

ATHENA SWAN CHARTER

Case Study No 21

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

SWAN SILVER AWARD MARCH 2007

Queen's University Belfast, a founder member of the Athena SWAN Charter, was awarded Silver SWAN recognition in March 2007. The recognition award is valid until the end of December 2010.

THE UNIVERSITY

Queen's University Belfast has a student population of over 16,000 undergraduates (61% female) and over 4,000 postgraduates (56% female). There are 3,500 staff. The University has 12 SET Schools employing 643 people, of whom 27% are women.

Queen's draws students and academic staff from more than 90 countries and has strong international research links. The University was recently invited to join the Russell Group in recognition of its reputation as a centre of excellence in research and education.

BACKGROUND

Queen's has been active on equal opportunities for the last two decades, and since 1998 has been required to meet the statutory requirements of the NI Act 1998, which are more exacting than those faced by employers elsewhere in the UK.

The Equal Opportunities Unit was established in the late 1980s, as a specialised unit within Human Resources, to provide expert advice on equal opportunities issues. It monitors the workforce in terms of specific equality categories, developing best practice, investigating internal complaints, developing affirmative/positive action plans, providing advice to management and staff, overseeing the University's legal obligations, and carrying out equal pay audits.

The Women's Forum was set up in 1999 to address long-standing gender imbalances at Queen's. It is chaired by the Senior Pro-Chancellor and includes men as well as women from all job categories. 2 Pro-Vice-Chancellors are members. The Women's Forum meets monthly and reviews reports from various subgroups and their champions and monitors the work of the Queen's Gender Initiative. In May 2000 the Forum produced a report based on the views of 600 women in a listening exercise.

The Queen's Gender Initiative (QGI) was founded to implement the 12 recommendations of the Women's Forum report. The QGI is independent of Human Resources, with a Director responsible directly to the Vice-Chancellor. It has an annual budget of £86,000 and an office of 3 staff. In response to criticism in an evaluation in 2003/04 about lack of publicity, Queen's Gender Initiative has set up a website and distributed a leaflet to all staff about its work.

In 2002 Queen's developed a Northern Ireland Local Academic Women's Network (LAWN) with the University of Ulster, and participated in the 2003 Athena Good Practice in UK Universities survey. The University received a Royal Society Athena award in 2003.

WORK IN SUPPORT OF CHARTER PRINCIPLES

SET Baseline and academic profile

- Queen's makes an annual monitoring return to the NI Equality Commission and carries out a 3-yearly review of employment composition and practices. Reports go through the main university committee structure. The University monitors the impact of policies, identifies any under-representations, takes appropriate positive action, and sets targets and timetables.
- Regular seminars are held for various categories of staff and surveys are carried out to uncover and make recommendations on any particular issues. Ensuing reports are sent through the main university committees.

Key Career transition points

- Queen's monitors the number of women taking career breaks, number of part-time staff, number of women taking maternity leave/applying for maternity leave cover, promotions/accelerated increments/discretionary points (including those in SET).
- In a survey of why women do not apply for Head of School posts, the main barrier, cited by both men and women, was the macho environment. Other barriers include the long hours culture. The University has instituted a peer support group for women professors, encouraged job-share at the top, instituted seminars, training and plans a major conference in 2007 to persuade women to undertake responsibility. The 'women in waiting' are targeted with specific events, eg, an annual promotions seminar for academic staff, regular seminars for all categories of staff, including networking seminar for research staff, and professorial women attend a dinner once per semester.
- An annual mentoring training exercise is run by a Champion who has been seconded one day a week to roll out mentoring across the University to encourage women to think about career advancement. Since 2002, a total of 93 academic women in SET have been either mentors or mentees. 34% of these SET women have been promoted as against 28% who were not on the scheme.

Culture change and gender balance in decision-making

In 2006 35% of Senate members were women, compared with 27% in 2000. There were 30% women on Academic Council compared with 19% in 2000.

- Queen's is seeking funding for more portraits of women and has commissioned work as a visual reminder of the important roles of women in the University, for example, a Council Chamber painting, 'Women Emerging from the Shadows'. 3 portraits have been commissioned, 2 of women in SET.
- A Women's Forum Committees subgroup has been set up to make proposals that will increase the voice of women in the University. All women were asked if they would like to place their name on the Register of those willing to sit on committees/give talks to internal/external audiences.

Work/life balance practices

- Queen's monitors the uptake of flexible working, career breaks, part-time working and reviews exit questionnaires to identify any possible issues. A successful flexible working hours pilot scheme has been followed by mainstreaming, and an annual survey of flexible working for clerical, technical and

academic-related staff is undertaken.

- Queen's Childcare Package includes after school and summer holiday provision, a voucher scheme and salary sacrifice scheme, and a register of childminders. A major review of childcare in 2006 led to more places and other improvements. A maternity leave cover scheme gives Schools funding to find replacement cover. There is also a carers' package and associated website.

Champions and responsibilities

- A Director was appointed for the QGI. The Women's Forum set up 27 subgroups, each with its own champion, which report back monthly.

THE SELF-ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The 19 members of the Self Assessment Team were drawn from across the University's SET Schools and included representatives from the Women's Forum, the QGI, the Equal Opportunities Unit and the SWAN Task Group. The Personnel Manager was also a core member of the team. Specific SWAN Champions in each SET School will take the action plan forward in association with the SWAN Task Group.

DEVELOPING THE ACTION AGENDA

The SWAN Task Group involved representatives of the Women's Forum, senior management of the University (both for their knowledge and to involve them in the planning process), and representatives of SET women at various levels from lecturer to professor, and with different career patterns. The group has agreed a specific SET programme with the University for the next five years and will monitor its progress bi-annually.

Detailed analysis of information on a School basis has enabled Queen's to identify the barriers to progress and introduce realistic action plans for women to progress in sizeable numbers through the University. In Medicine and Dentistry the focus will be progression to Senior Lecturer/Reader and Professor. In Science the University will increase the number of women progressing beyond Lecturer grades and also increase the number of female post-doctorates. In Engineering the goal is to increase the representation of women at each grade as a means of ensuring appropriate representation in senior positions.

Queen's has experienced some problems in effectively reaching research staff and alleviating their sense of isolation. Some attend LAWN events and have become involved in mentoring. As postdoctoral fellows are naturally more strongly committed to activities within their research groups, the University plans to engage them more fully through SWAN SET-focused activities.

In 2005 Queen's was restructured to remove the Faculty level of management and to reduce the number of Schools. As a result, there has been a drop in the percentage of senior management women, which had advanced from 11% in 2000 to 17% in 2004, but then fell to 13% in 2006. The percentage of academic women in senior management advanced from 16% to 19% between 2000 and 2004, but fell to 7% after restructuring. Correcting this imbalance is now a key part of the new five-year strategy.

Experience in the QGI has shown that commitment is very strong at the top, among women in most faculties, including SET, and in the relevant administrative departments. But, with notable exceptions, there is less commitment among Heads of School, who are in a prime position to support or hamper

progress. The five-year strategy includes measures to address this.

THE PLAN

SET baseline and academic profile

- Review the SET figures twice a year through the task group, including SWAN Champions (ongoing)
- Discuss with Government Departments the commissioning of a project (as in the Republic of Ireland) to investigate the shortfall of women in science in NI and how to encourage girls to read science subjects (before 2011)
- Explore the setting and monitoring of admissions targets for women undergraduates and postgraduates in SET (before 2011)
- Encourage Deans to monitor and support their Heads of Schools' achievement in increasing representation and roles of women in their School (2008/09)
- Continue to monitor equal pay, targets and timetables, appointment and promotions success rates, exit questionnaires, flexible working, maternity cover, parental leave, dependant leave and takeup of courses (ongoing)

Key career transition points

- Recruit more girls into SET before GCSE choices, through work in NI schools, such as road shows demonstrating that science subjects are not just for boys (immediately)
- Introduce scheme to encourage women undergraduates to proceed to postgraduate research by providing vacation internships to work with research teams (2007/08)
- Encourage women PhD students to advance to postdoctoral work and an academic career by offering career development research training packages with role models
- Continue to provide mentoring for SET women postdocs, internal and cross-university as appropriate
- Negotiate six months' full-time research (and appropriate cover) for women academics returning after maternity leave (2007/08)
- Continue to provide mentoring for academic women, an advice scheme for promotions and grant applications, and an annual promotions seminar (immediately)
- Continue to provide peer support for the women professors group, and create occasions for them to bring along a postdoc or junior colleague, maintain other networking opportunities for women academics and research staff (in hand)
- Develop a career training package for postdocs and arrange experience in other laboratories (2007/08)

Culture change and gender balance in decision-making

- Attract more women into non-traditional jobs within the university through the WINS (Women in Non-traditional Sectors) project of Belfast City Council (ongoing)
- Encourage women to apply for senior management posts by reviewing criteria and support, ensuring core committee experience and addressing the possibility of job-share (2007/08)
- Target second-tier managers (Directors of Research, Directors of Education and Directors of Fora) as well as women professors, and offer them: a) a series of seminars with successful Heads of School who maintain high research profiles; b) career development training through, eg, the Leadership Foundation; c) specialist mentoring by current senior managers, at Queen's or elsewhere (2007/08)
- Ensure an increased voice for women on committees and working groups (with the Vice-Chancellor)
- Commission more portraits of women for prestigious public spaces (immediately)
- Hold a conference in autumn 2007 on women's later academic careers to allow very senior women academic managers to talk about their experience (in hand)
- Hold a conference on university women in Ireland to coincide with the centenary in 2008 celebrating the achievement of women at Queen's (April 2008)

Work/Life balance practices

- Maintain current initiatives and policies for all categories of staff and investigate home-working and condensed hours working (ongoing)
- Continue to press for more full-time childcare places for staff (ongoing)
- Ensure that committees routinely work within core hours (with the Vice-Chancellor)

Champions and responsibilities

- Maintain the Director for the QGI and the 27 subgroup champions (ongoing)
- Appoint a 'Swan Champion' in each of the SET schools with appropriate support from the QGI (2007/08)