

The aims of the University of Surrey project, supported by the 2000 Athena Development Programme, were to improve the recruitment, retention and career progression of women in science, engineering and technology (SET) and to support women in playing a more significant role in shaping the university's direction and culture. The project's objectives were to:

- collect and analyse information on career progression
- investigate possible indirect causes of discrimination in career progression
- develop management training:
 - to counteract identified discriminatory practices
 - for staff on both sides of the appointment, probation and promotion procedures
 - to give women the experience they might not get in their departments because of typical gender-influenced task allocations
- develop a network of friendly non-specialist women peers and senior colleagues in SET to:
 - review grant proposals
 - provide information, encouragement and support on the promotion process
 - develop a forum with successful women leaders in industry and business
 - offer strategy and good practice workshops to more junior colleagues

Despite Surrey's increasing number of women in SET and higher-grade posts, women were under-represented on most university committees and the university had found it difficult to retain the women it attracted. There remained a perception that progression was more difficult for women. This was variously ascribed to:

- the entrenched outlook of some older staff
- the culture in some of the male-dominated SET departments
- a differential allocation of responsibilities which were differently valued for promotion
- a lack of flexibility in combining career and caring responsibilities.

The project committee recognised that:

- women were less confident in putting themselves forward as candidates for positions of responsibility and promotion
- women waited until they were certain they had all the attributes required, unlike men who made earlier riskier applications.
- allowing women to see what was involved in senior positions through work shadowing and targeting women for training to fit them for places on university committees were ways for women to achieve higher levels of self-confidence.

THE UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

The University of Surrey is a 1960's technological foundation, which has moved somewhat away from its initial SET bias. It remains one of the smaller universities, with a strong research record and commitment to teaching. Surrey is above average for the proportion of women senior staff and professors. In SET there has been a significant increase in the number of women academics in the last 10 years. For example in 1989, there were 5 women academics in engineering all at lecturer level. By 2000 there were 14, including 1 professor and 7 readers/senior lecturers.

Joint Project Managers	Dr Nicole Rockliff Jane Fielding
Project Committee	Professor Glynis Breakwell, succeeded by Professor Sara Arber (chair), Alan Behagg, Jenny Grant, Professor Maria Petrou
Contact	n.rockliff@surrey.ac.uk



BACKGROUND

The University of Surrey had established and effective equal opportunities policies and a good record of fair appraisals, staff development and management training. However the more subliminal 'cultural' aspects which tended to disadvantage certain groups were not addressed by the university's training provision, nor did its equal opportunities data collection and monitoring take account of such issues. The project team felt that things would not change unless they could provide the university's senior management with hard evidence of this largely indirect and subconscious discrimination.

THE PROJECT

The project had three main parts:

- setting up a SET women's forum, for networking, formal and informal contact and to deliver some women-only staff development activities
- a survey of academic staff to explore progression histories and links with different areas of responsibility
- developing a career programme for women in SET, informed by the results of the survey, which would become part of the university's staff development programme

SET women's forum and staff development

The project team used the women's forum and its members as a sounding board and to test perceptions and their suggestions for change. The first formal meeting was addressed by a senior woman academic who talked about her career and the benefits of moving between HEIs and different academic fields. From the ensuing discussion of women's development needs, the agendas were set for future meetings:

- promotion procedures, examining what truly was valued and how to prepare a suitable profile
- the university's financial and planning systems
- achieving outcomes at meetings, preparing for them and conduct at

meetings- body language, voice control and interventions

Two members of the promotion committees gave a session on promotion to SL/readers and professors. They covered procedures and official criteria, but most interesting for participants was the discussion of the 'real' criteria and the effect of taking maternity leave and/or part-time appointments. Following this the promotion committee members took these issues back to their committee.

The session on achieving successful outcomes from committee meetings has been time tabled to lead into a joint event with the University of Luton to share the learning from their 'Inclusive Committees' project, also part of Athena's 2000 Development Programme.

The session on financial and planning systems will take place in the autumn, together with an open meeting with senior management to share the results of the analysis of the survey and to start firming up the action agenda from the project.

Survey of academic staff

The project wanted to compare SET and non-SET academics' pathways for both women and men, so the questionnaire was sent to all academics, full and part-time (370 men and 130 women). Some 160 replies were received (over 28% of men responded and over 47% of women). The questionnaire covered career and promotion history, areas of responsibility and included issues arising from discussions in the women's forum. The results from the survey were used with the focus groups of men and women (separately) to explore the issues further.

Staff development programme for women

As the project progressed the women's forum came to be recognised not only as a valuable sounding board and networking tool but as an effective means for delivering the learning activities needed to equip women to play

a full and satisfying role in departmental and university life. The findings from the questionnaire and focus groups identified a range of organisational, structural and cultural issues common across the academic community (men and women in science, engineering and human sciences) which could best be addressed by a university wide development programme.

LEARNING/TRANSFERABLE MESSAGES

The survey and the focus groups addressed what the project saw as key to the career progression of women in SET and to the promotion prospects of men and women in all disciplines:

Administration and committees ‘unlike teaching and research, administration was optional.’ There was little evidence of a system for appointing individuals to administrative roles. Such roles were not seen to be valued in terms of promotion. They might help to meet senior/powerful people but the workload, for example on student admissions, was out of proportion and could get in the way of research. Similarly, women were under-represented on the university’s high level/high profile strategic policy committees, but over-represented on the working committees such as staff and student welfare:

- there were dangers - *‘being on a course/exam board can, at first, help you get to know how things work but if you keep at it too long it doesn’t really benefit you’.*
- some was necessary but only of limited use in furthering a career while some *‘puts you in the eye of the people who make decisions ...*
- *‘there was an inverse correlation between workload and the public profile’*
- *‘girly bits of jobs eg dealing with troubled students were jobs for someone with plenty of tissues in their bag’*
- there were those who *‘were never there when students want to know their exam results and are always doing something valuable like going to*

a conference’

- the system allowed people to dodge administrative chores *‘the more incompetent you are the less jobs you get’*
- heads of department (HODs) should ensure that *‘significant work was recognised and acknowledged and that perceptions and others’ understanding go with the contributions’*

Teaching was the fixed point, otherwise academics had near complete autonomy. However for junior staff the allocation of teaching raised problems; it was seen as ad hoc with an unfair distribution of teaching loads. Appointments tended to be made on the basis of research but this could make it difficult to improve teaching standards *‘there are only a small number of people who can be trusted with key teaching’.* However teaching was seen as undervalued in terms of promotion.

Research the organisation of research and membership of research groups was seen as ad hoc and without much consultation with individuals. The traditional model of applying for grants was contrasted with the growing trend of approaching departments to do/bid for work. This meant that academics have to be known *‘it depends on networking and having a reputation’.* HODs had a role here in minimising internal conflicts and ensuring that research teams supported their young researchers.

Promotion career progression was perceived as being based entirely on research and consequent publications. Although in theory weight was given to administration and teaching this was not seen to be the case in practice. The system was seen as *‘unstructured and flawed being hugely dependent on the HOD’*, the perception was that personal applications not supported by the HOD *‘may get disapproved of and their promotion prospects put back’* but against this *‘the university has to promote early or risk losing its best staff.’*

Work life balance present-ism was seen as disadvantaging those with

dependents *'the people who move up the tree in my department are those who are still in the office at 7 or later'*. The balancing factor was that the people who were around most tended to get given the time consuming jobs

The 'good' academic there was general agreement on the need to encourage collegiality, enthuse others and contribute to the general good, but distinctions were drawn between the good and the successful academic and between the academic as a leader and as a scholar *'when the scholar - intelligent, enthusiastic, dedicated, with an ability to write and think in depth and breadth is appointed to a leadership role eg a head of department, all hell breaks loose.'*

Departmental organisation the problems were compounded by the lack of structure in departments. It was agreed that management development training was essential to develop the abilities to take decisions quickly and to delegate.

Personal development and training there was a general feeling that the importance of personal development was undervalued with supervisory staff paying lip service and a perfunctory approach to appraisal. Individuals who were promoted on the basis of their research skills were then expected to fulfill management roles for which they had neither aptitude nor training.

OUTCOMES

The women's forum, the questionnaire and focus groups all contributed to an understanding of the academic culture of the university and of SET and their related organisation and procedures. The project team is discussing with the university action to:

- improve the university's management development programme to equip HODS and heads of research teams with the management skills they need
- change the promotion procedure to be more transparent and equitable
- introduce fair departmental arrangements for:

- appointing academics to administrative roles and rotation of such responsibilities
- appraisal
- allocating individuals to research groups
- allocating and monitoring teaching loads

THE FUTURE

The project team and members of the women's forum are planning development activities for which the forum will continue as the delivery point, with short 1-2 hour sessions over lunch or half days. The forum will also continue as a networking group for mutual support and encouragement, with visiting speakers. The forum is planning two new initiatives:

- a small-scale work-shadowing scheme with nearby universities as a regional initiative.
- a pairing scheme for junior academics, for example those getting ready for promotion or preparing research grant applications, with a more experienced colleague who will advise on CVs and preparing a case for promotion

The outcomes of the survey and focus groups is to be presented to the Vice-Chancellor, heads of schools, senior university managers, school administrators and women in SET. The project team is now engaging with the university's senior management to determine how best to move this forward and hopes that this can be progressed this as part of the national Athena Project action implementation programme.