



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE



Looking Ahead:
Addressing Equality and Diversity Issues
in a Research Environment

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What is your Local Culture Like?

- Obstacles can be subtle – would you recognize this situation?

Punch
1988



- Many of my female friends would, even if in slightly more disguised form.
- This applies just as much to research group meetings as to university level.

Myths to Overcome

- A 24/7 culture is the only way to succeed
- Work-life balance is not valued
- Having children means you aren't serious about your work
- That success/rewards comes from being selfish, concentrating on your own research and contributing little to the bigger picture.
- That shouting loudly gets rewards

- The way the faculty behave will influence how researchers think research 'should be done'.
- Important to make sure PIs own behaviour reflects the culture you want to instill. For instance: does being a good citizen 'count' for promotion?

Action needs to start at the Top!

University Policies and Actions

- Visible commitment from the top is crucial – senior individuals walking the walk, not just talking the talk.

Action: Create champions (male and female) who have academic credentials that will mean they are taken seriously!

- They can work closely with PVCs and relevant committees but have a single priority.
- Publicly celebrating the success of minorities
 - Are good news stories widely disseminated?
- What support is there for those returning from long term leave (maternity, paternity or other caring responsibilities)
 - Family friendly policies
 - Are these well-known and widely available?
 - Is any money or other support (eg reduced teaching load, support for childcare so returners can attend conferences) available to help people get back on their feet after a break
- Share and disseminate good practice between departments
 - May be useful to construct toolkit or resources to save individual departments reinventing the wheel.

Unconscious Bias

- We all have schema about how we think people should behave:
- Typically
 - Women are expected to be nurturing, kind, good with people...
 - Men are expected to be assertive, decisive, risk-takers.....
- People who don't 'fit the bill' may be disadvantaged.
- Evidence shows that women are just as bad at this as men (2012 PNAS paper <http://www.pnas.org/content/early/2012/09/14/1211286109.full.pdf>)
- Unconscious bias may come into play in recruitment, in sponsoring individuals/encouraging researchers to explore opportunities and when writing letters of reference.
- **Training needs to be offered – and mandatory for leaders and those involved in recruitment.**

Unconscious Bias

Letters of Reference

- Evidence shows how letters of reference are gendered: J. Madera, M. Hebl and R. Martin *Journal of Applied Psychology* 2012
- Men are much more likely to be described by 'agentic words': assertive, dominant, ambitious and intellectual.
- Women by 'communal words': affectionate, tactful, sensitive and helpful

Concrete examples from letters I saw recently:

- **Woman A**
- 'a consistent output of more than a dozen papers per year, despite a period of maternity leave and currently working less than full time; more than £2M of current research funding held as PI....however she is still at a relatively early stage of her career and this makes me uncomfortable about recommending her....'
- **Man B**
- 'I should comment on the fact that all but 3 of B's recent publications do not include Y [*his mentor, still in the same department*] as a co-author. However for about half of these B appears to be the senior author, and presumably the intellectual driving force behind the work....my overall view is that...he is highly deserving...'

Early Career Researchers and Progression

- Anyone in a minority can feel very isolated.
 - Do you provide networks, peer-to-peer mentoring, appraisals for postdocs or other support?
 - What about careers' advice?
- What training is available for transferable and leadership skills for the ECRs?
- Are there exit interviews when people leave, to help identify areas where there may be problems?
- Are the experiences of men and women similar or very different?

Questionnaires can be very useful to provide data as to where local problems sit.

Thinking about Career Progression

Help researchers formulate the questions they need to answer:

- I was involved with producing a list of 10 questions for the Athena Forum for postdocs which may be helpful at any career stage:
 - *Are you on the right career path?*
 - *Are you ready for the next step?*
 - *How's your life/work balance?*
 - *Why do you enjoy what you do?*
 - *What are your strengths?*
 - *What motivates you?*
 - *What is your next step?*
 - *What skills and experience do you need?*
 - *How can you gain these?*
 - *Where can you go for objective guidance?*
- But you need to have people you can turn to for advice – and these need to be clearly identified.

Sponsorship and Mentoring

- Formal mentoring of researchers can be valuable but may not always work if pairs do not 'click'.
- But sponsorship can be effective too, when senior members of the department look out for opportunities for researchers and make sure they are aware of and encouraged to apply and progress.
- Women are stereotypically less likely to put themselves forward without such encouragement.
 - Example: Royal Society University Research Fellowships have a smaller application pool of women than might be expected.
 - If female researchers in departments aren't 'tapped on the shoulder' they may not have the confidence to apply.
 - And if applications aren't looked over their chances may be reduced.

What Can Departments Do? Inclusivity

- Induction
 - Is this routinely provided for all new departmental employees?
 - What written information is provided?
 - Do people know where to turn to if problems arise?
 - Does everyone get given a job description?
- Timing of seminars and meetings
 - Are these family friendly?
 - Does the whole department ever get together?
- Liaison committees eg for graduate students and postdocs
 - Do the junior members feel they have a voice?
 - Are there events held especially for these cohorts?

What Can Departments Do?

Support

- Appraisal/Staff Review
 - Does everyone get this automatically and how often?
 - ASSET 2010 survey showed established academics more likely to be appraised than contract staff, but the latter are likely to be the ones to benefit most.
- Advice regarding progression
 - Do people get advice/encouragement as to when to apply or do they have to ask?
- Formal mentoring
 - Is there a formal system?
- Social events
 - Is support provided for isolated women to be able to get together and share experiences?
- Speakers
 - Having diverse speakers come into the department offer diverse role models; even better if they are available for informal discussions.

What Can Departments Do?

Communication

- Is there a newsletter?
 - Are successes celebrated?
 - If so, is this true of everyone or just a few senior and possibly male professors?
 - Do people know about comings and goings or special events?
- Does the management make sure that people know in advance of significant changes?
 - Does everyone know, or again is there a sense that there is an 'in-group' who get told and the rest who don't?
 - Do people have opportunities to have input?
- What happens when things go wrong?
 - Are there clear – and well known – procedures if individuals feel they are being bullied, not being line managed properly or otherwise things are going wrong?

How Do You Know if Things are Going Right?

- Monitoring of statistics needs to be done on an ongoing basis.
- At researcher level this should cover recruitment and progression issues.
- At university level we have a Gender Equality Group, formally charged with looking at Equal Pay data but it does far more.
 - Have set up KPI's so that we can follow what happens year on year.
 - Also acts as a 'ginger group' to feed in where issues are perceived (eg recently around non-uniformity of application of KIT days and lack of policy around student pregnancies).
- Also have an Athena Swan Governance committee which has oversight of our applications and ongoing developments.
- Through these committees we can see how changing policies and culture change the University.