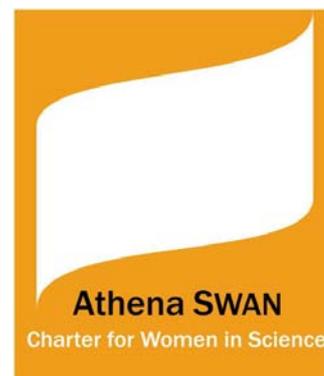


6 August 2009

Professor Christine Maggs
School of Biological Sciences
Queen's University Belfast
University Road
Belfast, BT7 1NN



Dear Professor Maggs

Athena SWAN Award Application

I am pleased to tell you that, at a recent meeting, the Athena SWAN judges agreed to award the School of Biological Sciences at Queen's University Belfast a Silver SWAN award. A Press Release about all the 2009 awards will be made shortly by Equality Challenge Unit and the UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology, and I would be grateful if your press officers could liaise with Anna Roberts (tel no 020 7438 1018) about further publicity, including at local level.

Awards ceremony

Presentation of the award will take place at the formal SWAN awards lunch on Tuesday 29 September 2009 at the Birmingham Botanical Gardens from 11.30am to 3.30pm. We have allocated two places for each award winner, but we are not being prescriptive about who attends, as there are SWAN Champions at different levels in different organisations. I would be grateful if you could let Victoria Lord (victoria.lord@ecu.ac.uk) know the names of the two attendees from the School of Biological Sciences as soon as possible, along with any special requirements they may have no later than **Monday 31 August**. Once we have this information we will send you full details about the venue and other arrangements.

Validity and logo

The School's award will be valid until the end of June 2012. During this period we hope you will make good use of the award to demonstrate the School's ongoing commitment to women's career progression in SET. I would encourage you to use the Silver logo, which I attach, together with guidelines on its use, in publications and recruitment advertising. We also strongly encourage you to publish your submission on your website.

Feedback on the application

I have been asked to give you feedback on your application. The Judging Panel appreciated the hard work by the School in putting its submission together and hopes that both the team members and the School found the exercise valuable in its own right.

The judges were concerned that the action plan was rather retrospective with few actions for the full 3 year validity of the award. However, they were pleased to see that you had identified attracting more female applicants to academic jobs as the major problem and

then set out clear steps to address this in the action plan. They were also pleased to see that you had identified particular subjects within the School where the problem was most acute and that, as there was no shortage of women in biology at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, the real issue was the transition to academic posts. They also noted that female representation was particularly low on the Promotions Committee and suggested that you make a real effort to improve this as this could give a different perspective on the promotions issue. You might also want to consider changing the profile for promotion to encourage early career academics as they have done at the School of Physical and Geographical Sciences at Keele University (see <http://www.keele.ac.uk/facs/sci/athena/paperwork/SPGS%20Silver%20report%20submission%20May2007.pdf>). The judges applauded the Head of School's role in soliciting promotion applications from women and in giving good feedback to unsuccessful applicants. They were also pleased to see a gender-aware letter of endorsement from the Head of School which focused on the lack of women in SET.

The judges were worried that you had no workload model, nor any plans to introduce one. However, they noted that staff do get recognition for outreach activities and that it is a requirement of promotion.

The judges were glad to see that several women in Biological Sciences had participated in the QGI mentoring programme and suggested that you monitor what happens to participants, particularly in terms of promotion so that you can demonstrate the value of mentoring to potential mentees.

The judges were pleased to see that social activities are largely organized so that children and their mothers can attend. They welcomed the move of School Board meetings to early Wednesday afternoon, but suggested that you ensure that meetings end by 4pm which is more family-friendly than 5pm.

But, the judges were concerned at an underlying feeling through the application that the School treats the lack of women in SET as a women's issue, rather than the responsibility of everyone. For example, they noted that flexible working and flexibility in teaching are aimed at female staff with young children. Yet worklife balance is an issue for all staff, male and female, young and older. As the Royal Society of Chemistry states "good practice benefits all, staff and students, men and women, but bad practice adversely affects women's careers more than men's".

Conclusion

In conclusion, we congratulate the School of Biological Sciences at Queen's University Belfast on receiving a silver SWAN award and we look forward to working with you in the future.



Julie Ashdown
Athena SWAN Coordinator

Cc Professor Ian Montgomery, Head of School of Biological Sciences
Professor Margaret Mullett, Athena SWAN contact