

# Lessons from an Athena SWAN Silver Award

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LMS Good Practice Scheme workshop

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# Who dis

- Lecturer (Teaching) at UCL Maths, joined in 2009 as an outreach officer (FMSP Area Coordinator)
- Organised Celebrating Women in Mathematics at the Royal Institution in 2014 and 2015, aimed at Year 10 students
- Joined the departmental Athena SWAN SAT in 2016
- Co-chaired with Prof Helen Wilson our latest Athena SWAN cycle (and the current one)
- Awarded Silver in April 2021
- Co-founded with Javier Bautista the LGBTQ+STEM @ UCL network in September 2020

# This presentation

- The Data
- The Narrative
- The Evaluation of Progress
- The Action Plan
- Things that went well
- Things I wish I knew
- Some personal reflections

# The data

- Collect the data as early as possible.
- It will save you some pain and frustration but it also informs the work of the SAT.
- Data can also be qualitative: focus groups, ask colleagues for comments, use quotes throughout the application.
- Mini surveys may help to collect data that may not be possible to disaggregate or are not available (eg professional services staff)
- Some data are mandatory, some are very hard to find. The data does not have to be perfect. Do you have adequate data to back up your claims?

# The Narrative

- As data is collected, a story emerges. Find the story of your department.
- Analyse and reflect on the data.
- Others may help you understand that story: mock panels, LMS buddying scheme, conversations with colleagues from other departments.
- Identify what went well and what didn't go so well. And what is going badly.
- Curate your narrative.

# Curate your narrative



## Impact Box

### Issue Identified:

- Proportion of women declines across the PGR admissions process (2009-15\*)
- Proportion of female PGR students is below national benchmark (15% vs 26% in 2015\*)

### Action:

- Renovate our departmental webpage and establish a social media presence (action 3.2\*)
- Interview panels for PhD places at least 25% female (action 3.3\*)
- Visible female role models, outreach and EDI events (see Section 5.6 (i)), and improve support for female PhD students

### CDT specific:

- Dedicated webpage for “Women in Mathematics”
- Deferral scheme with Cambridge and Oxford for female MSc applicants

### Impact:

- Proportion of women mostly increases throughout the admissions process (see Figure 4.12, in line with action 3.4\*)
- Significant increase in the proportion of female PGR students, currently at 24%
- Proportion of CDT female PhD students increased from 14% to 50% between 2014 and 2019

\*from our 2016 Athena SWAN application.



## Action 2.2 Ensure recruitment process is fair:

The SAT will monitor the applications-to-offer ratio and take action if problems arise (Action 2.2.1), and we shall explore the possibility of adopting the CDT recruitment model more generally across the department (Action 2.2.2).

*“I really enjoyed participating in the women in mathematics event to celebrate international women’s day as it gave myself and others a platform to talk about and celebrate women who have inspired us. The fact that it was organised demonstrated that the department was taking on a role to promote women in mathematics which was both encouraging and inspiring to see.”* (Female UG speaker on Susan Brown Day)

# The Evaluation of Progress

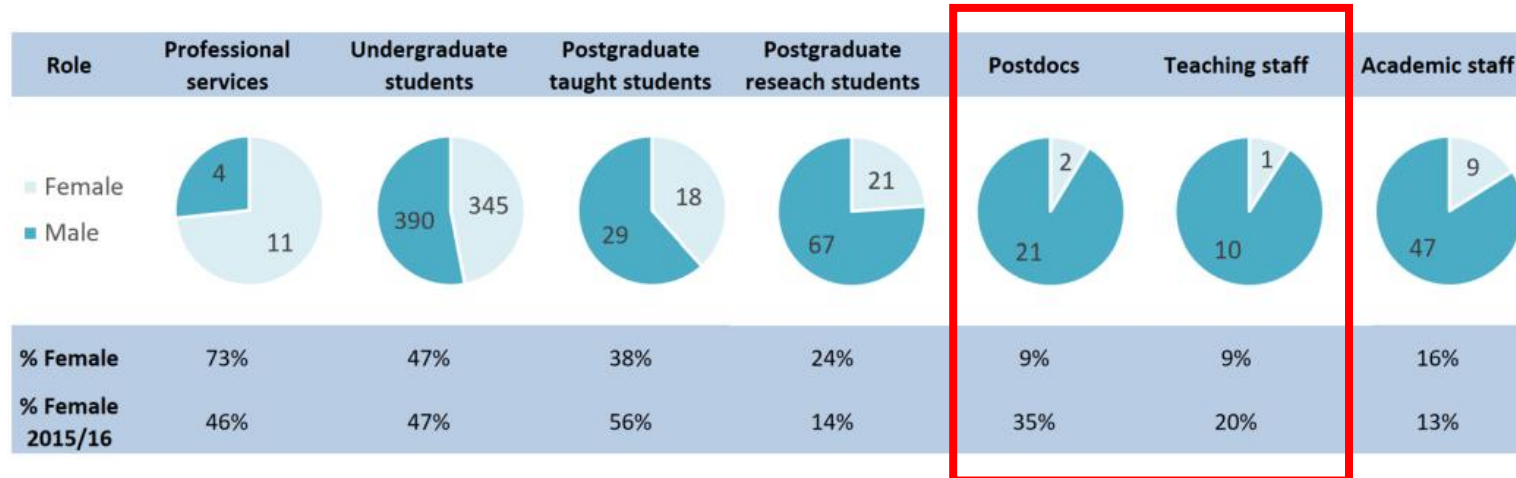


Figure 2.1: Current snapshot of the department compared with the previous Athena SWAN application.

# The Evaluation of Progress

- Honest reflection on actions that have had less impact than hoped can be seen as positive, especially if it informs the action plan proposed.
- The implementation and evaluation of the action plan is not static.
- Add further actions when further issues are identified: this is evidence of learning from the evaluation process.



# The Action Plan

- Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound: SMART (ugh and sorry)
- Less monitoring more action.
- Code the actions according to priority (high, medium, low).
- Find structural changes however small.
- Consult with colleagues outside the SAT so they can share their insights on possible actions.

# The Action Plan

Issue 6: PhD student dissatisfaction						
6.1 Improve support for PhD students	The PhD student survey identified a great concern that female students 'considered leaving PhD early occasionally or often'. Given the low response rate, we decided to run a very short anonymous questionnaire, 'Have you considered leaving you PhD early?' (No/Yes, occasionally/Yes, often) and an optional free text box for comments. The response rate increased to 51% and we did confirm that a higher proportion of students were considering leaving their PhD early than in 2017. The gender disparity was not as significant as in the first	6.1.1 Improve supervision and the extent to which supervisors encourage their students to continue.	Establish a supervision working group (2020/21) to gather and disseminate good practice in the department. Survey to gather PhD students' views of the student-supervisor relationship. Supervision to be a standing item on staff meeting agenda from spring 2021.	First survey 2021. Working group for 4 years initially.	Lead to be identified (not necessarily in the SAT) and PhD student representatives	PhD students feel more comfortable in their relationship with their supervisor. (assessed via survey) [Benchmark in 2021] [Improvement by 2024]
		6.1.2 Empower PhD students to feel in control of their own PhD trajectory	Guidance sessions (i) for PhD students at the beginning of their studies, and (ii) for those who have upgraded from MPhil to PhD	Sessions for those who have recently started have been running for 2 years; higher-level sessions to begin in summer 2020.	Luciano Rila in liaison with Dave Hewett (academic staff member not on SAT).	Reduced proportion of students considering leaving their PhD early. (assessed via survey) [Target: 40% by 2023] [Benchmark: 2019 60%]
		6.1.3 Reframe career support for PhD students to include links with employers outside academia	One-off event involving PhD alumni working outside academia (autumn 2021); Establish broader links with	On-going	Nick Ovenden	

# Things that went well

- Strong senior level support.
- Honesty in our data analysis followed by appropriate actions.
- Data clearly and consistently presented, and beautiful presentation throughout (thanks to David Sheard).
- Action plan linked to data and SMART.
- Actions to support career progression of PS staff.

# Things I wish I knew

- How hard it is to get all the data.
- Chairing a large committee requires a thoughtful strategy.
- Doing actions is not enough, we need to embed them in the workings of the department so that they perpetuate.
- Athena SWAN is a collective effort.
- EDI is a departmental effort, colleagues outside the SAT should get involved as well.

# Some personal reflections

- Athena SWAN was a painful and frustrating process but I learned a lot and I now entertain the idea that we made a small difference.
- Challenge gatekeeping by proposing structural changes, however small.
- Nurture environments that allow those who don't conform to thrive.