

Action plan for gender in School of Biological Sciences

The following three problems are addressed by this action plan:

1. Lack of applications by women for academic positions. Success rates are identical for males and females but there are fewer females applying, despite their strong representation among research postgraduates and postdoctoral staff. In particular, the more molecular areas did not appear to attract as many female applicants. We consider it likely that the main deterring factor in Northern Ireland is that the majority of applicants for academic posts come from Britain or abroad and females are differentially affected by mobility issues (family responsibilities including care of elderly and children, or partners who cannot move). The following suite of actions already has already had results in enhancing recruitment by women and we anticipate being able to increase numbers of female applicants in future.

Action	Responsible	Timescale and results
The “desirables” for posts will include “demonstrated ability to work as a group/in a team/co-operatively”. This does not disadvantage male applicants but encourages the appointment of women and more collegial-spirited men. To be demonstrated during interview.	Head of School, Directors of Research, appointments panels.	This was put into place during recruitment for 6 posts in 2008/9 and a suitable question was included in interviews. This contributed to the result of the process of appointing two females to posts in marine biology but made no difference for two biochemistry posts (two males were appointed).
Ensure that any breaks for maternity or parental leave during applicant's career are taken into account at shortlisting and interview stages.	Head of School, Directors of Research, appointments panels.	This was put into place during recruitment for 4 posts in 2008/9; it had a result in bringing a female applicant up to a higher, successful, position in the rankings.
Make the School more attractive to female applicants by greater visibility of women among existing academic staff	Head of School, Directors of Research, School website committee.	In 2009 replaced generic university images of academics on School homepage with real female members of different categories of staff.
When possible, the School contact for advertised positions should be female, and can use the opportunity to emphasize the good quality of life in Ireland, in particular the excellent education systems and good healthcare.	Head of School, Directors of Research	To be implemented at next available opportunity (next vacancy).
Encourage postdoctoral researchers to continue careers in academia	Head of School, SWAN committee	In 2008 and 2009 the Head of School addressed all research staff on career prospects and encouraged them to monitor vacancies.
Encourage postgraduates to consider careers in academia	SWAN committee	In 2008/9 two SWAN champions from Biological Sciences led Postgraduate Skills Training promoting women in science.
Consider use of Fair Employment Legislation to include statement encouraging applications from females as they were under-represented in this category of employment.	Head of School, Personnel, Equal Opportunities Unit, SWAN committee	In May 2009 Personnel agreed that within the constraints of section 75 of the NI Act and at special cost to the School, for single posts we could advertise "...under-representation of women at all levels in this School from lecturer to professor therefore application from women is particularly welcome."

2. Under-representation by women at senior academic levels, as seen in Biological Sciences throughout the UK. The goal is to increase the numbers of women at senior levels.

Action	Responsible	Timescale and results
Ensure that staff are familiar with the criteria for promotion.	Head of School, Directors of Research	This was put into place in staff appraisals during 2007/8.
Encourage female staff who have the required profile for promotion to apply. This should take place before the commencement of the promotions process.	Head of School, Directors of Research.	In 2007/8 one female was successfully encouraged to apply for promotion to Senior Lecturer; for the next few years there will be very few women eligible for promotion.
Encourage mentoring for those considering submitting an application for promotion, including use of the QGI's drop-in scheme for particular queries related to career hurdles.	Head of School, Directors of Research, QGI.	Uptake of mentoring opportunities in the Women's Mentoring Scheme has been good within the School (30% to date, with others planning to get involved).
Ensure that each applicant meets the senior administrative level criteria, by reviewing the organization of administrative responsibilities and involving QGI.	Head of School, Promotions panels, QGI.	During the 2007/8 and 2008/9 promotions processes, explicit recognition of administration, particularly in pastoral roles, contributed to the promotion of a woman to Senior Lecturer.
Emphasize the likelihood that candidates with all-round contributions to the School can achieve promotion (not just research stars).	Head of School, Promotions panels, Directors of Research.	The example of several promoted women in Biological Sciences who better fit the profile of all-round high quality than research stars has been used in Promotions panels to evaluate other applicants.
Female academic staff returning from maternity leave to be allowed to concentrate on their research for six months.	Head of School, Equal Opportunities Unit.	This action is part of the University's SWAN plan, to be implemented when funding permits. The Head of School will respond if there is a need within the School prior to that.

3. Lower female representation among permanent than among fixed-term contract research staff, as seen throughout the UK. Its significance within our School was not realized until full statistics became available in 2009.

Action	Responsible	Timescale and results
Queen's Gender Initiative to provide mentoring for postdoctoral staff	QGI	This was offered in 2008/9 and several women in Biological Sciences participated.
Encouraging contract staff to apply for grants, although in general they cannot be PIs.	Head of School, Directors of Research	In 2008 and 2009 the Head of School addressed all research staff on making grants, and this will continue annually.
Provide a supportive environment for postdoctoral staff, through successive contracts, including preparing them for transition to academics if desired, by regular monitoring of <i>curricula vitae</i> , meetings, etc	Head of School, Directors of Research, all employers of contract staff, SWAN committee	Supportive monitoring of research staff is encouraged during appraisal of academics; more specific actions to emphasize the needs of staff for mentoring are now being explored.
Try to identify why postdoctoral staff have not made the transition from research to academia, and why there is gender imbalance between permanent and fixed-term posts	Head of School, Directors of Research, all employers of contract staff, SWAN committee, QGI	This situation has only been noted recently. A fine-grained analysis, including age and other factors, will take several months.
Give good feedback to unsuccessful applicants for positions to help them with future applications	Head of School, Personnel	To be implemented at next available opportunity (next post advertised and recruited).