

## **ATHENA PROJECT**

### **Case Study No 8**

## **UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON**

### **SWAN BRONZE AWARD MARCH 2006**

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

### **THE UNIVERSITY**

The University has a staff of around 5,000, half of whom are employed in SET departments. Most of the SET schools are located in the faculty of engineering science and mathematics with some in the faculty of medicine health and life sciences. There is a wide variety of activities, many to a world class standard, such as the school of electronics and computer science and the national oceanography centre. The University is dedicated to supporting research, enterprise and innovation and to providing an intellectually challenging and stimulating educational environment. The University has launched fourteen spin-out companies in recent years, many of which are now part of larger commercial enterprises. Research income makes up a third of its overall income.

### **BACKGROUND**

The University has an association with Athena through its participation in Athena's university good practice survey in 2003 which led to it becoming a founder member of the SWAN Charter in 2005. The Athena Project has received support from all levels of the University from the Vice Chancellor to members of the women in science, engineering and technology network (WiSET).

### **WORK IN SUPPORT OF CHARTER PRINCIPLES**

Within Southampton's corporate strategy there are various references to diversity not just in terms of values but also in the way the University is envisaged in 2010. A cornerstone of the strategy is the University's stated values of freedom, success, creativity, inclusiveness, openness and innovation. These form the basis of the key objectives which include creating a culture that values diversity. As a result the University aims to welcome diversity amongst its staff and seeks to develop their potential.

As part of embedding diversity, the University drafted its equality code of practice in relation to the Research Assessment Exercise 2008 whilst the discussions were underway on the process for determining submissions. This enabled consideration of equality from the very start and where and who was responsible for making decisions on who should be submitted or otherwise. It is hoped by writing the code at this very first stage it will impact positively on the process, making decisions fair, consistent and transparent across the University within the constraints of the differing requirements of the external sub-panels on the various units of assessment.

To advance this embedding through all levels Southampton launched its diversity learning programme, in the 2005/06 academic year, to offer learning in a range of diversity issues, including gender, to all members of University staff. A key part of the programme has been the development of a diversity charter. This details why diversity is important to the University, what is meant by diversity and everyone's rights and responsibilities within that. It is hoped that the

charter and the associated learning programme, will give real meaning to the University's values and help everyone to be clear about what every individual needs to do to make a difference. In this way, the University seeks to create a more inclusive community which attracts, retains and develops the best staff, regardless of any personal characteristic, including gender, or career pattern.

### **Data analysis and reporting**

In recent years there have been significant improvements in data collection at Southampton. In 2003 the action learning set pilot for women in SET identified this as an area where the University had limited provision; without data it was difficult to identify the pattern of women's employment and how it compared to their male counterparts. Since then there have been many steps to improve the completion of Equal Opportunities forms, more accurate data collection on the geography of applicants and clearer data on the promotion process. This has increased the University's ability to identify areas where action can be taken to improve the representation of women in SET and across the whole hierarchy.

Southampton presently has an under-representation of women in senior management roles across the organisation. The SET profile report shows that academic women do not progress through the hierarchy of job levels in the same way as men do. Women make up 58% of the lowest job level and only 10% of the highest level. It appeared there were barriers to women's progression that keep them in the lower paid jobs. The actions described below are aimed to address this to ensure the University is an employer of choice, attracting the best staff from wherever they come.

### **Equal pay audit**

The University is probably one of the first to complete such an audit after implementing a new pay and grading structure. The audit found no significant gender based pay gap within each job family level and therefore Southampton offers equal pay for equal value which is important if it is to both attract and retain women. The percentage pay gap however is some 26% reflecting the dominance of men in the higher levels of the pay and grading structure. Part time employees earn on average 29% less than their full time counterparts and are less likely to receive additional increments. The majority of staff who work part time are women. The starting salaries of women are some 20% less when compared to men. It is thought that as previous salary determines starting salary in a new post, it is probable that breaks in employment are contributory to the difference in starting salaries. The equal pay working group, which included members from WiSET, will consider these findings and make some recommendations for action in the 2006/07 academic year.

### **Recruitment**

A contributing factor to the gender imbalance is the area of recruitment. A small scale study of a cross section of positions in SET has shown that women do not suffer disproportionately in the recruitment process. Their success rates at short listing, interview and selection are all comparable to their male counterparts, however women account for only 16% of the applicants. This low level of female application rate and subsequent intake mean that the imbalance in the work force is not set to change without some intervention to increase the number of women applying for vacancies.

The University is aiming to appeal to women through its membership of Aurora's *Where Women Want to Work* website ([www.www2wk.com](http://www.www2wk.com)) which it joined in June 2005. This marketing tool specifically targets women; it details much of Southampton's female friendly measures and allows the University to be compared with other companies in the private and public sector. Organisations can be rated by visitors to the site; the University's rating has remained above the average for the majority of the time it has been a member.

To build on this initiative, Southampton is working on developing its employer brand, due to launch in 2006. In consultation with members of staff from across the University, including women, there will be a re-branding of the University to appeal to a wide variety of groups. This process will be conscious of the qualities women look for in an employer. The University will be looking to promote more heavily many of the benefits of working at the University such as the enhanced maternity leave and adoption leave offered as well as the range of flexible working options on offer and that are presently not pushed. Part of this work has already taken shape in the new employment strap line '*Excellence through Diversity*' the University's adopted vision for equality.

Activities like employer branding and Aurora membership aim to increase the level of female applicants and hence start to address gender balance in the workforce. The University will be monitoring this in its annual report and hopes to see steady progress over the coming years. As the University has seen that those Schools with larger numbers of women attract more applications from women, it is expected that once there is an increase in female application rates the situation will begin to improve.

### **Retention**

In addition to bringing more women into SET, the University needs to mitigate the numbers of women leaving which represent a higher proportion than their male colleagues. Women make up 52% of the people leaving SET but only 45% of the total workforce.

One of the ways the University endeavours to retain women is through its suite of family friendly policies. For example, the University offers a competitive maternity pay scheme which allows women who are eligible to take 26 weeks of maternity leave at full pay, providing they return to work for 52 weeks after this period. This is a scheme in which the University invested some £430K in 2004/05 and this figure it expects to rise in coming years.

It is acknowledged that people can be reluctant to access family friendly policies for fear of being seen to be doing less of a job or that it may impact on future career progression. The University demonstrates its support for people through one of the ten statements in the diversity charter, expecting that people will support their colleagues in helping them achieve a work/ life balance and can expect the same in return.

The 2006/07 academic year will also see some activity to establish the reasons why the University has low retention of women. This will inform what actions can be taken to reduce the numbers leaving and how best to implement these. This work will be conducted not just with those leaving but also WiSET.

### **Appraisal**

Appraisal is a vital part of building careers within the University. This was identified in the action learning set pilot report published in 2004 as an area that was not felt to be operating effectively. However the most recent audit on this showed an 82% participation rate for staff in academic and research roles. Qualitative feedback was largely positive. This audit is being repeated and due to report early in 2006. In response to concerns raised in the audit and backed up by the action learning set pilot, the appraisal process has been amended to include performance assessment to better serve strategic needs and career development. The message of fair appraisal is being built upon with the staff development office's performance management project which in part is trying to develop senior management thinking in this area. Training for appraisal is ongoing and does include a forum to explore issues of caring, responsibility and maternity that can hinder women's progress in the workplace.

## **Promotions**

The academic promotions report found that women's success rates at school (24%) and university promotion panels (73%) are comparable to or better than their male counterparts. However, while women make up 37% of the academic staff, they only account for 24% of those applying for promotion.

This data highlights how important it is for the University to take positive action in the field of promotion to complete its aim of halving the gender gap between lecturers and readers that it has set itself in its employment action plan 2002/03 - 2005/06.

Reports generated from the action learning set pilot revealed that the promotion process was perceived by women as complex, lacking transparency and not understood, contributing to low application rates. It should be noted that this was conducted in 2003 just after the process was simplified. Since then there have been two complete cycles of promotion which hopefully have gone some way to improving this perception. To ensure the process is seen to be balanced guidance has been written for this round, recommending that women are on promotion panels as the norm. This aims to make the system appeal more to women who may be eligible for promotion but do not put themselves forward.

Data collection for promotions has recently been improved and the University will be better able to monitor this in the future.

Women often spend long periods out of the workplace and this can discourage them from applying for promotion or altering their career pattern to differ from the expected full time pattern. The promotion process is intended to focus on the potential of candidates to perform now and in the future without putting disproportionate weight on past achievements which may have been affected by time out of the workplace, periods of part time working or restrictions for health and safety reasons. This message has been reiterated in the new guidance.

The University has also taken pro-active measures to empower women to apply for promotion. The action learning set has been successful in helping a high percentage of women involved achieve promotion. Piloted in 2003 the set was a place women could share experience and talk through career options in a constructive learning environment. The project was designed to give people confidence and gain direction to further their careers through discussion with peers and colleagues facilitated by a qualified professional. The scheme was open to all members of staff at the key transition point of senior lecturer to reader, as it was then. This has since been piloted for senior female managers across the University and in 2004-05, as part of the University's senior management development programme.

The success of both pilots of action learning has prompted the University to expand this to other areas by training its own facilitators. This project has already secured funding of £20,000 and over 3/4 of the senior women contacted have expressed interest. The University aims to embed this initiative as a long term sustainable part of the system to enable staff in achieving their potential.

## **Mentoring**

While the action learning set focuses on people already on the established academic career path, the University has also targeted women starting out in academia. The school of medicine has had a mentoring scheme in place for post-doctoral researchers since its pilot in the 2003-04 academic year. Mentors have oversight of the mentee's career, fulfilling a variety of roles from coach and advisor to bench-marker and referral agent.

This scheme is open to all post-doctoral staff. Although this is not an opportunity that everyone is interested in, the feedback from those who take part has been positive. The scheme has the full support of the school and has moved from a pilot to a natural part of the career path. Prompted

by this success, the national oceanography centre is presently discussing how such mentoring will work in their context following a similar pilot scheme supported by members of WiSET.

In encouraging female academics in SET to further their careers it is important to promote role models and their achievements. The annual Campbell Lecture established in 2004 is the mechanism by which role models are brought into the University to discuss their research as well as their experiences. The lecture also acts as a promotional tool for the WiSET and vicariously, initiatives such as mentoring and action learning.

### **Networks**

To retain women at the University it is acknowledged that they need a voice so they can help inform policy and influence decision making. This is achieved through the staff networks. The current WiSET network was established in 2003 to enable women to identify the barriers to their progression and retention as they feel and see them and to assist in the development of actions that are designed to minimise artificial barriers that prevent their progression. The WiSET group has been well received and is the most autonomous of all the diversity networks.

Theano is another group the University invests in by funding a member of staff for half a day a week to run and organise its activities. Theano's work is closely related to WiSET and the two act together to try to improve conditions, promotion and retention of women in SET. Theano is more student orientated than WiSET and aims to provide networking opportunities to undergraduates and postgraduates in the form of workshops, talks and social events all of which are funded by the University. Theano and WiSET have been instrumental in helping achieve the aims of the University on women in SET and informing policy at both school and central levels.

### **Work-life balance**

The first University action learning set pilot revealed that women see the University as a very male-dominated environment isolating to women. The University has a large framework of policy to gear it towards changing this culture to one where women are able to succeed. A hall mark of the male-orientated culture is long hours where time at work can become valued over quality of output. To address this, the University has a series of policies (flexible working, leave for family responsibilities, and voluntary reduced hours) to enable employees to have a work life balance.

To support the framework for work-life balance Southampton has introduced child care vouchers this year to make work for people with children more financially manageable. This was recommended by the action learning set pilot report and a WiSET survey of child care provision. Take up rates are expected to be high as the on site day nursery, the third largest university nursery in the UK, is already used heavily by staff whose children make up over half its population. The scheme will allow working parents to better manage their time and finances resulting in more effective recruitment and retention of women. This provides a valuable benefit for which 26% of women in SET are eligible as they have declared caring responsibility for a child.

To raise awareness of another important work-life balance issue, the university's carers information pack was launched in September 2005 to provide advice and information to carers who often find themselves with caring responsibilities but no knowledge of where to get assistance. There is also a section for managers who will want to support carers in the workplace as far as possible. This is highly relevant in SET as 27% of both women and men have declared caring responsibilities.

The University recognises that policy alone will not necessarily affect the representation of women, or any other under-represented group; what is required alongside such procedurally driven approaches is culture change. One way of achieving this is the inclusion gender and caring issues as part of the diversity learning programme. The diversity charter also contains support for work-life balance principles as one of its ten key statements.

## **THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

The Athena project board comprised a deputy vice-chancellor, the director of HR, the head of staff diversity, the chair of Theano and the chair and representatives from WiSET. At their initial meeting they resolved that information would be collected through the staff diversity office (SDO) and then sent to the board for approval. The board also decided that the University would apply for a Bronze award, although it was felt significant progress towards Silver status was being made but was not as yet complete. The data collection process was taken forward by the SDO collating information from existing reports and initiatives. This was made possible by the cooperation of members of WiSET, Theano and various sections of University.

## **DEVELOPING THE ACTION AGENDA**

The Athena project board has concluded that Southampton had made some steady and meaningful progress towards gender equality in SET. There was still a lot of work to be done and continuous assessment of the programmes was already in place. Improvements in data collection would allow these assessments to be made over the coming years. The University's approach to gender and diversity were best shown in its action learning, in the diversity learning programme and its response to the Research Assessment Exercise. As demonstrated below the University is keen to embed diversity practice and principles into its business so that it is reflected across the University. This is a long term strategy but one believed to be the most sustainable and effective for Southampton.

## **THE PLAN**

### **SET baseline and academic profile**

The University will use and make available the baseline information it now has.

The equal pay working group will consider the findings of the equal pay audit and make recommendation for action to be implemented in 2006/07.

Activity to establish the reasons why a disproportionate number of women leave the work will involve both leavers and the WiSET group

### **Key career transition points**

The appraisal audit will be repeated in 2006.

The University will train its own facilitators to allow the action learning scheme to continue.

### **Culture change and gender balance in decision making**

The University will offer diversity learning to all members of University staff.

The University is reviewing its employer brand and will launch a new image to appeal to a wide variety of groups.