

ATHENA PROJECT

Case Study No 18

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

SWAN BRONZE AWARD MARCH 2006

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

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

University College London (UCL) was founded in 1826 to provide higher education available to all irrespective of religion or social origin. It was the first university in England to admit women for full degree programmes, in 1878. These historic commitments are reflected today in its commitment to equal opportunities and its proactive stance in promoting equality with regard to sex, sexual orientation, race and national origin, religion, disability, family status, or age. UCL is a member of the Russell Group. In most published rankings of research volume and quality, it is among the three leading multi-faculty UK universities, and in the top 30 universities world wide in recent surveys.

UCL currently has 5 SET faculties (life sciences, clinical sciences, engineering, mathematics and physical sciences and built environment). It has particular strength in biomedicine, including three formerly separate medical schools, four former postgraduate institutes and the Wolfson Institute of Biomedical Research. A review of the faculty structure of clinical research, life sciences and biomedicine is currently underway.

BACKGROUND

With effective new initiatives to achieve equality, UCL aims to be a global leader of change in promoting successful and satisfying women's careers in SET disciplines. In line with its international strategy and mission statement, UCL will extend effective initiatives, developed in SET disciplines, across all disciplines and staff groups.

UCL is committed to challenging discrimination and promoting equality through mainstreaming equality in all major strategy initiatives. It has an active Committee for Equal Opportunities (CEO). Each department has a departmental equal opportunity liaison officer and these are represented on the CEO. UCL's commitment to equal opportunities is also demonstrated by its corporate equality objectives and equality action planning framework and through its widening participation initiatives to increase access for all to UCL and counter the inequality barriers, including gender biases in science, which currently exist. A summary document and checklist on '*Mainstreaming equality issues*' is sent to all those with responsibility for drafting and revising UCL's corporate and strategic documents to ensure that equality of opportunity is promoted in all major strategy initiatives.

UCL's equality action plan framework started in 2001, with nine departments, and will be rolled out across all departments and institutes by 2007. To date, 15 SET departments have included initiatives on gender equality and a further 18 SET departments and institutes will be involved in forthcoming rounds.

The President and Provost has championed the SWAN Charter in putting forward UCL as one of the Charter founder signatories, committed to addressing gender inequalities in career progression in SET.

WORK IN SUPPORT OF CHARTER PRINCIPLES

Several small subgroups had been set up on specific issues coming out of ASSET responses, to review current practice and suggest innovations to improve practice. These subgroups will report back to the combined group over the coming 18 months. These initiatives will be taken back to the CEO and hopefully put into place in the next academic year, alongside individual departmental initiatives which are already underway.

Data analysis and reporting

UCL systematically gathers data on gender breakdown by faculty/institute and staff grade, which is annually reported to the Committee of Equal Opportunities and the HR Policy Committee and circulated to departments as part of UCL's equality action planning. A small subgroup with expertise and experience on statistical analysis will scrutinise the monitoring data across years and report back to both the advisory group and the self-assessment team. They will also receive feedback from departments' equality action planning initiatives on gender issues in SET. It is hoped that this may enable some departments and institutes to apply for SWAN Charter recognition in the future.

In the 2005-2006 profile there were 3400 academic staff employed in SET, from post-doctoral researchers to Vice Provosts. This makes UCL one of the largest employers of SET academics in the UK. Out of a total of over 19,000 students, 7282 undergraduates and 4,776 postgraduates study in these SET faculties and institutes.

Gender balance varies widely with grade and across department, faculty and institute. Across faculties the variation is from around 23% female for engineering and physical sciences to 49% for clinical sciences. There is a higher percentage of females in the clinical postgraduate institutes, the highest being at 57% female in the Institute of Child Health. Across grades there is a higher percentage of females generally in lower grades, particularly at post-doctoral contract research worker level. In one or two departments and institutes there are still no female professors.

However the current level of females in academic posts in some departments is higher than in many other UK HE institutions e.g. civil engineering. This baseline data will be used in future analyses to calculate both trends and changes, together with estimating the effectiveness of new interventions and initiatives undertaken at department and faculty level as part of UCL's Equality Action Planning.

Before taking part in Athena's Survey of Science Engineering and Technology (ASSET) in 2004, UCL had not identified gender issues in SET as a separate concern, but had considered gender bias across the whole university. In 2004, with the support of the Provost, Athena programmes were promoted across SET faculties and departments, starting with participation in the ASSET Survey.

UCL achieved the highest number of responses from any UK HEI in the ASSET survey. The UCL responses have been partially analysed by gender. More complex analysis at different points in the career progression and comparison across different grades will be carried out, when resources allow. The initial analysis of the UCL data identified three major areas of concern:

- the existence, extent and success of mentoring and counselling, including career and promotion advice and criteria, particularly for relatively junior research workers
- flexibility and advice on career breaks and returning to academic work
- the existence of the 'glass ceiling' -the extent to which females were engaged in major decision making on the top committees (internally, and externally nationally and internationally).

Mentoring schemes are already in place to aid certain career transitions. Maternity leave policies are in place for all staff. A new work-life balance document to aid individuals on career breaks and their line managers was launched in May 2006.

Women in senior management and decision making

The representation of women in positions of responsibility, on senior committees, and on staff selection panels, is a concern highlighted in the UCL's responses to ASSET. Race and gender monitoring of 16 key committees has been in place since 2003, and for selection panels from 2005. Both UCL's Governance Committee and Committee for Equal Opportunities oversee progress on this. Guidelines for appointments to positions of responsibility have been formulated, and Faculty Promotion Committees have been given a new structure which should streamline the procedures for academic promotions. These new structures will be monitored over the coming year.

THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The SWAN self-assessment team was established to work with the Athena advisory group on the identification of issues of gender balance in SET, on preparing UCL's Charter submission, and to advise on ways to take forward new initiatives in SET. To achieve an appropriate breadth across disciplines, career stages, and to incorporate necessary expertise, the SWAN self-assessment team and advisory group worked together in the production of the submission.

The experience in preparing the submission highlighted the demanding nature of the task of incorporating a gender balance agenda into the multiple priorities of busy academic, research and management staff, not least in the time commitment necessary. It has also highlighted the vigilance and commitment which will be needed to keep gender issues in sight, in an HEI driven strongly by the anticipated pressures of the RAE and the need for financial sustainability.

DEVELOPING THE ACTION AGENDA

Issues of mentoring and maternity leave have been discussed and subgroups set up to investigate them further, to consider UCL's current policies, make comparisons with schemes within other institutions and report back to the advisory group with suggestions for new initiatives. It is hoped to start piloting these schemes in 2007. The advisory group and self-assessment team will also consider ways to monitor the impact of advice to staff and their managers on work-life balance and career breaks, particularly in SET, and will consider what further steps might need to be taken including staff training schemes.

The advisory group is adopting a number of means to disseminate information throughout UCL's departments on the Athena principles recognised in signing the SWAN Charter, the objectives in applying for recognition and the initiatives to be undertaken to improve gender balance in career development:

- individual communication through group members to their departments, institutes and faculties

- UCL Web presence for Athena including the SWAN Charter self-assessment process and advisory group activities

- mainstreaming SWAN Charter principles and initiatives in UCL policy and strategy documents

- liaison with other HEIs and national bodies concerned with gender equality issues in science, including widening participation schemes in schools

- participation in national and international conferences and meetings concerned with SET equality issues including Athena and SWAN Charter events

- Celebrations of Champions – a UCL conference on 'Celebration of Champions' of women's advances in SET careers is being planned

RAE planning - the 2008 RAE is an important driver of UCL's strategic planning. UCL recognises the importance of equal opportunities considerations in this planning, and these are included in the principles and criteria set out in UCL's Code of Practice on preparing submissions and selecting staff for the RAE 2008. The advisory group and self-assessment team have identified this as an area needing particularly active monitoring in 2006-07.

THE PLAN

SET baseline and academic profile

1. Subgroup of advisory group and assessment team to review statistically changes in profiles over past three years compared to future two years and discussions of these findings with CEO and senior management team
2. Further analysis of changes over years of new initiatives under equality action planning scheme
3. Further in depth analysis and summary reports on further ASSET analyses to Provost, CEO and senior management team

Key career transition points

1. Subgroup of advisory group and assessment team has started to review mentoring/ support schemes from other institutions and will report back to advisory group with suggestions for possible new initiatives for discussion and consideration for introduction by HR
2. Subgroup of advisory group and assessment team started review of maternity/ career break/returners schemes from other institutions. To report back to advisory group with suggestions for changes in documentation and possible initiatives to be considered for introduction by HR
3. Reports on departmental equality action planning initiatives to be given by members of HR to advisory group for future consideration
4. Subgroup of advisory group (including senior HR representation) to consider ways to monitor success of introduction of new work-life balance policy and ways of training line managers in issues
5. Two subgroups of advisory group and assessment team to further analyse ASSET response data and examine current documentation on promotion
6. CEO staff survey action plan on career development progress to be overseen by CEO and HR Policy Committee.
7. Reports on exit interviews by HR to senior management team twice a year.

Culture change and gender balance in decision making

1. Progress on monitoring gender and ethnicity balance of 16 key committees reported annually to UCL's Governance Committee and CEO.
2. Subgroup to review document on selection/eligibility/nominations procedure for positions of responsibility
3. New structure for faculty promotions committees - progress to be reviewed by Academic Staff Appointments and Promotions Committee.