



## SFHEA Case Study Exemplar

<p><b>8.2</b> <b>Written Case</b> <b>Study Title:</b></p>	<p><b>Career Progression of Women in HE to Academic Leadership</b></p>
<p><b>Background</b></p> <p>During my career in HE, as I progressed to Professor and Head of the xxxx (xxxx), I realised there were fewer women in senior positions, in my own department and particularly on SHU senior staff committees. It had been a harder battle for me to gain promotion than for my male colleagues, twice having applied for promotion at different levels and failing, whereas my male peers succeeded first time. As a member of the University Professoriate Committee I was aware that there were far fewer applications for personal chairs from women and this led me to investigate this. Gender issues are more marked in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects and as a scientist myself, I have been interested in women in HE in STEM for many years. Nationally and at SHU, fewer women are recruited as undergraduates into HE in STEM, with fewer progressing to postgraduate research degrees and permanent lectureships in academia<sup>10</sup>. The Equality Challenge Unit's Athena SWAN (Scientific Women's Academic Network) award programme, was initiated to encourage universities to address the gender imbalance in STEM subjects<sup>11</sup>. The award scheme recognises good practice in relation to Equality and Diversity in STEM. I have played a key role in the University's equality agenda to gain recognition for our work on gender equality in STEM (V2).</p> <p><b>My support for women applying for personal chairs at SHU.</b></p> <p>Together with my colleague, Professor xxxx, I have run a CPD course for all staff on 'How to become a professor', which includes a workshop considering previous successful applications and CVs. I lead the discussion with attendees on what they need to consider when preparing their application (A2, V1, V2). Despite many women attending over the last 6 years or more, few women went on to submit an application. Data provided by the secretariat of the professoriate committee, on the numbers of women applying over preceding years supported this observation. Evidence from the literature indicates that women are lacking in confidence to put themselves forward for consideration<sup>12</sup>. When I was awarded a personal chair in 2005, there had been a number of senior women professors who met 2-3 times per annum to discuss common issues. I found this support very helpful and I had also contributed to running workshops for women in HE with regards to how to manage your career alongside family caring responsibilities (A1, A4, V1, V2, V4). This women professors group (WPG) had not met for some time due to the key organiser leaving. I therefore re-launched the group by contacting all women professors at SHU and inviting them to a lunchtime meeting. This provided a forum for discussions and action</p>	

around gender equality issues at SHU. I led the discussions and one key area where it was felt we could make a difference to the gender imbalance at professorship level was through mentoring women. The proportion of female professors at SHU fits within the national picture, where around 20% of university professors in the UK are women, yet at the more junior levels, the proportion of women is 50%<sup>13,14</sup>. Much has been written about this 'glass ceiling' effect in academia. From the literature on women at higher levels in HE and in business, it seems that women are hesitant to put themselves forward for promotion until they are completely sure they will get through the process, whereas men tend to give it a go even if they are not ready<sup>15,16</sup>. The key outcome of the first meeting was the Aspire mentoring programme. I initiated this women's mentoring scheme through meeting with staff from Human Resources', together with colleagues Profs xxxx and xxxx. I have led this scheme for two years now with over 30 women academics having been mentored by male and female professors, and there has been fantastic feedback on the scheme.

I have personally mentored four women through this scheme, one of whom was appointed to a professorship early this year and another was promoted to a PL post in ACES. I am continuing to mentor the other two, one of whom was recently turned down for a readership, and I am providing constructive feedback to improve her application and supporting her through this difficult period and help her to consider what further work she needs to do before reapplying for readership (A3)

The Aspire scheme has been successful with 6 of the last 7 women professors promoted at SHU in 2013-2015, having been mentored. I gained support for the continuation of the scheme from the ProVC for Research and Pro VC, Dean HWB. My leadership of the scheme I believe was essential to this continuation, I took the initiative to bring together the relevant staff and persuade them that this was a successful scheme (V3). Throughout my career I have not had any formal mentoring and when I came to SHU it felt like I was in a constant battle to push myself forward with little support and in fact sometimes antagonism to my progression, such that I now give as much as I can to support my mentees. I use my experiences to also guide undergraduate and PhD students as well as early career researchers in my department and research centre (A2, A4, V2). I act as a role model for women who want to have a family and a career, both for undergraduate students, PhD students, postdoctoral and early career researchers.

For the last 3 years in my position as Lead of the WPG, I have organised the International Women's day events at SHU, inviting inspirational women speakers as role models e.g. Meg Munn, MP, SHU pro Vice Chancellor Liz Barnes and Janet Dean, SHU Governor. We have had ~100 women academics each year attend the events and this year, following feedback from other staff in SHU, female staff in business services were invited as well. In 2014 I organised this together with the lead for the women's professor group at TUofS. I ran a confidence and resilience building workshop with a colleague from University of Sheffield, which was attended by over 30 staff (K1, K2, V1, V3, V4). I learnt as much from running this workshop as the participants did, with good feedback including appreciating the honesty of my account of when I had been unsuccessful in my career.

#### **My contribution to Athena SWAN initiatives at SHU and in HE**

The Athena SWAN programme, which is administered by the Equality Challenge Unit, a government body and recognises good practice in relation to Equality and Diversity in STEM. I am a member of the University self assessment team (SAT) (6 people in total) which gathered the evidence and wrote the application and action plan for the university's successful renewal of the bronze award in 2013 and I also led the BMRC successful

application for a silver award. I am continuing to contribute to both the university and the Biosciences SAT, where we are aiming for a gold award in November 2015, bringing my previous experience to the process. I have been invited to sit on the Athena SWAN award assessment panels in London on three occasions, where I assessed submissions from UK universities. This gave me an insight into what other universities are doing in relation to gender equality for students and staff in STEM. I always provide written feedback to the Athena SWAN network in SHU and share my learning from these panels, maintaining strict confidentiality, with the North East Universities network (A3, A5).

I have been interviewed for Times Higher Education newspaper on gender and glass ceiling effect<sup>17</sup> and I recently was invited to speak at Southampton University to their academic women's network on women in leadership in HE<sup>18</sup>. I also network with colleagues from other HEIs and take an active role in the North East Athena SWAN network, passing on my expertise to others. I am currently acting as an adviser to other departments and I have been asked to talk to the Materials and Engineering Research Institute management group and the Nursing and Midwifery Athena Swan group.

### **Summary**

I believe I have made a real contribution not only to the gender debate within SHU but also to individual women through inspiring them as a role to put themselves forward for promotion but also by mentoring and supporting individual female students and staff to be successful.

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