

EMBEDDING GENDER EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Loughborough University won the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) prize in the 2003 Royal Society Athena Awards for a decade of work in embedding gender equality and diversity. The chronology of the university's initiatives and activities since the nineties demonstrates a pace of change and an impact that increase year on year. What has been achieved reflects the university's long standing commitment to mainstream its many and varied initiatives into its strategic plans, its organisational structures, its policies and its working practices.

Loughborough recognises that its involvement in the Athena Project makes an important contribution to meeting the objectives of its Human Resources Strategy, for example the targets it has set to increase the number of female academic staff. Loughborough takes pride in what it has achieved, its committed staff and its ability to learn from past experience. Its key initiatives include:

- the recognition of career breaks and the need to have procedures in place to enable individuals to maintain and update their knowledge/skills while on leave and which help ensure a supportive and structured return to work
- changes to the equal opportunities monitoring form and procedures for collecting data which increased the response rate, to almost 99%, and resulted in better planning
- the regular monitoring and review of staff progression have helped identify ways to improve the numbers of women in senior positions, for example training
- LAWNs – following the Athena mentoring project in 1999/00 Loughborough took the lead in the East Midlands LAWN - this culminated in a conference in 2001 on women's career development and success in winning grants and developing research portfolios
- with assistance from the Athena Project the university established a web-based learning resource aimed at sharing experiences and good practice in the grant application process- the website which disseminates the discussions at the 2001 conference helps women to equip themselves with the skills to successfully pursue funding opportunities

The work by the university has begun to yield positive results. Recent monitoring shows that in Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) between 1999 and 2003, there has been an improvement of 1.2% in the number of women professors, a 5.5% increase in women senior lecturers and a 5.2% increase in women lecturers.

LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY

Loughborough University has three faculties: engineering, science, and social sciences and humanities, with 24 academic departments and over 30 research institutes and centres. The university has over 12,000 students and 3,000 staff. As at November 2003 in the university overall, 20% of academic staff were women, in SET 16% of academic staff were women. Work placements, degree programmes sponsored by industrial consortia, and an ever-growing international dimension are a distinctive characteristic of the university. Its industrial and professional partnerships contribute to the employment prospects of Loughborough's graduates and bring benefits to its core activities, its teaching and learning, research, and technology transfer.

Further Information

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A DECADE OF WORK

Loughborough's approach-making change happen

In 1991 the university established its equal opportunities committee and sexual harassment panel. These were followed by a gender-free language policy (now the inclusive language policy), the introduction of subsidised nursery and summer play school schemes, the establishment of a maternity fund to remove pressure on women returning to work too quickly after maternity leave and the approval of a gender equality in appraisal policy.

In 2001 full time equal opportunities staff were appointed and the pace of change moved up. In the following year the university's equal pay audits started, and the race equality policy was approved. In 2003 the university's equal pay policy was approved and the faculties and support service produced their equal opportunities action plans and appointed departmental equal opportunities and disabilities co-ordinators.

The evidence base

The changes made by Loughborough were based on the findings of the research they undertook. This started in 1991 with research funded by their research committee on women, black and disabled academics. This was followed by the establishment of a university wide gender studies research forum in 1994 and a gender audit – a study of the influence and awareness of gender issues at the university, again funded by the research committee. The university continues to use its taught and research students' projects to underpin its understanding of the issues and its action agenda.

Loughborough uses its equal opportunities data, to identify the position of women and minority ethnic staff within its structures and the possible barriers to their progress, and to set realistic and measurable benchmarks for under-

represented groups. The current monitoring response rate is almost 99%. The ratio of female to male staff is 49%:51%, but there continues to be gender and occupational segregation for women and for the ethnic minority staff who account for 9% of the total. Monitoring and reviewing the progression of staff has helped to identify ways to improve the numbers of women eligible for senior positions. Targeted training is identified, for example a development training programme for female technicians is currently scheduled.

Similarly, the university maximised the benefit from the equal opportunities audit it commissioned from the ECU, by asking working parties to address the issues identified:

- setting up specific-interest groups on disability, gender and minority ethnic issues
- targeted training for women
- conducting a staff survey
- committee membership and the under representation of specific groups

Committee membership

A review of the constitution of university committees, their membership criteria and the procedures for appointing members led to changes which will ensure that there is no indirect exclusion / discrimination. The university council has been active in the promotion of positive action to achieve greater equality by removing restrictions on membership, by asking committee secretaries to use positive action statements and generally to encourage applications for membership. Longer term measures have been identified, for example staff shadowing on committees to increase individuals' knowledge and to gain the confidence to put themselves forward for membership.

COMMITMENT, CULTURE AND ORGANISATION

Loughborough's progress would not have been possible without the commitment of the Vice-Chancellor, whose personal performance targets have included action to achieve Athena's aims. As he emphasises

It is overwhelmingly in our interests to support diversity at Loughborough. This is not only because we would otherwise be failing in our responsibility to applicants, as well as our staff and students.... The University itself would also be losing out by failing to avail itself of the best people.

The university recognises that for the right organisational culture to develop, responsibilities for equal opportunities have to be cascaded to all levels and have to include key staff such as heads of departments and sections. For example, the inclusive language policy, which was developed in 2002 was rolled out to departments, requiring all heads of departments and sections at the university to ensure their documents and language usage reflects diversity and inclusivity.

The equal opportunities sub-committee (to whom the working party tasked with moving the Athena agenda forward reports) has a commitment to ensure that the university's three faculties and support service department produce their own robust equal opportunities action plans. Heads of departments / sections are held accountable to the faculty deans for progressing these action plans. This involves their scrutiny of departmental action plans and an annual review of progress.

Loughborough has dedicated faculty equal opportunities co-ordinators. The engineering faculty has co-ordinators in each department and the dean has briefed staff on the faculty's action plan to emphasise its importance. The science faculty also plans to appoint departmental equal opportunities co-ordinators as the best way to mainstream equality issues.

Career progression

The university's human resource strategy majors on career progression across the university, with work on:

- clearer career paths – the review of 'job families' followed by the introduction of a single job evaluation scheme will help staff develop a clear career action plan
- extended career breaks - agreed on the basis that individuals continue to undertake a limited amount of teaching during the leave of absence to maintain their skills - with a departmental undertaking to facilitate the individual's ongoing academic activity by providing access to desk-space and IT support throughout their leave of absence and appropriate steps by Personnel to ensure that the individual's incremental progression is maintained during the leave of absence
- flexible working arrangements – with opportunities to work part-time, job-share and work flexible hours
- a flexitime pilot scheme for clerical and ancillary and academic-related staff was successful, and is now implemented throughout the university - trials are under way for technical staff
- work-life balance

SET Initiatives

In 1999 Loughborough with Nottingham University was awarded an Athena development grant to set up a support programme of workshops and mentoring for women with up to five years post-doctorate experience in SET. The following year an East Midlands women in SET network was set up and in 2002 they held a conference - *Research Success: Winning Grants and Developing Excellent Research Portfolios*

Following the conference, and with part funding from Athena, a website was created as a learning resource, aimed at sharing experiences and good practice on issues facing women scientists in the

grant application process and disseminating the discussions aired at the conference. This research success website aims to equip women with the skills needed to successfully pursue funding opportunities. It includes background information and an outline of Loughborough's earlier work on mentoring. It has two bibliographical sections, one with details of publications on women working in SET in higher education, the other providing details and web-links on women working in SET throughout the labour market. There were 1,249 visits to the site - www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/personnel/athena_web/INDEX.HTM in its first eight months.

Loughborough has recently attracted external funding for work on equality issues in SET with:

- *Barriers to Choice in Career Development Paths* – research looking at barriers between industry and academia (jointly with Queens University Belfast)
- a HEFCE funded BALANCE project for three years from 2000 to produce a comprehensive set of initiatives for HEIs to attract and retain women students on engineering programmes. The project involved gathering, disseminating and embedding existing good practice and developing methodologies to generate an engineering community to which more balanced numbers of women and men are attracted, recruited and retained.
- In 2004 a three year ESRC funded project starts on the impact of the HE environment and industrial placement on women engineering students' career intentions /aspirations and the university will be developing a similar research application for women science students

The impact of the work

What is important is the change in attitudes that these varied initiatives have engendered. There are now two senior female managers on the university's Executive Management Group. Gender diversity is now accepted at all levels as a fair and sensible approach. Stereotypes are being challenged. At all levels (research, technician, academic-related and academic levels) funding is provided for in-house initiatives on an 'added-value' rather than 'lip-service' basis. Logic is overcoming prejudice and tradition. Culture does take time to change but at Loughborough it is felt that the university and its departments now have the foundations firmly in place to avail themselves of the best people for whatever tasks need to be done, regardless of gender issues.

THE FUTURE

The university will continue its commitment to meeting the objectives of its human resource strategy and to involve itself with Athena in developing and disseminating new approaches to good practice in SET employment and to cultural change. The university will use the ECU prize to assess the impact of the Athena work on the university, alongside an existing Economic and Social Research Council funded research programme looking at the impact of women engineering students' industrial placements on their career aspirations and expectations.