Equality and Diversity on the Medical Schools Council and Dental Schools Council

The impact of Athena SWAN in UK medical schools

News

Data Resources
Equality and Diversity on the Medical Schools Council and Dental Schools Council

The Medical Schools Council and Dental Schools Council are undertaking an Athena SWAN style review process of equality and diversity within Council. The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) has confirmed it will work with the Medical and Dental Schools Councils to develop an appropriate format, as it has with The Royal Society. The Councils will be setting up a joint Equality & Diversity Advisory Group, with representation from both genders, comprising colleagues at different stages in their career, to oversee the review.

The Councils are concerned by the small number of women Deans in both professions, and asked Professor Anna Dominiczak to lead scoping work to understand the issues and barriers facing women, particularly the culture at Council itself. Feedback was sought from women who had attended Council meetings as Dean or representative, and more generally from Athena SWAN leads across medical and dental schools around the perceptions of MSC and DSC, and ideas for specific actions which MSC and DSC could champion to eliminate gender bias and develop an inclusive culture that values all staff. Data were collated for the last three years looking at attendance (including reps), round table chairs, speakers, committee chairs for Council and other networks (e.g. Admissions, Fitness to Practise, Education Leads, Research Leads). Generally, there was a positive trend with more women attending and taking on key roles, although not for every group.

The recommendation of the Advisory Meeting (members listed below), was accepted by both MSC and DSC, to undertake an internal review first before looking at the role it can take to promote good practice across medical and dental schools. Both MSC and DSC are keen to look at Equality and Diversity in the whole, as well as the gender focus of the Athena SWAN review process.

Prof Iain Cameron, Chair of MSC, said

‘We need to act now to get this right. The Athena SWAN process will provide a crucial next step for Medical Schools Council to identify how best to promote and ensure gender equality across the sector. There is clearly much to do. At the same time, we know that there are many examples of good practice across medical and dental schools, and it was encouraging to see some of the exemplars identified by the Advisory Group.’

Prof Callum Youngson, Chair of DSC, said

‘We consider that the Dental Schools Council must take a pro-active role to promote best practice and ensure that this is upheld across the sector. I am really encouraged by the feedback from the Advisory Group, and will be pleased to help drive this forward. I have no doubt that there will be some positive changes we can make as a result of undertaking an Athena SWAN assessment internally to ensure that we meet the values that we espouse - a flexible, inclusive culture where all viewpoints and experience are valued and contribute to our informed decision making.’
Key observations and feedback from the scoping work of the MSC and DSC Women Advisory Meeting

- There are 34 member medical schools – two members of Council are women.
- There are 18 member dental schools – four members of Council are women.
- Feedback suggests that whilst some women have found the Medical Schools Council to be an open and respectful forum, others have felt excluded from discussions. Feedback from the Dental Schools Council was unanimously positive.
- The Chair of a committee has a strong role to play in setting the tone of a meeting. There was feedback about the DSC meetings where the Chair would ask directly for views during the meeting, and about the MSC meetings where the Chair would ask the individuals on a one to one basis if they wished to contribute.
- It was recognised that Council meetings can be daunting – but this is not necessarily gender-related. There would be benefit for all new attendees to be introduced specifically to the Chair and Chair of Sub-Committees, and to each other, before the start of a meeting.

Out with specific Council matters there are other challenges affecting the professions:

- Recognition of the unconscious barriers facing women in their careers – e.g. the perception of an “old boys” club, networking out of hours, same gender appointment panels.
- Unconscious bias awareness is essential for both men and women.
- The value of champions – more than mentors or role models - to encourage someone to go for new roles and putting them forward for opportunities.
- Work needs to be done nationally to ensure that education as well as research is valued, as are different styles of leadership.
- Nearly all those who gave feedback or attended the meeting had experienced gender bias during their careers.

Members of the MSC and DSC Women Advisory Meeting (one-off meeting January 2015)

- Professor Anna Dominiczak (Chair). Professor, Vice-Principal and Head of College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences, Glasgow
- Prof Deborah Bowman. Dean for Students and Professor of Bioethics, Clinical Ethics and Medical Law at St. George’s, University of London
- Sarah Dickinson. Athena SWAN Manager, Equality Challenge Unit
- Prof Fiona Karet. Gender Equality Champion, University of Cambridge School of Clinical Medicine; ECU Athena SWAN Medical and Dental Advisory Group
- Prof Liz Kay. Foundation Dean, Peninsula Dental School; ECU Athena SWAN Medical and Dental Advisory Group
- Dr Ailbhe McDonald. Senior Lecturer, Eastman Dental Institute
- Prof Jane Macnaughton. Professor of Medical Humanities; Deputy Head of School of Medicine, Pharmacy & Health. Dean of Phase 1, University of Durham
- Dr Katie Petty-Saphon. Chief Executive, MSC and DSC
- Prof Debbie Sharp. Chair of MSC/ DSC 2007 Working Group on Women in Medicine and Dentistry; Professor of Primary Care, Bristol
- Prof Kate Thomas. Vice Dean of Birmingham Medical School; Programme Director MBChB; Prof of General Practice
- Prof Val Wass. Head of School of Medicine, Keele; Chair of MSCAA; Chair of MSC Education Sub Committee

Note: There were more than 20 volunteers (none of whom were men – which the group regretted). In order to keep the discussions small and focused, 10 were invited to the meeting. Weblink: http://bit.ly/1IkZEsz
Abstract
This paper examines the impact of the Athena SWAN initiative on female careers in UK medical schools by exploiting two natural experiments. The first is the introduction of Athena SWAN charter in 2005, whereby twelve UK institutions selected into the charter. The second is the announcement in 2011 by the NIHR, to only shortlist medical schools with a ‘silver’ Athena SWAN award for certain research grants going forward. This second change potentially impacts schools that are further away from silver status than those that were already close in 2011. While there is a marked improvement of women succeeding in medical schools during the sample period, early Athena SWAN adopters have not increased female participation by more than other schools whose institution signed up later. In addition, tying funding to Athena SWAN silver status has yet to have an impact on female careers, although medical schools have invested in efforts to achieve silver status. ISSN 1749-8368

The full paper is available to download.  
Weblink: http://bit.ly/1FRAY Iv

NEWS

BBSRC Chief Executive Blog

In her recent blog the Chief Executive of the BBSRC Professor Jackie Hunter noted the importance of individuals as agents for change, stating:

“although the commitment from the top is extremely important, for example Sally Davies’ mandating of Athens Swan status for NIHR BRC and BRU funding, we, as individuals, can all help to drive change.”


~~~

Conference

Stepping Up and Speaking Out
Manchester Friday 15th May 2015

The Medical Women’s Federation Spring Conference 2015 is in Manchester. Speakers and Workshops include sessions on leadership and mentoring and a panel discussion on leadership and women doctors.

Weblink: http://bit.ly/1ztIBn9

~~~

Women Leading the UK Top Universities
The Guardian newspaper feature

Weblink: http://bit.ly/1FEpVTn

~~~

Data Resources

• Clinical academic staffing levels in UK medical schools
http://bit.ly/1o6Ow8t

• Clinical academic staffing levels in UK dental schools
New website under construction

• ECU Athena Swan Resources
http://bit.ly/ZA4H7A

~~~