

Gender equality work in a distance learning institution

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Sharing Athena Swan good practice across STEM disciplines at The Open University

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- (a) largest university in the UK,
- (b) 50 years 'young',
- (c) open access, flexible, distance education across the UK, Ireland and internationally,
- (d) PT and FT study, two million alumni across 157 countries
- (e) Only FT PhD students campus-based.

Challenges

- (a) Distributed organisation
 - (a) produces large amounts of data,
 - (b) introduces errors and inconsistencies in data,
 - (c) obscures transparency of workload allocation
 - (d) makes our equality efforts less visible (no undergraduate students on campus, and many staff are homeworkers)
- (e) Monitoring uptake of online channels




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Opportunities

- (a) ensuring gender balanced imagery in prospectuses and online media
 - (b) the increasing visibility
 - (a) establishing regular communication channels
 - (b) events to increase visibility, both online and face to face
 - (c) Together with more gender balanced interview panels
- diversifying the recruitment of staff and PGR students**



Maven of the Month

We are also inviting top experts in AI and Knowledge Technologies to discuss major socio-technological topics with an audience that comprises both members of the Knowledge Media Institute, as well as the wider staff at The Open University. Differently from our seminar series, these events follow a Q&A format.

Upcoming events

Maven of the month



Women in Engineering student conference

Opportunities

- (a) flexible working attracts more women to the OU
- (b) Career development
 - (a) training, leadership courses,
 - (b) peer mentoring and working groups,
 - (c) improving gender balance in staffing boards
 - (d) making equality and inclusion work a career pathway

all Silver departments achieving good gender balance in promotions

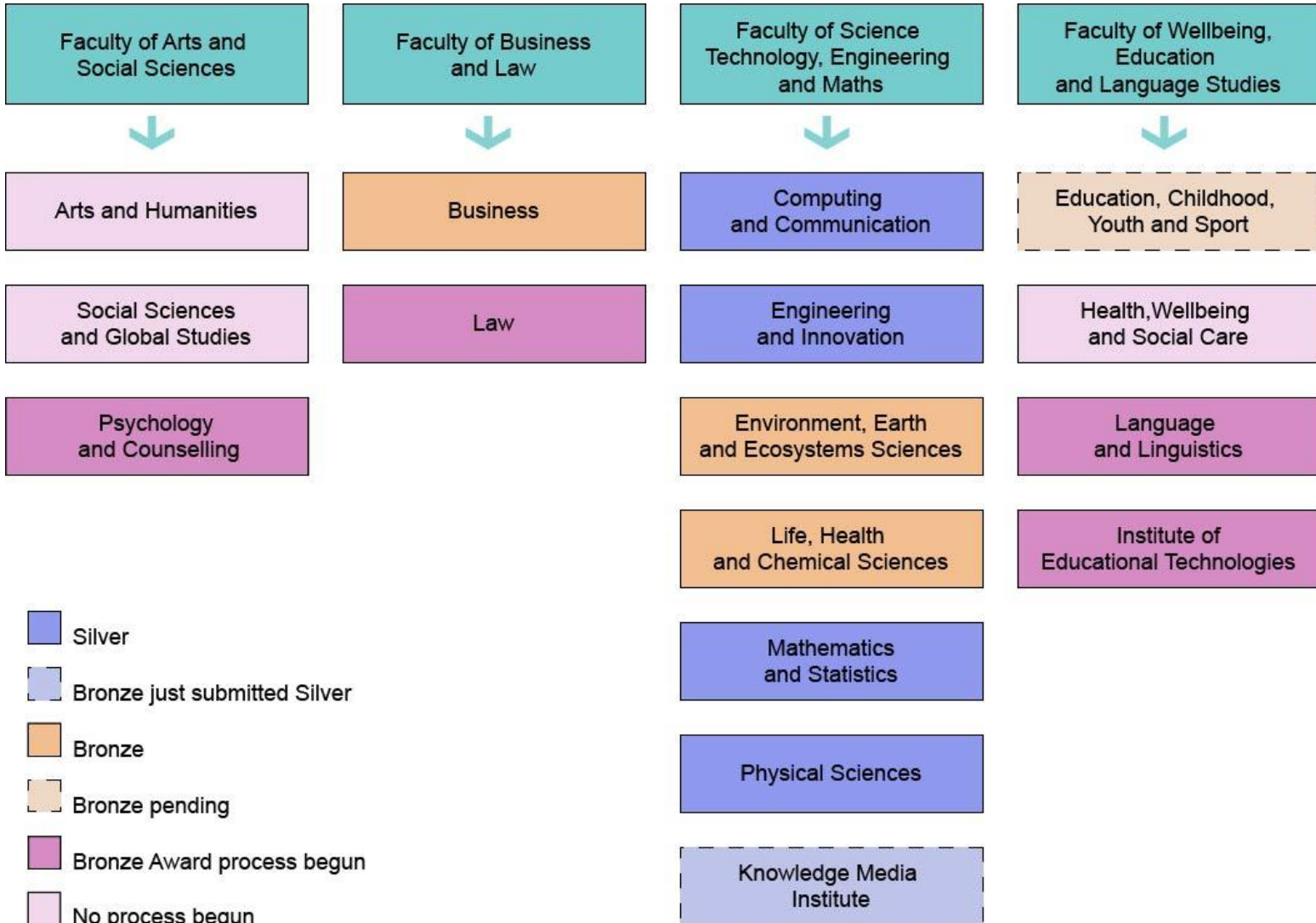
Surprising insight

Hybrid working: the greatest challenges to our equality work

Fully online working (Covid impact): unexpected opportunities for inclusion

Good practice across STEM

OU Athena Awards



Recruitment

- (a) organising departmental training on unconscious bias to supplement the OU's online course,
- (b) ensuring diversity on selection panels,
- (c) modifying websites to increase visibility of women and showcase commitments to gender equality,
- (d) ensuring inclusive language use in advertisements, and
- (e) making use of women in maths/science/computing/engineering mailing lists and networks.

Consequently, recruitment has got fairer

Three departments reporting gender balanced recruitment overall,
All reporting gender balanced recruitment at grades Lecturer and above,
Proportions of recruited female postdoctoral researchers above national averages,
Improved gender balance of our PhD cohorts,
All departments now reporting proportions of women well above national averages.

Promotions

- (a) ensuring appraisal of all staff annually, with career progression a key topic of discussion,
- (b) offering mentoring for promotion applications,
- (c) postdoctoral reviews that encourage women to apply for promotions,
- (d) providing training for staff to understand promotions criteria,
- (e) gender balancing staffing/promotions panels,
- (f) encouraging leadership programmes like Aurora,
- (g) monitoring gender in leadership and committee positions, and
- (h) moving towards greater shared leadership, including creation of deputy roles.

Achieved fairer promotions, minimally proportional to staff gender ratios, and in one case gender balanced.

Proportion of women has increased across all departments (by 5-10 percentage points)

Proportion of women professors are now substantially above national averages for four departments (ranging from 29% to 60% of all professors)

Maternity



- (a) make staff aware of OU policies,
- (b) establish schemes for a maternity buddy and Keep in Touch days
- (c) promote flexible working, and
- (d) increase entitlements for returners, from conference costs, to carrying over leave, to reduced teaching loads
- (e) All departments also follow a core working hours policy of 10am to 4pm

Across the five STEM departments just a single woman (professional staff) did not return

One further woman (research associate on an external grant) left within 18 months of returning.

All contracts that expired during maternity leave were renewed.

Thank you!

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