Good Practice Guide: Principle 1

Robust organisational framework

“A robust organisational framework to deliver equality of opportunity and reward.”

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Establish organisational framework

Senior management are clearly committed to the process, there is evidence of the impact of the communication and reporting mechanisms, and there is clear accountability for the allocated resources (both time and money).

- The Juno Equality Action Plan has been incorporated into the school’s strategic plan for the next three years and the requirement to monitor equality and diversity has been written into the role description of the head of school.
- All heads of groups are asked to report on their own group’s Juno activities annually to the all-staff meeting.
- Department communications are cascaded down and up through heads of groups at group meetings. Groups meet monthly in term time and Juno is a standing item on their agenda.
- Initially, the Juno process was driven by the head of department and Juno Champion. This work then resulted in the formation of: a wider Juno Committee, consisting of staff with a range of different experience and duties within the department; a Research Staff Forum; and a Postgraduate Forum. This structure, supplementing the established committee structure of the department, provides effective mechanisms of consultation and communication with the respective groups (academic staff, research staff, postgraduates, administrative and technical staff). There is now an embedded calendar of meetings and events for these groups, as well as holding additional meetings when required.
- Research assistants felt that they were not properly represented in the department, which has now been addressed with the formation of the Research Assistant Committee, which will meet regularly and report at head of group meetings.
- Practices are now embedded within different administrative hubs providing an in-depth appreciation of the undergraduate gender statistics, undergraduate final-year motivation survey, PhD five-year review and generic reasons for drop out, research assistant destination statistics, and recruitment of academic and research assistant staff. National, university and departmental surveys have helped us to form a clearer understanding of outstanding gender issues.
- The department supports the Juno project by funding:
  - weekly Friday (Juno) coffee mornings, providing money for cakes, biscuits and administrators’ time for organisation;
  - Women in Physics group events targeted at undergraduates;
  - travel costs for female speakers invited to talk at Women in Physics events;
  - Juno events, e.g. to support academic staff, research staff, and postgraduate survey events and forum meetings (chocolates and tea/coffee);
  - a yearly “Celebrate Success Event” held in June (food and drinks);
  - travel costs for Juno Champion to attend Juno workshops, and administrative staff time to collate the statistics data for Juno and to help prepare Juno application documentation;
  - new posters for department foyer and corridors – showing diversity;
  - alumni careers events to which undergraduates, postgraduates, research staff and academics are invited.
The Research and Resources Committee is responsible for the allocation and monitoring of departmental resources. The chair of the Research and Resources Committee and head of department approve funding for Juno events.

The degree of senior management commitment is further demonstrated by the substantial financial assistance committed to the project. This includes funds to recruit and employ a postdoctoral research assistant to the Juno Project and resources to support the PhD project of a student whose thesis explores the perception, participation and performance of women in undergraduate physics.

Monitoring and evidence base

Continue to monitor gender-disaggregated quantitative data and provide evidence of qualitative data from staff over time. Identify any discrepancies in gender representation, the factors that may be causing them and the impact of any actions so far.

Updates on the baseline and the SET academic staff profile: there are currently 58 scientific staff in the department of physics including academics and research staff. In July 2010, nine out of 46 scientists (19.6%) were female; in May 2011, female scientists were 10 out of 61 (16%).

The department’s gender statistics compare favourably with national figures except that we have a slightly lower proportion of female postgraduates. The percentage of women academics has remained around 10% over recent years as the department has grown, which implies a growth in the absolute number of female staff. 25% of the female staff are part-time. There has been considerable growth of women at lecturer and senior lecturer grades in percentage terms over the monitoring period. Given women’s percentage representation in the UK pipeline we have focused on retention and support of the existing staff in the department. The action plan addresses improvements in the male/female balance at postgraduate, postdoc and lecturer grades.

Our bespoke front-end database was modified to include gender-disaggregated analysis tools. In addition, when the university implemented a simple reporting system, showing long-term trends in applications, conversion and admittances for all university admissions tutors, gender disaggregation was implemented in direct response to a request by the physics department.

Staff survey: the university commissioned a survey of staff opinion on many aspects of working at the university. The results of this survey showed the university to be in the top 10 of the 300 employers surveyed, which included a large number of universities. Even more encouraging were the results for the department of physics, which had better scores on almost all questions than the university average, having an average ranking second in the university. Particularly relevant for this submission, the statement that the department respects gender equality had a positive response from 98% of staff (compared with 91% for the university). In addition, 93% of staff said that they were generally able to work flexible hours and/or had flexible-working arrangements (compared with a university average of 77%). Also of interest is the response that 83% of staff considered themselves to be supported by their line manager in accessing the identified staff development activities (university average, 74%) and 81% were satisfied with their current level of staff development (university average, 66%).

In the focus group recently held with postgraduate research assistants in the department, they were questioned about the department’s flexible-working policies. The feedback was that they all felt that they can work flexibly and this flexibility is seen as embedded within the culture.

Examples of actions taken this year include: ensuring that when women postgraduate candidates were interviewed, they met at least one female academic and a current female postgraduate or researcher; holding a meeting of the Women in Physics Committee with final-year MSci female undergraduate students in order to give them as much general information as possible about doing a PhD; ensuring that a female academic presented at postgraduate open day; including images to illustrate diversity of the postgraduate admissions web page; populating the department, particularly the foyer, with posters to illustrate diversity.