



Analysis of 'Survey of Research Funders' on behalf of the Athena Forum

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Summary

The survey revealed that a substantial amount of good practice already exists amongst research funders and that policies to develop a gender inclusive culture are in the main well understood by the funding agencies.

Less positive is the message that funders mostly rely on host institutions to enact gender inclusive practice established by the funders' policies. The funding organisations point to the 'Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers' and the Athena SWAN charter scheme as indicators that these policies are being enacted as they do not have their own monitoring systems in place. While recognising that the funding agencies are not the employers of researchers, they nonetheless can have a major influence on good practice by the employers.

The Athena Forum recommends that *all* funding bodies should implement the following actions to ensure good practice. Many examples of existing actions of this type are described in the rest of the document.

- All fellowships should offer the flexibility to switch between full-time and part-time working, with the fellowship being extended pro-rata.
- All workers funded by grants (including investigators) should be able to request a switch from full-time to part-time working with the grant being extended pro-rata.
- All grants and fellowships should be extended to compensate for periods of maternity/ paternity / adoption leave.
- Additional costs incurred in relation to childcare as a consequence of participation in conferences and research visits should be included as a standard expense alongside travel and subsistence (note that the Athena Forum has obtained clarification that such payments are not taxable¹).

¹ <http://www.athenaforum.org.uk/media/1118/athena-forum-statement-on-taxability-of-childcare-expenses-may-2015.pdf>

- Funding for workshops and conferences should be conditional on the gender balance of the proposed speakers being representative of the community.
- Funding bodies should pro-actively advertise their policies and initiatives related to flexible working and produce a highly visible webpage giving a clear summary of these.
- Career age should be used instead of chronological age when assessing applications.
- Review panels should have a good gender balance and chairs should be trained in unconscious bias/ issues surrounding gender equality.
- Larger funding bodies should take active measures to ensure that institutions hosting grant holders are implementing good practice.
- Data should be collected on the gender breakdown of applicants and recipients and the information analysed and used to inform policies and procedures.

Some funding bodies have a number of initiatives that go beyond the basic good practice listed above – examples of such initiatives are described in the rest of the document. The Athena Forum recommends that funding bodies (especially larger bodies) work towards implementing the following actions.

- Introduce fellowships specifically aimed at those returning from a career break or an extended period of leave and/ or support to enable those returning from extended periods of leave to prepare a standard fellowship application.
- Provide mentoring for those funded by fellowships.
- Fund additional costs incurred due to research staff taking extended periods of leave.
- Highlight the careers of an appropriate diversity of successful researchers, using them as role models, nominating them for prestigious roles and ensuring that their achievements are noticed by the academic community.

An additional important issue that does not appear to be addressed by the UK is that of the “two-body problem”. Funding bodies could help to address this by introducing competitive peer-reviewed funding to support researchers who have to relocate to follow a partner.

Background

In July 2010 the Athena Forum held a conference with representatives from UK research funders to discuss how their organisations encourage and support women in science, and in particular what they do to:

- influence and support universities and their STEMM departments in implementing good practice
- ensure the equitable distribution of the money they award.

A report 'Good Practice by UK research funders'² summarised the key findings under the following headings:

- policy making and impact assessment;
- committees, boards and awards panels;
- monitoring;
- partnerships with universities and STEMM stakeholders;
- critical career transitions and research fellowships.

A follow up survey (Appendix 2) was distributed to research funders in August 2013 with the aim of extending and updating the 2010 report.

The Athena Forum then held a workshop in September 2013 for professional institutions, learned societies and research funders on good practice in supporting STEMM departments with SWAN submissions which included a discussion on some of the initial findings from the survey, highlighting areas of good practice and other areas where improvements could be made.

Methodology

The survey in Appendix 2 was distributed to eight research funders and HEFCE. Some of these were umbrella organisations who then forwarded the survey onto their member bodies. Responses were received from the 13 organisations listed in Appendix 3. A summary of the good practice reported in the survey is provided below. To avoid duplication the responses are reported by topics where some topics covered more than one survey question. (For clarity the survey questions relating to the topic heading are given in italics beneath each topic heading.)

A simple analysis was undertaken to identify:

- common themes;
- examples of good practice;
- opportunities to share good practice.

It is important to note that some of the organisations surveyed do not have the typical underrepresentation of women in STEMM, specifically those involved in women's health.

1. Activities to address the under-representation of women in STEMM

Describe any initiatives taken by your organisation to address any under-representation of academic and research staff in HE at particular levels/grades, such as attracting more women and/or under-represented groups into STEM disciplines.

(i) Career support schemes

The Royal Society's **Dorothy Hodgkin Fellowship** scheme provides fellowships for early career researchers who require flexible working due to personal circumstances. These awards provide flexibility by covering part-time as well as full-time salary costs, which can be switched between full and part-time during the award period. Funding for family support to enable the fellow

² <http://www.athenaforum.org.uk/media/1004/research-funders101105-final.pdf>

to attend conferences etc. This provision is also available from other funders' awards.

The STFC also offer bursaries that provide support of up to £2500 towards the costs of, for example, additional childcare or other care and travel to the Host Institution or to meetings.

Wellcome Trust awards cover actual costs of salaries of those on parental or sick leave and grant holder can apply for additional direct research costs that may be incurred due to Fellows' leave. **The Trust's Institutional Strategic Support Fund** has been used to support returners and provide bridging funding between grants.

Holders of The Royal Society **Rosalind Franklin Award** are required to spend a proportion of the grant on implementing a project to raise the profile of women in STEM in their host institution and/or field of expertise in the UK.

(ii) The supply of female students into STEMM careers

The RCUK's School-University Partnerships Initiative is a three-year initiative to create structured and strategic mechanisms for HEIs to work in partnership with secondary schools and FE colleges. This partnership working will support researchers' direct engagement with students and bring contemporary and inspirational research contexts into formal and informal learning to enhance and enrich the curriculum. In particular the project aims to reach secondary school students from a diversity of backgrounds.

The Wellcome Trust funds the INSPIRE initiative, which is coordinated by the Academy of Medical Sciences at all 32 UK medical schools to engage medical and dental undergraduates with research and promote clinical academia as a career path.

2. Data collection and analysis to promote change

How does your organisation collect, use and review data for application and award processes? How does your organisation ensure that the data collected influences change within your organisation?

The Wellcome Trust collects and analyses demographic application data for all its grant schemes. This is widely used within the organisation to influence procedures and policies, for example, equal opportunities data is regularly reported to the Trust's Board of Governors. For certain schemes the Trust also provides application data externally, such as for the Investigator Award schemes. Additionally, information is collected on the career destinations of Trust Fellows via annual online surveys of key cohorts of Trust-funded researchers and the findings are available from their website.

The Royal Society collects data on Research Fellows through the electronic Grant Application Processing system (e-GAP). These data are used to present the outcome of awards to their Council in order to review the representation of men and women, which areas of science are being funded, and where the Fellows are based. Additionally, the Society recently

undertook an exercise to compare the level of salary being paid to male and female Research Fellows and found that the level of salary paid to women was equivalent to men at an early stage of their career.

Research Councils UK (RCUK) collects equality data of applicants, reviewers and peer review panel members via the Joint Electronic Submissions (Je-S) system. A cross Council group is considering data and its publication on applications, awards, reviews and peer review panels by gender, ethnicity, disability and age. A separate group is considering the data of the Council's employees. Based on these and other analyses, RCUK have recently published their action plan for equality, diversity and inclusion.

Smaller organisations typically do not collect equality data, or do collect it but struggle to use it.

3. Promoting best practice within the funding body

What does your organisation do to monitor and implement best practice internally with regards to staff (e.g. recruitment, promotion, career breaks, committee memberships?).

Monitoring of recruitment, the workforce and composition of boards and committees by gender and role is commonly undertaken by the larger organisations. Best practice includes annual reporting to executive boards and governing bodies of the outcomes of this monitoring with recommendations for action and equality and diversity training for board, committee and council members.

Several of the STEMM research councils have cross-council initiatives such as a network of equality champions who provide equality and diversity training, a newsletter and support for involvement in the Athena SWAN process.

4. Attracting applications from women

What processes are in place to attract applications for funding from female candidates? How are these effectively communicated to ensure the processes are open and transparent?

Most respondents report no such processes, so there is a significant opportunity to share good practice where it does exist. For example, there is evidence that the wording of calls for applicants can influence applicant diversity. One funder mentioned ensuring a 'variety of advertising methods' are employed. One requires grant holders to have an Athena Swan Award.

Good practice from the Wellcome Trust includes a dedicated webpage for all policies and initiatives for women; published profiles highlighting the careers of successful female researchers; discussing policies at university visits and presentations to potential applicants with Trust Fellows and grant holders both at cohort meetings and on a one to one basis; and providing advice to potential applicants both prior to and during the application process.

In addition, the Trust and other funders mentioned counting career age rather than chronological age when assessing applications. This practice discounts time spent outside the research career so is particularly helpful for funding schemes aimed at particular career stages that have time limits for eligibility.

5. Support at different career stages

What are the different career stages for women researchers and fellows where support from your organisation may be needed? What type of support is offered by your organisation at these key stages e.g. personal development training, networking opportunities, mentoring programmes?

One funder devolves this activity to grant holding institutions, but most are active and mentioned advanced fellowships for existing Fellows to promote progression; mentoring; leadership training; surveys to understand career choices beyond PhD, resulting in enhanced support and guidance to Fellows.

The survey was also sent to the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE). Whilst HEFCE doesn't engage with individual researchers, so cannot provide individual support it is in a very strong position to influence policy, collect and analyse data on a national basis, monitor good practice and provide centralised guidance and support. HEFCE also works with the Equality Challenge Unit to support the career development of researchers.

(i) Support for newly funded researchers

There is a considerable degree of good practice in this area as described below.

Applicants to the Alzheimer's Society may cost in to their application training relevant to their project. For PhD Studentships and Fellowships, a budget for conference and dissemination is also included, as is the case with many other funders. The Society holds an annual research conference where all funded researchers are invited. This networking opportunity also gives early career-stage researchers an opportunity to present their work. The Society also uses the widely adopted good practice of including in the assessment process for PhD Studentships and Fellowship applications the research and training environment, and the support that will be provided by the host institution

The Royal Society runs a mentoring programme for new University Research Fellows. Following consultation, the scheme focuses on providing support in the following areas:

- Knowing how and when it is appropriate to discuss the issue of the next appointment.
- Guidance on how to develop into a more independent role in your research.
- Developing confidence in negotiations with your Department.
- Career planning/tracking to help ensure you are proceeding as required for your goals (i.e. understanding university requirements for professorships).
- Understanding the funding landscape and knowing when and where to look for additional funding.

The Wellcome Trust gives new awardees access to web-based resources, invites new early/intermediate Fellows to induction meetings followed by annual or biennial meetings.

(ii) Career development opportunities

This responsibility is almost universally devolved to grant holding institutions. A number of funders explicitly allow training to be included in the costs of a Fellowship and expenses to attend meetings and conferences. The Researcher Concordat also supports the development of researchers' careers.

Arthritis Research UK offers a Career Progression Fellowship scheme to their existing Fellows, which provides 1-2 years funding (50% cost-shared with their host institution) to enable an application to a more senior fellowship or academic post. Researchers can also apply for separate support to bridge those between grants.

Recognising the need to broaden the talent pool from which to recruit tomorrow's research leaders, the Wellcome Trust runs a Research Leadership Development Programme for Trust researchers already established in or aspiring to hold a senior leadership position in academia or a major research centre. The Trust will also support Intermediate-level grant holders to attend relevant leadership programmes, such as the EMBO Laboratory Management Courses. Fellows and grant holders can request advice at any time on future funding opportunities and career development from Trust staff. Furthermore, advisory sessions are included in their cohort meetings.

Alzheimer's Research UK fund a Network of Centres of Excellence across the country that receive a small grant each year which they can use for small pilot projects, equipment, conference attendance or administrative support. They also provide help for researchers to promote their work through press releases and provide media training.

A training and development manager is employed by the BBSRC to ensure that researchers have access to opportunities for personal development as well as scientific development.

The Royal Society and the Wellcome Trust will support Sir Henry Dale Fellows and Research Career Development Fellows to attend a bespoke training programme suitable for those at the start of their independent research career.

There is unsurprisingly a strong focus on career development associated with most PhD funding schemes. This includes funding for transferable skills training, funding to attend a Vitae GRADSchool, and funded internships outside academia. The Wellcome Trust and BBSRC co-fund the Young Entrepreneurs Scheme to help early career researchers develop entrepreneurial skills.

6. Gender equality training

What steps do you take to ensure staff in institutions and departments where funded individuals work receive gender equality training?

This responsibility is almost universally devolved to grant holding institutions where the conditions attached to the award require the institutions to demonstrate good practice in this area, such as holding an Athena Swan award or HR Excellence Award. Again the Researcher Concordat is relevant here. A key principle of the Concordat is to promote equality and diversity in all aspects of the recruitment and career management of researchers; however few funders or institutions, apart from the BBSRC, have *mandatory* gender equality training.

7. Funders influence on developing a gender-inclusive culture

How does your organisation influence the departments that receive funding to;
a) Have clear and fair systems for making decisions and allocating workload and resources? b) Use positive messages to address the gender imbalance on committees? c) Address the issue of 'committee overload' where there are small numbers of female staff in the department? d) Demonstrate a female-friendly and inclusive culture?

This is an underdeveloped area for most funders because they see it as the responsibility of the host institutions that should be enacted under the terms and conditions of the grant allocations.

The Wellcome Trust however, expects the organisers of conferences and workshops they fund to ensure that the proposed speakers, panelists and participants are representative of their scientific community. Furthermore, to encourage other organisations to increase the representation of women on decision making bodies, the Trust plans to invite their female intermediate and senior-level researchers to place their profile on AcademiaNet. Run by the Bosch Foundation the site provides an excellent tool to identify leading female scientists across Europe for a range of activities including committees.

HEFCE uses its Financial Memorandum with HEIs to require institutions to comply with the Equality Act and uses institutional visits and the annual monitoring process to engage with HEIs on their performance and to help them promote equality and diversity. As a signatory to the Researcher Concordat, HEFCE expects the employers of researchers in receipt of the Council's funding to adhere to the seven principles of the Concordat which include equality and diversity. HEFCE has funded the 'Every Researcher Counts' project, delivered by Vitae, that is designed to promote equality and diversity in research careers by raising the profile of this issue in institutions and developing targeted resources and networks.

HEFCE believes that it has a responsibility to provide information to the public and, wherever appropriate, to provide leadership and good practice.

The [higher education workforce framework](#) looks at the major considerations and challenges facing the workforce of the English higher education sector. It

examines key issues (including, for example, equality and diversity) and draws on evidence to inform policy making and strategic planning at HEIs.

8. Support for returners

What support do you offer to those returning from career breaks to help them achieve a suitable work-life balance and re-engage fully with research?

There are several schemes aimed at researchers wishing to return from a career break, the best known of these being the **Daphne Jackson Fellowship scheme**. The five research councils with a STEMM remit all sponsor this scheme. In addition **re-entry Fellowships** are available from the Wellcome Trust and the Science and Technology Funding Council (STFC) have a strand in their **Ernest Rutherford Fellowship** scheme for returners. These Fellowships are in addition to the usual quota of 12 awarded annually and returner applicants are assessed on the basis of their track record prior to their career break. STFC also offer bursaries which provide support (up to £2500 towards the costs of, for example, additional childcare or other care and travel to the host institution or to meetings) for those seeking to resume an academic research career to develop a proposal suitable for submission to the STFC Fellowship scheme.

EPSRC Institutional sponsorship can be used to support women returning from career breaks to their host institutions. This sponsorship can also be used for teaching buy out; conference participation; research and academic assistance; hosting visitors; collaboration and learning visits to overseas research institutes; and hosting small equipment for independent researchers.

There is a general trend among funders toward best practice in covering maternity, paternity and other extend leave during a research grant. This includes flexibility to move between full time and part time working with extension of the award pro-rata, placing the grant in abeyance for more extended leave, and covering the institutional costs of the leave period

9. Promoting success

How does your organisation promote the success of individuals who have taken career breaks and succeeded in science research careers?

The majority of funders do not specifically promote this, although the following examples show some that present case studies of returners in their publications or on their websites.

Arthritis Research UK promotes positive role models in the form of guest lecturers at their Fellows' Meetings, current Fellows and Fellowship alumni who have taken career breaks along the way. The charity publishes a quarterly magazine for supporters 'Arthritis Today', which includes regular Meet the Experts articles which often include reference to life outside the lab, clinic or surgery.

The Wellcome Trust regularly highlights such individuals in publications, on their corporate website, in the Annual Review and via social media.

Furthermore, successful female researchers are nominated for inclusion in resources such as AcademiaNet referred to earlier, and for awards, including Fellowship of the Academy of Medical Sciences.

The Royal Society includes case studies of Royal Society funded research Fellows on their webpage.

Cancer Research UK invites female researchers who have taken career breaks to be among the speakers at networking and career advice events for our junior scientists.

10. Developing sustainability in academic science careers

How does your organisation ensure more generally that departments manage and encourage flexibility to support sustainable and enjoyable careers in academic science?

Funders mentioned that the Concordat plays an important role in this. In addition the RCUK requires that research organizations provide research staff with a statement at the outset of their employment setting out the provisions for career management and development, including personal skills training, and ensure they have access to appropriate training opportunities. The research organisation must integrate the Research Fellow within the research activities of the host department, whilst ensuring that he or she is able to maintain independence and focus on their personal research programme.

Appendix 2: Survey questions August 2013

Topic 1: A picture of your organisation

1. Describe any initiatives taken by your organisation to address any under-representation of academic and research staff in HE at particular levels/grades, such as attracting more women and/or under-represented groups into STEM disciplines.
2. How does your organisation collect, use and review data for application and award processes? How does your organisation ensure that the data collected influences change within your organisation?
3. What does your organisation do to monitor and implement best practice internally with regards to staff (e.g. recruitment, promotion, career breaks, committee memberships?).

Topic 2: Key career transition points – appointments and promotion

1. What processes are in place to attract applications for funding from female candidates? How are these effectively communicated to ensure the processes are open and transparent?
2. What are the different career stages for women researchers and fellows where support from your organisation may be needed? What type of support is offered by your organisation at these key stages e.g. personal development training, networking opportunities, mentoring programmes?

Topic 3: Career development – policies and activities

1. What support does your organisation provide for newly funded individuals at all levels? What steps do you take to ensure staff in institutions and departments where funded individuals work receive gender equality training?
2. What career development opportunities does your organisation provide? To what extent do researchers you fund engage and contribute to their own personal and career development? How do you ensure the career development of those you fund is supported by institutions and departments in which they work?

Topic 4: Organisation and culture

1. How does your organisation influence the departments that receive funding to;
 - a. Have clear and fair systems for making decisions and allocating workload and resources?
 - b. Use positive messages to address the gender imbalance on committees?
 - c. Address the issue of 'committee overload' where there are small numbers of female staff in the department?

d. Demonstrate a female-friendly and inclusive culture?

Topic 5: Flexibility and managing career breaks

1. What support do you offer to those returning from career breaks to help them achieve a suitable work-life balance and re-engage fully with research?
2. How does your organisation promote the success of individuals who have taken career breaks and succeeded in science research careers?
3. How are policies and practices in your organisation, such as flexible working, promoted to enable women to manage career breaks?
4. How does your organisation ensure more generally that departments manage and encourage flexibility to support sustainable and enjoyable careers in academic science?

Appendix 3: Survey responses

The Athena Forum received responses from:

- Alzheimer's Research UK
- Alzheimer's Society
- Arthritis Research UK
- Ataxia-Telangiectasia Society
- Breakthrough Breast Cancer
- Cancer Research UK
- Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)
- Novo Nordisk UK Research Foundation
- Parkinson's UK
- Research Councils UK (RCUK)
- The Royal Society
- Wellcome Trust
- World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) International