Departmental structures and systems that support and encourage the career progression and promotion of all staff and enable men and women to progress and continue in their careers.

Transparent appraisal and development
Ensure that all staff, including postdoctoral research assistants, are appraised regularly, that there is a mentoring scheme in place, or under development, and that all staff have access to impartial career guidance. Demonstrate the impact of these measures.

The appraisal process considers all aspects of the individual’s working life (research, teaching and administration) and anything that would affect it, including personal circumstances, career breaks, life-changing events and flexible-working opportunities. The system has been running for several years and is now embedded across the whole university. The completion rate for last year was 91% for the university as a whole and 100% for the faculty of science and technology, which includes physics. Staff are usually appraised by their line manager. For more senior staff this might be the head of division or the head of department. All staff have the option to choose a different appraiser, who may not be their line manager, but must be an appropriate person agreed by the head of department. All appraisers receive mandatory training. Postgraduate students have their own appraisal system, run by the central postgraduate service office and conducted every term with their supervisor, deputy supervisor and their independent advisor.

This system ensures that postgraduate students have an opportunity to give feedback regarding their programme that is independent of their meetings with their supervisor. In addition, all postgraduate students are encouraged to fill out an online development needs analysis in which they assess their own capabilities on a regular basis. They may, if they wish, invite their supervisor to see and comment on this assessment.

The department aims to provide an environment in which all staff are valued and able to flourish. A key part of this provision is the Staff Review and Development scheme, which provides an opportunity for individuals to discuss and plan career development with a senior colleague, and to review achievements and issues arising in the course of their work. The department’s scheme is in line with university policy and is administered by the head of department’s office. The departmental administrators are very much engaged with the developments of the university Staff Review and Development scheme and will influence changes to improve the quality of reviews for all university research staff, in particular using the department’s experience of the Athena SWAN programme. The department’s Staff Review and Development scheme was modified to provide an annual review for research staff in their first five years, starting six months from start of contract and ending six months before end of contract, such that appropriate career advice and encouragement to apply for personal fellowships, in particular those targeted at women, could be given. The department uses a group of skilled senior reviewers, whose contributions are recognised in the Workload Model. All record forms are scrutinised by the head of department to monitor, identify and prioritise training and career advice, and to identify underlying issues; feedback is reported at advisory board and staff meetings.

“For the next generation of women physicists, making small changes will make a huge difference.”
Prof. Val Gibson
University of Cambridge
A perennial issue in the department has been the implementation of a mentoring scheme that works effectively. Although we run a voluntary mentoring scheme in which all new staff are assigned a mentor, the uptake of mentoring among postdocs has been poor. The department has introduced a revised mentoring scheme for all staff that requires research groups to actively assign mentors to new staff members and report on the uptake (providing the name of a mentor within a one-month probationary period). The online mentoring support has also been improved with a list of specialist mentors who advise staff on various aspects of working in the department; career development in general is published on the website.

In addition to the department’s activities, the university provides many forums for career advice and support at key career transition points. Excellent advice is available from the University Careers Service; the science careers advisor runs three surgeries per month, with one-to-one appointments at the department to discuss opportunities in academia and industry. We plan to undertake a review of the careers service provision within the department. The university runs a widely acclaimed Professional Development Programme for PIs at all career levels; activities include a grant submission support scheme, skills development, leadership and management training, and the “New Perspectives for Women” workshops. There are also career development seminars for early-career women researchers, topics include confidence building in the workplace, “speaking up and saying no” and “working smarter not harder”; these are widely publicised and encouraged within the department. The department also hosts many of these activities, such as the “Cake and Careers” event.

All academic staff are considered for promotion annually through the academic staff review. There is no sense in which staff are required to “put themselves forward for promotion”. There are clearly defined criteria of achievements that must be demonstrated for promotion available on the website and recently updated at the request of the Athena SWAN Committee. All academic staff are required by the department to put forward their CV for consideration by the departmental academic staff review committee, which comprises the professors in the department and the dean of the science faculty. University policy requires that this committee includes at least one female professor. At present, there are no women professors of physics and so a female professor from another science department attends. The committee is aware of those staff who have had a career break and this is explicitly taken into consideration. The departmental academic staff review committee decides who, in their opinion, meets the promotion criteria. These staff are put forward and there is no “cap” on numbers.

One of the first issues that the Juno Committee tackled was drawing up a document to explain the early stages of the promotion process to make it more transparent. It was one of the points raised when the women academics in the department were interviewed by the member of the Juno Committee who comes from staff development. The document was finalised with agreement from all of the head of groups and is on the departmental website.

The head of department invites all academic staff to submit an annual “summary of achievement” record. A review by the Juno Committee suggested that women were less likely to respond to the invitation. Action will be taken in advance of the next promotion round to encourage more women to submit.

Transparent promotion processes and procedures
Ensure that all staff are aware of the promotions process and the criteria for promotion. Support staff through the promotions process and take steps to encourage potential candidates for promotion.