

WOMEN IN SET INITIATIVE WiSETI

The University of Cambridge won joint second prize in the 2002 Athena Awards for the work of WiSETI.

WiSETI had its origins in 1993 when the university joined the then Opportunity 2000 campaign. In 1998 some of Cambridge's culture change goals were targeted at SET with specific initiatives to address the under-representation of women in SET. WiSETI was created in 1999 with support from Personnel and funding from the Vice-Chancellor to raise expectations and to meet the challenge of those raised hopes and aspirations.

WiSETI's remit is to improve the numbers of women studying SET at Cambridge, 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 initiatives. WiSETI addresses:

- access - recruitment and admissions
- participation - retention of women graduate students and post-docs
- progression - the career progress of women post-docs into permanent posts and their retention if they choose to have children or undertake other caring responsibilities
- performance - whether women are required to outperform men in order to win research funding or appointments

WiSETI has played a key role in highlighting the issue of the under-representation of women in SET. It successfully introduced dialogue between the different agencies in the university, where undergraduates are admitted by Colleges, involved in outreach to school students.

WiSETI's Advisory Committee has equal numbers of men (science professors, heads of department and college heads) and women (practitioner scientists from the university's four science schools) plus the Director of Personnel. The University Equal Opportunities Officer is Secretary to WiSETI. WiSETI's half time Project Director has an office and administrative support. It receives regular statistical reports on the numbers and percentages of women in SET by department and grade.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge is an ancient, collegiate university with a strong science base. The profile of women in SET is slowly changing. Between 1995 and 2002 there was a 7.7% rise in the number of women SET staff, and a 6.5% rise in the number of SET women undergraduates and postgraduates. Despite the fact that women are appointed to academic posts in the proportions that they apply, women are not represented in the proportions that would be expected at the upper levels of the university. For example, while 20% of engineering undergraduates are women, only 5.5% of academics are women. At CRS level 24% are women and in the University's SET faculties of the 1,069 'established' academics just over 12% are women, and of the 1,955 CRS 41% are women.

Further Information

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WiSETI

The projects undertaken in WiSETI's first phase (1999 to 2001), Springboard for Undergraduates, mentoring for women in SET and raising awareness among male scientists, were designed to complement existing initiatives in the University, to extend innovative and good practice and:

- raise the profile and enhance the self-confidence of women in SET
- improve the numbers of women studying SET subjects
- improve the recruitment, retention and promotion rates of women in SET posts.

Seminars helped to raise awareness of the issues for women. They brought together senior male and their (often more junior) women colleagues to explore and identify obstacles facing women in SET. Dissemination and communication is through lunchtime seminars/focus groups for men and women, with other women only focus groups. WiSETI has also organised evening focus groups on mentoring for men and women contract research staff (CRS) and an all day access seminar for science teachers on ways of attracting young people, especially girls, into SET.

The University and the Springboard Consultancy jointly developed the Springboard for Undergraduates programme for women in science, which provides a toolkit for building confidence and taking control and emphasises the need for each student to develop strategies for changes that are in tune with her own personal values and aspirations.

Following the pilot for second year undergraduates, the University is publishing a new design workbook. The programme was so successful that it is now open to women undergraduates in all subjects.

Participants describe it as *'practical feminism for Cambridge in the 21st century - it really is'* *'Springboard encouraged me to go for it, I hope the programme goes from strength to strength and inspires other under-confident undergraduates as it did me.'*

WiSETI's current programme 2002 to 2004 has been mainstreamed into and funded from the University's HR strategy, with additional financial support from the Colleges and the University's learning and teaching strategy. Its main strands are:

- MentorNet - an email mentoring programme for women undergraduates
- a recruitment programme
- an annual WiSETI lecture
- a Code of Practice and best practice guides for the SET workplace

Following a successful mentoring pilot for CRS, which was supported by training for both mentors and mentees, mentoring is now incorporated into the draft Code of Practice for laboratory disciplines. MentorNet www.mentornet.net is a complementary project for 2002 which taps into an American e-mentoring scheme, pairing industrial, commercial and government/civil service mentors with women SET students.

The University knows *'we appoint women in the same proportions that they apply for SET posts - now we need to increase application rates from women'*. So, based in the University's science schools, two recruitment officers will:

- act as head-hunters to identify potential women candidates in SET and ensure they receive appropriate information about positions that may interest them
- track the progress of women candidates
- advise and support appointments committees in evaluating women's CVs
- run workshops on gender bias and gender equality issues for senior academics to:
 - bring out subtle differences in expectations for men and women
 - challenge institutional culture and values in a positive way

Their appointments were welcomed by the faculties *'who know we are not doing well enough and that our staff profile is not what we want'*

An annual WiSETI lecture by a high profile woman scientist is part of outreach to girls who may be interested in science. The first was delivered by the NASA astronaut Dr Bonnie Dunbar in May 2002.

The Code of Practice and best practice guidelines together form a toolkit for SET departments to ensure that the right systems are in place from admission or recruitment, through to graduation or retirement. The intention is to level the playing field so that women and other under-represented groups are offered equality of opportunity, in a fair system based on merit in an environment free of bias and discrimination.

The project has two stages, research followed by an interventionist pilot. The research is a statistical overview of students and staff by gender and ethnicity, based on the University of Melbourne report Faculty Employment by Gender 2001. www.hr.unimelb.edu.au/e/. It will provide a baseline for the year-on-year comparisons outlined in the Cambridge Code of Practice.

The pilot will focus on CRS and their recruitment, performance management, rewards, terms and conditions, training, career guidance and development. It will:

- examine the systems in place (induction, mentoring, appraisal and training/development opportunities) as they apply to CRS
- consult with CRS and with supervisors to establish particular areas on which to focus
- introduce/build on existing systems to maximise good practice, tailored to the needs of the particular institution or department
- produce written best practice guidelines, and provide back-up training where appropriate
- establish regular workshops for CRS to facilitate discussion on training and development needs

WiSETI's Success

Initiatives for change must work with the culture not against it. At Cambridge the gender balance, where men are in the majority especially at senior levels in all the SET disciplines, contributes to a traditional masculine culture, resistant to change. The University's dominant position in most league tables further contributes to an unconscious resistance to change. As a highly successful institution the University lacked the key motivators or drivers to make institutional and cultural changes. These were both the starting points and the main constraints for WiSETI's work.

The Vice-Chancellor said *'Our success as a research intensive institution, with a major emphasis on SET, can only be sustained by ensuring that both potential and established women scientists are retained for scientific professions both within and outside the HE sector. WiSETI has shown how a variety of approaches will sustain and retain women scientists and shift the cultural attitudes which can be obstacles for them.'*

WiSETI, championed by the Vice-Chancellor and other senior academic and administrative staff, has succeeded in engaging senior male scientists in its activities by identifying key strategies and adds value. For example:

- a general University policy on mentoring was followed through with a departmental mentoring programme for women CRS and has now led to e-mentoring via MentorNet.
- the Springboard for Undergraduates pilot in 1993 paved the way for the full-scale initiative in 1998.

WiSETI is fully integrated into the University's governance and departmental structure. Its committee is chaired by the Secretary General of the Faculties and reports to the University's General Board, the main academic decision-making body. Minutes are exchanged with the Joint Committee on Academic Performance, with some joint membership.

WiSETI is mainstreamed into and funded from the University's HR Strategy. It builds on the University's ethos of excellence. It challenges received wisdom and accepted cultural norms and encourages changes in behaviour.

WiSETI's work involves heads of departments, principal investigators, senior administrative staff, CRS, students and practitioner scientists, both male and female. All SET departments have designated WiSETI representatives to keep them informed of activities.

WiSETI's results show that making the issues explicit, demonstrating the practical effects of discrimination on women's experience and careers and introducing practical strategies for addressing these issues, all make a difference to women's experience and to the institutional culture.

THE FUTURE

'WiSETI has created the context in which Cambridge can target its particular concerns but we still need a better understanding of why women do not ALWAYS flourish in SET'.

The current WiSETI projects will run until 2004. It is hoped that the pump-priming projects (recruitment and code of practice) will lead to mainstreaming, in the same way that Springboard for Undergraduates has been incorporated into the University's learning and teaching initiative.

Sponsors are being sought for MentorNet so that, if the pilot proves successful, membership can be continued beyond 2002/2003. Similarly, work is being undertaken to identify further sponsorship for the annual WiSETI lecture. Meanwhile, other projects are being worked up, notably a Cambridge/Canada exchange programme for senior women scientists.

Cambridge will use their Pearson prize money to support progression and promotion by developing and adapting management and leadership training and personal and professional development for senior and aspiring SET women.