Improving gender balance at Aston

An update on progress with Athena SWAN - May 2016

In the last few months we have identified the key areas on which we need to focus:

**Five key aspects of our “FAIR FUTURES FOR ALL” campaign**

**Understanding the baselines and trends**

To show improvement, we need to understand our starting points. Data collection and analysis is underway, along with benchmarking against other universities.

**Improving processes**

Improved guidance for staff and managers in 2016 PDRs, encouraging consideration of career progression opportunities, mentoring and coaching, appropriate diverse experience.

“I’m not biased”, “I don’t discriminate”

Unconscious bias training to help staff consider how they can eliminate gender imbalances in day to day activities, in images, language used, committee membership, appointments internally, representation externally.

**Recruitment and induction**

Improving gender balance as staff start their careers at Aston.

**Flexible careers**

Supporting careers wherever possible with varied working patterns, career breaks, the nursery.
More baselines and trends

Previously, we showed graphically the proportions of female students and staff. Our aim is to show positive trends towards gender balance and increased diversity in these statistics. Athena SWAN also asks us to reflect more generally on the gender balance in all University activities. One part of this is how influential committees, panels and boards increasingly involve an improving balance of both genders and also a better representation of other diverse personal characteristics. For example, on Aston’s Council there are 26 “governors” of whom 6 are female (i.e. 23%). Further female nominations to Council are being sought as vacancies arise. Senate currently includes about 26% females (12 in 46) and the recent call for nominations specifically requested staff to consider more diverse nominations.

The University Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC) has close to 50:50 gender mix as does the International Strategy Committee (ISC). Interestingly these 2 committees have approached close to balance from the opposite directions – LTC from male dominance, ISC from female dominance.
University and School “Self-Assessment Teams” (SATs) have been formed, along with sub-groups to address specific aspects of the submissions and ensure representation from staff in different roles, career stages, work areas and grades / levels.

*Other volunteers with experience or interest are welcome to join the SATs either in a School, the University Centre or across the University. Please contact a School Lead or University Lead as appropriate.*

_EAS - Robert Berry_

LHS – Julia Brown

ABS – Yves Guillaume

LSS – Gertrud Reeshemius

AMS – Rachel Burn

University – Alison Hodge
Focus groups to explore staff views of recruitment and induction, career development and flexible career options

Athena SWAN submissions must include very detailed statistical analyses but also more qualitative views of staff, throughout the University. We are therefore forming a set of focus groups that will discuss with staff their views on a wide range of issues that affect their day to day working in the University and the development of their careers for the medium and longer term. We will be inviting staff to contribute in these groups so please look out for invitations to participate.

Aston mentoring scheme

Mentoring is often found to be a very helpful way in which individuals may obtain or share advice about their own career development and professional interests. Aston has a peer mentoring scheme and this is being extended. Mentors may be from work areas that are different from your own, and can therefore enable individuals to make contact with someone else who has similar circumstances, experience or needs and interests. These can be at any career stage from early career, to retirement, through promotions, career breaks etc. 
http://www.aston.ac.uk/staff/staffdev/mentoring/

With the 2016 PDRs (Annual reviews) just starting, considering finding a mentor or offering to be a mentor may be timely!

Aston Women events

The “Aston Women” initiative was launched in October 2015 with a view to supporting all Aston women in planning their careers and achieving their goals. At the launch, two main themes of work were identified; mentoring and career progression. Since then, we have been active in working with HR to invigorate the mentoring scheme, which will be re-launched this year. The development of a network of supportive women was identified as key in relation to supporting women with their own goals and career progression. To this end, regular events have been organised including:
• Returning to work workshop, presented by Clara Wilcox from The Balance Collective
• Work-life balance in academia, presented by Professor Sarah Hainsworth from the University of Leicester
• Engage. Influence. Succeed – a communication skills workshop presented by Judith Beale from ZEISS
• Forced Marriage Seminar, presented by the Forced Marriage Unit

In June we will be hosting a networking event for BAME women in Birmingham in collaboration with Zahara Women.

We have launched an Aston Women book club and also hold regular parent/carer lunches.

Our Facebook page can be found here: https://www.facebook.com/Aston-Women-591594830993133/
Expanded Aston nursery

Aston University Nursery and Pre-School moved to a brand new purpose built building in January 2016. The nursery caters for up to 104 children aged from 3 months to 5 years. The nursery is Ofsted rated from Good to Outstanding. More details can be found on the website here: [http://www.aston.ac.uk/nursery/](http://www.aston.ac.uk/nursery/)

More information on Equality and Diversity from other relevant sources – there are many available by simple searching!

A few examples

“Equality and Diversity for Actins for All” HE and research focused:

“The Ten Steps for sustaining the pipeline of female talent in science, technology, engineering and manufacturing (STEM)" STEM focused, but still broadly applicable:

https://www.wisecampaign.org.uk/consultancy/industry-led-ten-steps/10-steps

“Improving the Gender Balance on British Boards” Oct 2015 Davies Review – focused on the top levels of organisations, internationally. The approaches are still relevant. Page 25 shows a useful checklist, with similarities to the Vitae and 10 Steps above.


“Progressing women in STEM roles” – documents can be downloaded here: