GeCo Project and UKRC-WISE
Sharing Good Practice in Gender Equality, York, 27th June 2012

Feedback from group discussion one following University of York presentation

Q1. What senior-level commitment has your organisation made on gender equality and how did that work in practice?

- Vice Chancellors are driven to obtain Athena SWAN following the announcement that Medical Schools must obtain it by 2015 if they are to obtain funding. Whilst they may have been on board with gender equality before this announcement, the financial element has now focussed their minds on it more. Not surprisingly, there are varying dates to achieve this across different universities.
- Some universities have set up an Athena SWAN steering committee, chaired by the Vice Chancellor, consisting of HR, Professors, and people handling data collection. Senior heads of STEM are in assessors groups.
- It appears to be a good idea to have someone within your organisation to 'champion' gender equality and Athena SWAN, although it can make you vulnerable if this person leaves/ moves to other departments. It was suggested that a group of champions would be better.
- It was acknowledged that it takes a lot of resource to get information together for the Athena SWAN application. One university is lucky in that they had resources provided from a central pot of money, used to fund a Research Officer across STEM departments, for one year, to collect this data. University of Leeds is just about to advertise for an Athena SWAN post specifically to deal with the application etc.

Q2. How much baseline data do you hold on gender and how did you obtain it?

- Getting accurate data, and then finding the resource to analyse it, is the biggest and hardest part. Also acknowledged that sometimes the bigger the organisation, then it is less likely that this data is easily available from HR.
- Useful to ensure the person who supplies your data is also involved in the application committee so that they have a good understanding of what is needed and why.

- Once data is obtained, then a lot of 'local' knowledge is needed to make it meaningful and useful. The use of different terminology, job titles etc. is one issue. Another is that progression within the organisation takes time so, for example, if you have only just recruited women at senior lecturer level, it will take some months/ years for them to become established in the organisation and be promoted to Professor, so this needs to be considered when analysing your data.
- It was commented on that most universities do offer flexible working and that it is being taken up, but the data is not always recorded centrally and agreed as a local arrangement with the manager. There is a need to let HR know so that is can be reported on.

Notes from discussion two following University of Reading and University of Sheffield presentations

Q1. How does your organisation cover maternity/paternity leave in research projects, and what works best in facilitating publication during and after this process?

Q2. What are the best ways of measuring the impact of these kind of initiatives, so you can target future resources effectively?

The discussions concluded that some institutions make more funds available than others, and at school level some underwrite the costs to providing cover for maternity/ paternity leave. However, this is varied and a lot depends on whether the staff member has a grant, or the nature of their funding. Some offered reduced teaching loads when mothers returned to allow them more time to finish research etc.

Sue Couling concluded that it is shocking that there appears to be no consistent approach to this issue within universities, and this is an action point for us all to consider.

Others remarked that paternity leave also was a similar issue for men as they were unlikely to take it if they were not supported whilst away.

We also discussed how to measure impact of initiatives and concluded that it was difficult to attribute it to one resource/ initiative. However, it was suggested that qualitative feedback could be useful to evidence the success of the initiative. Possibly there is a need to follow up with those who left the organisation to find out the reasons why.

Notes from flipcharts not covered in feedback

Discussion 1 – senior level commitment

- Network group – cross disciplines
- Head of Department plays an integral role, and must form part of new HOD induction
- Must value quality over quantity – align to the REF
- Encouraging part-time applications
- Quick fire surveys – engagement & information about the department from people within it
- Targeted approaches to encouraging opportunities
- Single access point on website
- Importance of data

Discussion 2 – Maternity/ paternity leave

- Grants --- suspension or cover
- Conference care fund where support given for childcare
- Returning parental network – use as a mechanism to feedback improvements
- Mentoring scheme for women returners (apply to be a mentor)
- Departmental maternity leave guidelines
- Use of teaching fellow
- Use of 'research terms'
- REF recognises career breaks
- Grant income of women on WARP/ WARP for all e.g. both genders??
- Usage of SMP – if you don't use it all up your partner can use it
- Cost of losing a post-doc after 5 years
- Mobility of women – waste of talent
- PDRA's – requires visits abroad and not possible