necessarily aimed at helping CRS find positions outside Cambridge. The University website includes pages specifically aimed at CRS and a university-wide society for post-doctoral researchers aims to inform CRS of what is going on in Cambridge and encourages networking.

In 2003 the staff development office launched an induction scheme for newly appointed academics. The aim of this 'programme in HE practice' (PHEP) is to help them to tailor their own development requirements during their probationary period of appointment.

Recruitment and retention

WiSETI projects include a recruitment and retention project which has focussed on attracting female candidates to academic appointments within the University's SET departments, by means of positive action strategies, and once there, ways in which departments can retain women academics on their staff, and encourage promotion. The recruitment officers ran three workshops in the 2004-5 academic year which provided a forum for departmental administrators and academic staff involved in recruitment to consider the issues facing women progressing in science careers, and to consider ways to reduce or eliminate the hurdles female scientists face.

Career breaks

The University has a career break scheme and a scheme for graduated return from maternity leave. People returning from a career break can take advantage of the wide range of courses offered by staff development and the computing service.

Springboard

The University runs the Springboard programme for all women staff and graduate students. In addition WiSETI pioneered the Springboard for undergraduates programme. WiSETI runs careers lectures for undergraduates in which a panel of successful women in SET, business and financial services discuss their careers.

Networks

Within the University's computer laboratory, a three-year project is underway to address the under-representation of women in computer science, both locally and nationally. Women@CL has been successful in attracting women from the computer laboratory to network and monthly lunchtime speaker meetings have been well attended.

A further source of advice and information of particular interest to women working in the field of biological, veterinary and medical sciences is provided on the University's Women@Biology website. This site received, on average, 650 hits per week during the previous twelve months.

Mentoring

WiSETI promotes MentorNet, an e-mentoring scheme based in the US, for undergraduates, post-graduates and CRS.

A guide to mentoring, written by WiSETI, extends the information available on induction mentoring to include developmental mentoring.

Champions

There are numerous academics within Cambridge's SET departments who support and champion women in SET. External champions are Cambridge Schlumberger Research and the Citigroup Foundation, which support WiSETI financially.

In addition, the Director of WiSETI, Dr Nancy Lane, has responsibility for advancing women in science within the University as well as at a national level as Chair of the Athena Project. The head of equality and diversity, Dr Felicity Cooke, as well as her general responsibility for equality and diversity, takes a special interest and responsibility for women in science through WiSETI.

THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The self-assessment was undertaken by WiSETI working with an extended team. The core team collated the University data, held meetings with relevant University staff and wrote the report. The extended team included scientists, male and female, at different stages of their career from different departments within Cambridge.

DEVELOPING THE ACTION AGENDA

The implementation of the action plan was discussed at the annual meeting of the Women's Forum early in 2006. The Women's Forum was inaugurated in October 2003 with a series of nine consultation seminars held across the University to which women in all staff categories were invited to contribute their views on their experiences as women working in the University. These resulted in a Report and Implementation Plan and will be followed by annual meetings, of which the first was held in February 2006, to consider progress.

The introduction of a new HR information system in 2006-07 should enable more consistent data to be obtained. From 2006 the annual labour turnover survey produced by personnel will include gender disaggregated statistics.

A new director of external affairs and communications has been appointed with a brief which includes the improvement of internal communications.

THE PLAN

SET baseline and academic profile

1. A follow-up meeting for the Women's Forum to discuss the implementation of the action plan.
2. A revised 'Dignity at Work' policy to be approved.
3. Personnel's annual labour turnover survey to include gender disaggregated statistics from 2006.

Key career transition points

1. Mentoring Guide to become available to all staff and students.
2. 2006, a pilot undergraduate mentoring scheme to be associated with the WiSETI Careers Lectures.
3. WiSETI draft policy and a guide for dual career couples in Cambridge 2006.

Culture change and gender balance in decision making

New policy guidance on membership of committees is being implemented.