

ATHENA PROJECT

Athena Development Programme 2000 Good Practice Guide



REPORT
16

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The Athena Project's aims are 'the advancement of women in science, engineering and technology (SET) in higher education (HE) and a significant increase in the number of women recruited to the top posts'. Launched in 1999, Athena is now part of the Equality Challenge Unit. Athena is supported by the UK funding councils, Universities UK, SCOP and the Office of Science and Technology.

The report follows on from Athena Report No.8 which describes the good practice on mentoring, networking, staff development and career progression from Athena's first Development Programme in 1999.

This report describes the good practice from the 2000 Development Programme. The five projects at the Universities of Edinburgh, Heriot-Watt, Luton, Oxford and Surrey, which were funded by Athena, started in summer 2000 and were completed by autumn 2001. All five projects focused on the organisational culture and the processes and practices in SET and HE which present barriers to women's progress to the top.

What follows is based on the work of the HEIs who took part in the 2000 programme and focuses on practical approaches to change and solutions that work, rather than on the issues and problems.

This guide contains ideas and suggestions for good practice from the projects and from the action plans that their HEIs are now starting to implement. These plans have a firm basis from the project teams' work, their findings and analyses of the barriers to women's progression in SET careers. The guide includes what the HEIs have identified as successful outcomes and the ways in which they will evaluate and review the processes of change.

During 2002 Athena will work alongside the project HEIs as they refine and implement the action plans based on their projects' findings. In the meantime, Athena commends HEI managers, heads of departments (HODs) and women in SET to consider the good practice described here.

Further information and support is available from the Athena Project for HEIs wishing to develop activities and programmes in support of the Project's aims and to improve the representation and contribution of women in SET.

This guide, together with the good practice from Athena's 1999 Development Programme and from the first Athena Awards (for work in the 2001/02 academic year), will be incorporated into a comprehensive guide to good practice to be published by Athena in March 2003 with the support of the Royal Society.

Previous work

The projects in the 2000 programme did not 'spring from nowhere', in each case the foundations had been laid by earlier work. Their successes built on previous initiatives and activities and were enhanced where their work ran in parallel with other initiatives, for example:

- the HEI recently introducing a new equal opportunities policy that required HODs to develop departmental action plans
- an HEI review of institutional policies and procedural documentation designed to remove language and practices that were discriminatory
- a women's network established for mutual support and to improve the access, participation and promotion of women
- a network of women academics who helped to disseminate information and to inform the development of the project's recommendations
- parallel initiatives which provided and shared information and improved the potential for linking the project's findings with achievable/sustainable policies

Management involvement and commitment

All the projects recognised the importance of senior management commitment and involvement. In one, the Vice-Chancellor and two HODs were interviewed as key informants, while a third HOD was on the project committee. This commitment was also important when it came to taking action on the projects' findings and recommendations.

Some projects focused on areas already identified by their senior managers as needing action:

- the representation of women at HOD and senior management levels
- concern at the number of women leaving in recent years, particularly contract research staff
- the trend for women to be over-represented in research grades and under-represented in lecturer grades

While others:

- shared their early findings with senior managers who contributed suggestions for changes, which they then 'owned'
- confirmed the importance of their work to the HEI by having Pro-Vice-Chancellors as chairs of the project committees – this also led to the expectation that action should and would be taken on their recommendations
- involved the Director of Personnel where the changes that were needed had to be centrally driven with a significant personnel input; this also allowed their work to 'piggy-back' on other personnel initiatives

Raising awareness

All the projects recognised the need to raise awareness and improve the understanding of the:

- differences in men's and women's career progression and the causes of those differences
- constraints on women's progression which were often embedded in university and departmental structures and organisation
- the perceptions on which career decisions were based

One HEI showed perception and reality can be rather different. Respondents were asked what percentage of posts at different levels were held by women. Both men and women over-estimated the numbers of women in academia, however male academics significantly over-estimated the percentage of female professors. Including findings like these captures colleagues' and managers' attention.

The evidence base

All the projects were conscious of the importance of evidence. They compared quantitative and qualitative information and analyses of their own institutional staff /employment/career progression profiles with the UK picture to:

- raise interest and awareness among male and female SET academics
- present to senior management
- understand/illuminate trends
- inform proposals for change

The projects undertook workforce surveys and held focus groups, internally and externally, to identify concerns, attitudes and perceptions. However, where the HEI or the number of women in SET is small, some women will be uncomfortable about documenting their views on barriers, even where anonymity is guaranteed and the replies are to be externally/independently analysed. A problem which one HEI overcame by expanding its research to include other institutions and commissioning independent researchers from another university to undertake the work. Another of the HEIs is going to follow up its work by benchmarking its findings with a similar institution to see if they are institution specific or generic to other technology-based research-led universities.

With firm evidence the projects had the basis for:

- developing realistic and achievable objectives
- recommending the measures necessary to achieve their objectives in the short/longer term
- measuring the success of the changes they proposed
- providing information to use in target-setting for subsequent years
- setting targets for future years
- reviewing their procedures and practices

RETAINING AND DEVELOPING RESEARCH STAFF

The projects identified a mismatch between the perceptions, expectations and experiences of research staff and their Principal Investigators (PIs), their senior colleagues and HODs in terms of career progression and development and training. However, the move from a post-doctoral to a lecturer appointment was seen by all as the hardest to achieve and the time when serious career choices were made.

The evidence base

To find out why women leave, what the barriers are to their staying, seeking promotion and undertaking development activities, the projects considered and consulted all constituencies, HODs, PIs/senior colleagues and the research staff themselves (male and female).

HODs, who are responsible for departmental practices, found the barriers easier to recognise in other departments. Few of the PIs and the senior academics, who provide the role models and support network and set the tone of the department, had ever had any management training. Researchers were questioned to identify:

- gender disparities in approaches, attitudes
- perceived barriers to career progression
- the extent to which support/encouragement to get involved in departmental activity had an impact on their progression potential

Specific concerns highlighted by research staff included:

- poor relationships with colleagues
- lack of involvement in committees – departmental, faculty and university
- few opportunities for contributing to the department – publications/writing research proposals/applying for funding /attending conferences
- little/no support in planning their future from senior colleagues/ their institution or for taking part in staff development activities
- few positive female role models
- exclusion from informal networks

Action

The lack of a research career structure was identified as a key concern, but one that needed to be addressed at national rather than HEI level. However, the HEI action plans developed from the projects included a range of good practice:

- exit interviews/follow ups to find out their reasons for wanting to leave the HEI
- checks on previous exit interview forms to identify issues for women who had already left
- the review/introduction of a staff development policy (to strengthen support for a long standing staff development programme)

- communicating widely the existence of staff/management development programmes
- the expectation/a requirement for all staff including researchers to be appraised
- an entitlement to staff development for research staff
- the introduction of mentoring to support researchers and to encourage them to consider academic careers
- the provision of coherent careers support/staff development opportunities for researchers and guidance for their managers
- careers advice for researchers
- adequate resources for researchers' development needs
- maintenance of pension contributions during gaps where funding is assured
- invitations to senior women scientists to talk about their careers
- a career development fellowship scheme, with an emphasis on positive action for women
- an improved management development programme to equip HODs and heads of research teams with the management skills they need
- training HODs and PIs to become more effective managers of researchers
- a requirement on HODs to minimise internal conflicts in their research teams and ensure that the teams supported their young researchers

Measuring success

The HEIs will continue regular monitoring of their recruitment and their workforce to determine how far they have achieved their objectives of:

- an increase in women applying for/being shortlisted for lecturing posts
- an increase in women being appointed to lecturing posts
- a greater awareness of issues facing women in SET among HODs and the faculty generally
- changes in institutional practices to meet their project's findings

RECRUITMENT AND PROMOTION

Several projects addressed what they saw as the significant barriers to women's applications for appointment and promotion:

- uncertainties on what a lecturer appointment involves
- the feelings that, if they were good enough for such a post in their own department, someone would have suggested to them that they apply
- the view that failure to be appointed would have a significant impact on subsequent applications
- lack of confidence
- the perception that appointments depended on who you knew rather than strictly on merit
- concerns about the equity of the appointment process

The evidence base

Two HEIs found that the point at which the percentage of women starts to fall sharply is between research and lecturer appointment; in both cases their percentage representation more than halved, in one case from 30% to 12%, in the other from 40% to 13%, by comparison with the UK average of 29% and 20%.

The HEIs who routinely monitored their recruitment knew that women were appointed to SET academic posts at least in proportion to applications. In one case in 1998/99 women represented 26% of applicants, 30% of shortlists and 25% of appointees. 1997/8 women represented 26% of applicants, 28% of shortlists and 30% of appointees. The same HEI had:

- analysed national data on numbers/proportions of women in SET posts in other research universities
- undertaken a gender analysis of contract research scientists and junior research fellows
- reviewed the prior experience of applicants, shortlisted candidates and appointees

From their work the projects reasoned that:

- the low numbers of women applying for lecturer appointments meant that the potential recruitment pool could be enlarged
- the significant decline in women's representation between researcher and lecturer appointments was not the result of overt discrimination but related in more subtle ways to the university's processes and practices

In relation to promotion, the projects chose to seek input from all the parties:

- the women, whose knowledge of promotion procedures was found to be sketchy and they were uncertain of:
 - the membership of promotions panel
 - the promotion criteria used
 - their eligibility for promotion

- PIs, whose experience suggested that women often needed more active support and encouragement from colleagues before they felt confident about putting themselves forward
- HODs, who saw the need to explore and understand the impact of differing departmental practices on promotion applications

Action

Much of the recruitment good practice identified in action plans reflected the need to develop and promote positive images of the department/HEI:

- the use of women's scientific networks to advertise posts
- a review of the material/language used in job particulars
- provision of information to candidates on what the selection process entails
- the addition of welcoming positive action statements to advertisements
- the involvement of women and men in reviewing selection criteria and guarding against inadvertent negative impact
- giving greater publicity to women's work in SET, past and present, to counteract stereotypical images of SET departments
- provision of publicity material describing the work of HEI/department/their successes for general use (exhibitions and websites) which used inclusive language and images
- encouragement to departments to incorporate positive images throughout their work programmes
- invitations to women from other HEIs to discuss their work at lectures/other events

Other good practice action concentrated on the equity and transparency of appointment and promotion procedures:

- dissemination of information on promotion procedures, eligibility and the constitution/ membership of promotions panels
- ensuring that all staff involved are trained and briefed on gender stereotyping
- reviews of procedures and criteria to ensure clarity and consistency in their application across departments
- publication of clear guidelines on routes to promotion and eligibility
- the avoidance, where possible, of temporary promotions made without open competition
- pairing junior women getting ready for promotion with more senior colleagues to advise on CVs and preparing their case for promotion
- feedback to HODs and individuals on promotion outcomes including positive feedback to unsuccessful candidates

- changed constitution of selection panels to ensure female membership/presence
- departmental seminars on promotion procedures before the promotion round, culminating in celebration of the staff who were promoted
- acknowledgment that maternity leave/career breaks result in reduced research output

Measuring success

The HEI, which has already agreed and disseminated its action plan and time table based on its project's work:

- anticipates that its action plan will increase the number of applications
- is using the project findings for target setting for future years
- will monitor applications from women, and the numbers appointed, to see if they increase as anticipated
- will continue to audit pay for gender bias

A common theme throughout the projects was the importance of women participating fully in departmental and university life, developing a more significant role in shaping departmental and university's direction and culture, and thus enjoying the full benefits of a successful career in SET.

The evidence base

The HEIs who collected evidence on and analysed women and men's career progression identified possible indirect discrimination in the differences in the departmental roles/responsibilities undertaken by them. The differences were found to be important to the development of a 'good' CV and to career progression.

Work undertaken by a women's network identified two other important barriers to women's full participation in the university, to building a good CV and to internal promotion:

- the use of internal secondments
- the membership and conduct of committees

The projects that compared the roles/responsibilities undertaken by women by comparison with their male colleagues found:

- an inverse relationship between the perceived value/recognition of the roles and the time and energy involved in them. This was also detrimental to building the research profile necessary for academic success
- little evidence of systems for appointing individuals to administrative roles (which were not seen to be valued in terms of promotion)- this also allowed individuals to dodge administrative chores
- the allocation of teaching was perceived as ad hoc and unfair
- high profile work/activities/events were given to men rather than women who were unfairly loaded with teaching and admin (menial) tasks
- the lack of management training for academics compounded the lack of structure in departments

Action

The good practice action to address these findings included:

- the introduction of departmental systems to recognise and acknowledge significant administrative work
- the inclusion of decision making and delegation within the management training given to HODs/heads of research teams
- the introduction of fair departmental arrangements for:
 - appointing academics to administrative roles and rotation of such responsibilities
 - appraisal
 - allocating individuals to research groups
 - allocating and monitoring teaching loads

- the inclusion of management development and explicit recognition of management experience in annual staff reviews
- work shadowing to enable women to see what was involved in senior positions
- the regular moving around of roles, so that experience is gained by more people/the workload is more fairly shared
- the introduction of training and support programmes for women which will include mentoring and coaching, secondments and project based opportunities

Measuring success

One HEI has set the target of increasing the number of women in senior management roles by 30% in five years.

Committees are an intrinsic part of academic life. However, the projects found that committee representation was often not wholly within the gift of the HEI, and was largely determined by democratic or quasi- democratic processes. There was a general perception that poorly defined institutional practices led to use of the 'old boy' network for internal secondments and eg selection for committee chairs.

The evidence base

One HEI found that women represented 70% of the membership of their mitigating circumstances committee and other 'administrative' committees, but only 13% of the research committee. 222 people (92 women, 130 men) filled 379 committee places. Men were more often on more than one committee, which intensified the 'closed network'.

Action

The HEIs' action plans included:

- mechanisms for selecting committee members to be made open and accountable with clarity as to whether representatives were appointed or elected
- appointments to committees to be a fixed term with 'rolling' replacements to allow more staff to participate
- membership elections to be by secret ballot, with numbers of votes not disclosed - to encourage participation
- all committee meetings to continue to be held in normal working hours, an aspect of the university's committee organisation welcomed by women
- piloting proportional representation on some faculty committees
- the introduction of opportunities for committee observation for men and women
- the establishment of a network for women members of committees
- the targeting of women for training to fit them for places on university committees
- the inclusion of more senior women on decision-making committees

One HEI recognised that change would depend on the extent to which chairs of committees could be persuaded of the importance of the issue and their own role as key players. It incorporated into a training programme for committee chairs the factors that it found to have inhibited the effective contribution of women to committees:

- 'the need for a strong chair to prevent senior management from dominating'
- 'making sure that it is not only the loudest voice that is heard'
- 'ensuring that women are allowed to speak for as long as men and are not interrupted'
- 'not disregarding what a woman member says because of how it is expressed – viewing women as over emotional or given to taking the issues personally demonstrates a lack of understanding of the way women communicate. It can be hurtful and may mean that the woman doesn't contribute further'

- 'awareness that the members who are part of or privy to the male network know the issues/politics around the discussion and that the rest of the members are thus excluded'

Measuring success

The HEI recognised the importance of evaluating the process of the changes it set out to achieve.. To do so, it identified what would be successful outcomes when it reviewed progress at the end of the first year:

- academic committees, faculty and university, represent more appropriately the constituency of women academics
- women committee members report confidence in their ability to operate and be heard in committees and in the conduct of the committees
- committee chairs report favourably on the training received and their own confidence in conducting committee business appropriately
- an encouraging review of committee minutes – the language and the articulation of women's contributions to committee business
- setting targets and monitoring committee representation

1999 Development Programme Reports

- 1 Bolton Institute – Mentoring Women in SET
- 2 University of East Anglia – ResNet2000
- 3 Imperial College – Might Mentoring Help?
- 4 Nottingham and Loughborough Universities – Skill Acquisition and Mentoring During Early Career Stages
- 5 The Open University – Beating Barriers and Constraints in HE Careers
- 6 Sheffield Hallam University – Progress-Developing a Mentoring Training Programme
- 7 Report on the 1999 Development Programme
- 8 The Athena Project Good Practice Guide 1999

2000 Development Programme Reports

- 9 The University of Edinburgh – Bridging the Gap
- 10 Heriot-Watt University – DRAW: The Development and Retention of Academic Women
- 11 The University of Luton - Inclusive Committees
- 12 The University of Oxford – Encouraging Applications from Women Scientists
- 13 The University of Surrey – Moving Up
- 14 Local Academic Women’s Networks (LAWNs)
- 15 Report on the 2000 Development Programme
- 16 The Athena Project Good Practice Guide 2000

Occasional Papers

- 1 Women scientists in higher education: a literature review (September 2001)
- 2 Gender Equity in Academia: Lessons from the MIT Experience
Professor Lotte Bailyn the first Imperial College Athena Lecture (February 2002)

Copies of the above and information on the Athena Project can be obtained from:

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