Athena SWAN Gold department award application

Name of university: University College London

Department: MRC Laboratory for Molecular Cell Biology

Date of application: Nov 2012

Date of Silver Athena SWAN award: May 2009

Date of university Bronze and/or Silver Athena SWAN award: May 2009

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An Athena SWAN Gold Department award recognises a significant sustained progression and achievement by the department in promoting gender equality and to address challenges particular to the discipline. Applications should focus on what has improved and changed since the Silver award application.

Not all institutions use the term ‘department’ and there are many equivalent academic groupings with different names, sizes and compositions. The definition of a ‘department’ for SWAN purposes can be found on the Athena SWAN website. If in doubt, contact the Athena SWAN Charter Coordinator well in advance to check your eligibility.

It is essential that the contact person for the application is based in the department.

Sections to be included

At the end of each section state the number of words used. Click here for additional guidance on completing the template.
1. Letter of endorsement from the head of department: maximum 500 words

An accompanying letter of endorsement from the head of department should confirm how the SWAN action plan and activities in the department contribute to the overall department strategy and academic mission, and spell out what is next for the department, what difficulties might be experienced, and what the department most looks forward to.

The letter is an opportunity for the head of department to confirm their support for the application and to endorse and commend any women and STEMM initiatives that have made a significant contribution to the achievement of the departmental mission.

Letter from Prof Mark Marsh appended.

2. The self-assessment process: maximum 1000 words

Describe the self-assessment process. This should include:

a) A description of the self assessment team: members’ roles (both within the department and as part of the team) and their experiences of work-life balance.

At the time of application, the core SAT is made up of two senior personnel who are Group Leaders (GL) (Dr Sara Mole (Lead), and Dr Rob de Bruin), both continuing from the Silver application, representing UCL-tenured and non-tenured positions respectively; two postdoctoral researchers (Dr Cristina Azevedo, Dr Joe Grove), both new for the Gold application, representing those on short-term post-doctoral and personal fellowships; and two post-graduate students (Ms Kathleen Webb, Mr Thomas Livermore), also new for the Gold application. All offered to serve the Department in this way and have been very enthusiastic in their involvement, particularly amongst their peer groups. The Departmental Senior Administrator (Ms Claire Hebblethwaite), responsible for providing the student and staff data; and Head of Department Prof Mark Marsh (Director, representing MRC), both continuing from the Silver application, are part of the extended SAT. All members have taken responsibility for different areas of activity as we work towards Gold level.

Within the SAT both genders are equally represented, and there is a variety of nationalities (British, Dutch, Portuguese), experiences of academic life and international work ethics (British, European, N. American), ages (20s to 50s), experience of parenthood (SM, RdB, JG, MM, currently from newborn up to twenties) and career breaks (SM), as well as caring for older family members (SM), and some experience of flexible part-time work (SM). In addition, Dr Mole and Dr de Bruin are involved in Athena-related activities within UCL and further afield.

There has been a change of SAT personnel since we first launched the SAT prior to our Silver application. We chose to deliberately model 50:50 gender balance for each career stage on the core SAT.

b) An account of the self assessment process: details of the self assessment team meetings, including any consultation processes that were undertaken with staff or individuals outside of the university, and how these have fed into the submission.
Once we had been awarded Silver status the process of continuing to charter and improve has been assumed. From 2009 to date we implemented our Silver Action Plan. As time progressed we realised that it was overambitious and decided to prioritise those areas that would make the most difference. We continued to monitor our progress approximately quarterly and, taking note of some clear independent cultural shifts that occurred quite naturally within the LMCB, decided early in 2012 that we should consider working towards Gold rather than renewing at Silver level. This option was presented to the GL Meeting who were very supportive, and the core SAT who would lead the Gold application was formed at this time.

After an initial meeting to familiarise with Athena aims, the new core SAT met regularly (approx. monthly) to throughly review all areas of LMCB life through ‘Gold eyes’. We undertook the ‘Good Practice Index’ from http://www.oxfordresearchandpolicy.co.uk/, which encouraged our view that we were shifting to a Gold level of working. We had previously found an internal survey valuable in (1) providing a picture of what life was really like in the LMCB, (2) raising awareness of Athena, (3) prompting discussion, (4) identifying areas that needed improvement. We revised and simplified the previous questionnaires, and ran them on-line with UCL’s assistance to both increase response rates and make the data easier to handle and analyse. Separate focus group discussions for students and postdocs were led by their representative SAT members. That with group leaders was held last so that we could consider all responses at this level. Informal discussions also took place. As with our previous application, the anonymous feedback from the survey, together with the discussions, were central to highlighting areas that need to be further improved, or showing where there was no real concern.

Ms Hebblethwaite gathered the required staff data and Ms Ione Karney the student data. Dr Mole liaised with the Head of UCL Eqalities and Diversity. Prof Marsh was kept informed of progress and gave regular guidance and input, including feedback on an early draft of the application. Work was intensive. As before the Departmental profile had to be assembled from data supplied by both UCL and the MRC, and from data held only by the Department.

The profile of the project was already high within the Department since our Silver certificate is displayed in our entrance foyer, the Silver logo is on our web site, and we have a noticeboard on work-life balance outside the tea-room. In 2012 we relaunched our web site so we took the opportunity to update our pages on Athena and ensure that all our pages truly reflected equal opportunities at the LMCB. Resources, such as books and articles, that had been identified since 2009 to the current day are available for reference. These activities have been ongoing, not only by the SAT but also by members of the LMCB, as well as the wider UCL, who are now sensitised to the aims of Athena SWAN and circulate articles and links.

The Action Plan was devised from the statistics, the survey and the discussion forums, and further comments from the GL meeting. This time we took the decision to identify 3 priority areas that would make the most difference. The documents used in this project are available on the LMCB Athena SWAN web page http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lmcb/athena-page. Finally, those involved in UCL Athena SWAN also gave encouragement and feedback on our Action Plan.

   c) Plans for the future of the self assessment team, such as how often the team will continue to meet and how the department will deal with the turnover of team members, any reporting mechanisms and in particular how the self assessment team intends to monitor implementation of the action plan.

The SAT will continue to meet less frequently, on a quarterly basis. We will recruit new members
to replace turnover at 50:50 either by asking for volunteers or by election. The team will fit under the newly established LMCB Equalities and Diversity Committee that will take responsibility for a wider area of equalities, following UCL initiatives, in time. We will implement the Action Plan through engagement with identified individuals responsible for realizing the aims. The SAT will review progress towards milestones and revise the Action Plan as necessary; reporting initiatives and progress to the LMCB Group Leaders Meeting. We will continue to contribute enthusiastically to UCL’s Athena SWAN initiatives, sharing our best practice and informing UCL strategy (Action N).

(Words 972)

3. **A picture of the department: maximum 2000 words**

   a) *Provide a pen-picture of the department to set the context for the application, outlining in particular any significant and relevant features.*

The MRC Laboratory for Molecular Cell Biology (LMCB) is situated on the main UCL campus but is unusual in that it is funded by the Medical Research Council. It houses the MRC Cell Biology Unit (CBU) as well as University or independently funded laboratories. The LMCB is a centre for research into fundamental aspects of cell function and their relation to human disease that aims for research excellence, and places much value on high impact research, reflected by publications, grants and other awards. It was opened in 1993 and since 2001 has contained the CBU through which core MRC funded infrastructure is provided. The LMCB was recently made a Research Department of UCL, and we are expecting the CBU to transfer to University Unit status very soon.

The Institute currently comprises 15 research groups. Six are part of the MRC CBU, and nine groups are supported by UCL appointments or personal fellowships. We also have one Emeritus Professor. Group leaders (GL) are culturally diverse (10 British and six from Europe/Russia.). Both MRC GL and UCL GL are tenured or tenure-track, and each organisation has its own promotion pathways in place. It is LMCB policy that students and postdocs are encouraged to move elsewhere at the end of their training period so that they gain a broad-based training. Since its inception, the LMCB has supported a MRC 4-year PhD programme. This is the main route of entry of postgraduate students, although there are always some 3-year students often supported by charitable foundations focused on a particular disease. There are no LMCB undergraduate students. Since there are still two distinct streams of administration, much of the MRC and UCL data are presented separately.

   b) *Provide data for the past five years (where possible with clearly labelled graphical illustrations) on the following with commentary on their significance, how they have affected action planning, and any improvements since the department’s Silver award.*

**Student data**

(i) *Numbers of males and females on access or foundation courses – comment on the data and describe any initiatives taken to attract non-traditional groups of women to the courses.*

Not applicable - the LMCB has postgraduate research students only.
(ii) **Undergraduate male and female numbers** – full and part-time – comment on the female: male ratio compared with the national picture in the discipline. Describe any initiatives taken to address any imbalance or negative trends and the impact to date. Comment upon any plans for the future.

Not applicable - the LMCB has postgraduate research students only.

(iii) **Postgraduate male and female numbers completing taught courses** – full and part-time – comment on the female: male ratio compared with the national picture in the discipline. Describe any initiatives taken to address any imbalance and the effect to date. Comment upon any plans for the future.

Not applicable - the LMCB has postgraduate research students only.

(iv) **Postgraduate male and female numbers on research degrees** – full and part-time – comment on the female: male ratio compared with the national picture in the discipline. Describe any initiatives taken to address any imbalance and the effect to date. Comment upon any plans for the future.

For the last 5 years, the proportion of female students accepting 4-year MRC PhD studentships has been ≥66% (except 2011-2012 when it was 16%), and the proportion has been ≥50% in 12 of the 19 years since the LMCB was founded. For the last 5 years, the proportion of female students accepting independent PhD studentship places has been 100% (except 2011-2012 when it was 33%). Although both sets of data are small they are in line with the national picture, at 62% for Bioscience PhDs. No imbalance is apparent, and no action is necessary. These data will continue to be monitored annually (Action 3.1).

(v) **Ratio of course applications to offers and acceptances by gender for (ii), (iii) and (iv) above** – comment on the differences between male and female application and success rates and describe any initiatives taken to address any imbalance and the effect to date. Comment upon any plans for the future.
In three of the last 5 years (2008 to date), the proportion of female students applying for, interviewed, and offered 4-year MRC PhD studentship places increased at each stage. In two of these years the proportion decreased at shortlisting (2010-2011) or at offer (2011-2012). No imbalance is apparent (Fig), and we are no longer concerned about a possible trend against male recruitment that we noted in 2009. These data will continue to be monitored annually (Action 3.1).

**(vi) Degree classification by gender** – comment on any differences in degree attainment between males and females and say what action is being taken to address any imbalance.

The LMCB has postgraduate research students working towards the degree of PhD, although initial registration is for an MPhil. The option to go only for the MPhil has not been taken up in the history of the LMCB, despite not all students eventually submitting for PhD. A UCL Graduate School-directed process, modified for our 4-year course, is in place to monitor progress and facilitate the decision to confirm transfer to PhD. All LMCB PhD students to date who have submitted for PhD were successful (78). There is no apparent imbalance, no action is necessary. Data will continue to be monitored (Action 3.1).

**Staff data**

**(i) Female: male ratio of academic staff and research staff** – researcher, lecturer, senior lecturer, reader, professor (or equivalent). Comment on any differences in numbers between males and females and say what action is being taken to address any underrepresentation at particular grades/levels.

At Sept 2012, at senior MRC level, there were 6 male and 0 female Group Leaders (GL), and 1 male and 1 female providing senior research support. In contrast, there are more female (5) than male (4) UCL GLs. In the last year we have been undergoing an intensive period of recruitment and have identified a further 3 men and 3 women we want to bring to the LMCB. So at present we are recruiting at 50:50 on scientific merit. One of these women will shortly be appointed at
Professorial level. If all accept, we are pleased that this will bring our overall GL to 39% female, up from the current 35%, and reversing a trend of decreasing overall female GLs (a combination of male recruitment and female retirement or transfer to other institutions based on success at the LMCB) over the last five years (Fig). This improved % is still significantly less than the % national female entry at postgraduate level (around 62%), however may not be a reflection of any bias as the numbers of GLs are low.

There are currently more female than male postdocs (12/7 for MRC, 8/7 for UCL) and core staff/research assistants (3/0 for MRC, 4/0 for UCL for RAs) (Fig). Against the national picture, there is male under-representation at postdoctoral level. It is concerning that there are so many females at research assistant (RA) level, and this is likely to reflect a self-selecting bias as a result of highly qualified females going for more secure RA positions rather than aiming for personal fellowships. We will continue to monitor (Action 3.1) as well as exploring the basis for this.

Our overall data are consistent with the recognised loss of female scientists during transition to scientific independence. We have taken several innovative actions over the last three years (see Sliver Action Plan progress and Case Reports) to offset this for our own postdocs to facilitate their transition to scientific independence e.g. providing opportunities to speak and chair, supervise students, participate in chalk-talks by interviewees, extending contracts to allow the generation of more data, giving support in writing applications and interview practice and will continue (Action 4.1). We recognise that it will take longer for the imbalance to be addressed at our own GL level (Action 4.3).

Recruitment data is now kept more consistently and will improve further as we move to become a University Unit and come under UCL’s administration (UCL eRecruitment systems). For recent GL positions, more males applied than females (80:20) and females were shortlisted in the same ratio as their applications, but offers and acceptances were at 50:50. The LMCB executive group (males:female 3:1) review GL applications and shortlist 6 for interview, but all GL are involved in interviewing, with the final decision by the Director. For postdoc, research assistant and core technical support, more or equal numbers of females apply, and a similar or higher % of females are appointed. There are no concerns over recruitment at individual levels. Wording of future advertisements for senior staff positions is always checked for gender impartiality.

(ii) **Turnover by grade and gender** – comment on any differences between men and women in turnover and say how the department plans to address this. Where the number of staff leaving is small, comment on the reasons why particular individuals left.

Most contracts are short-term and so turnover is necessarily high (planned turnover). For long-term contracts there has been little turnover - it is therefore not meaningful to compare rate of turnover by gender as the rates at which people leave are either beyond our control or statistically insignificant.

(Words 1153)

4. **Supporting and advancing women’s careers: maximum 5000 words**

   Key career transition points
a) Provide data for the past five years (where possible with clearly labelled graphical illustrations) on the following with commentary on their significance, how they have affected action planning, and any improvements since the department’s Silver award.

(i) **Job application and success rates by gender and grade** – comment on any differences in recruitment between men and women at any level and say what action is being taken to address this.

Bar chart illustrating total combined recruitment data for all staff applications, shortlistings and acceptances over the last 3 years, including some GL yet to start. Dotted line indicates 50%. Dark shading represents female, light shading represents male.
There is no problem attracting, shortlisting or offering positions to female applicants except at GL level where female applicant numbers are always lower than male counterparts, but not so low that excellent females cannot be identified. Therefore, we do not think we have a problem in attracting applications by gender or grade. However, the proportion of males tails off along the recruitment process for postdocs, perhaps consistent with their greater confidence in initially submitting an application than an equally qualified female and our ability to shortlist the best regardless of gender. We do now encourage our GLs to informally promote the LMCB to female colleagues as an excellent place to work which has been very successful recently in recruiting female GLs who are yet to start (Action 4.3).

(ii) Applications for promotion and success rates by gender and grade – comment on where these differ, whether these have improved and say what further action may be taken. Where the number of women is small applicants may comment on specific examples of where women have been through the promotion process. Explain how potential candidates are identified.

Staff who are potential candidates for promotion are identified at annual appraisals by their line manager. This discussion looks at achievements, goals, training needs, and criteria for career progression and promotion should be discussed if appropriate. The discussion takes into account career breaks and work-life balance issues (for both women and men). Criteria for UCL and MRC schemes are readily available. Since numbers are small there is no evidence for or against gender balance in any past process, but in the past three years (which included a promotion freeze) 7 MRC staff have been promoted (1 male core staff, 1 male to tenured GL) or had their contracts extended to give more time to secure a permanent position (2 female and 2 male postdocs to open ended posts). In the same period 4 UCL staff have been promoted (1 female postdoc, 1 female to Reader, and 1 male and 1 female to Professor). Two female and one male GLs who were recently at the LMCB have left and subsequently become Professors.

b) For each of the areas below, explain what the key issues are in the department, what steps have been taken to address any imbalances, what success/impact has been achieved so far and what additional steps may be needed.

(i) Recruitment of staff – comment on how the department’s recruitment processes ensure that female candidates are attracted to apply, and how the department ensures its short listing, selection processes and criteria comply with the university’s equal opportunities policies.

When we advertise any post we ensure that the wording is checked by UCL or MRC for gender impartiality. There is no problem attracting female applicants except at GL level where female applicant numbers are always lower than male counterparts but not so low that excellent females cannot be identified. In our last round of GL recruitment we tried to use more general vocabulary to encourage more females to apply as we were concerned that asking ‘the best’ to apply was not attracting females, but with no effect (still 20% female applications, consistent since 2009). So in addition, we asked GL to encourage female candidates (e.g. those they met at meetings), and two of these went through the process, were offered positions, and should start in 2013. Thus, in our experience, this type of positive action had a significant effect on female recruitment (Action 4.3) since between 2009-2011 no GL positions were offered to shortlisted female applicants.
We monitor our shortlisting and know that we are not disproportionately losing women applicants in the process of selecting and interviewing at any grade. However, we are concerned that well qualified females may be dropping out of the postdoc career route and instead settling for more stable research assistant or core staff positions since for two recent positions the % females increased significantly at the shortlisting stage.

We are confident that all appointments are on scientific merit. All staff involved in any recruitment undergo ‘fair recruitment’ training, of which gender equality and unconscious bias is a key component. UCL and MRC administer all appointments.

(ii) **Support for staff at key career transition points** – having identified key areas of attrition of female staff in the department, comment on any interventions, programmes and activities that support women at the crucial stages, such as personal development training, opportunities for networking, mentoring programmes and leadership training. Identify which have been found to work best at the different career stages.

We identified the transition between postdoc and independent researcher as the key transition point for females in the LMCB and so in the last five years have concentrated our efforts on this, as well as continuing to support the transition from student to postdoc. For our own postdocs, we have sought to ensure that we encourage them to be aware of their abilities and potential, and to provide them with opportunities to develop skills pertinent to independent research positions (**Action 4.1**). This applies to all, but of course we ensure that we pay particular attention to promising staff who are less confident, who we have observed often tend to be females.

For example, for senior postdocs moving towards scientific independence we now (i) invite them to sit in on chalk-board talks by applicants for GL positions at the LMCB to allow them to experience the necessary level of expertise and competence that they will need to show (or conversely exceed in the case of an unsuccessful GL candidate), (ii) invite them to chair sessions or to speak at our Retreat alongside some very experienced internal and external GLs (at our last Retreat in 2012 2 female and 2 male postdocs chaired sessions, 3 female and 2 male postdocs spoke, 1 female and 1 male student spoke), (iii) ensure a rotating programme where all postdocs host and introduce internal speakers at our weekly internal research update talks, (iv) encourage them to take turns as a small group to act as host to our weekly external speakers at the UCL Housman Room following their talk and prior to a dinner hosted by a few GLs. We also ensure that 50% of external speakers are female, inviting a greater percentage of females to speak if necessary to ensure this. At our Retreats we always invite one speaker who is working on projects quite far from our research interests and this year it was a young female GL working at the Large Hadron Collider.

We encourage all postdocs to attend the many excellent UCL or MRC training events to achieve their 10 days/year under the Roberts agenda, and will try new ways to increase this (**Action 5.4**). These courses cover different topics aimed at developing transferable skills and helping in personal development. Training needs are always discussed at annual appraisals.

In addition, the LMCB postdoc committee organises informal events tailored to areas of interest of current postdocs and also students, such as ‘Inspirational scientists’, ‘Working in editing/publishing’, ‘From Postdoc to PI’, ‘Women in Science’, ‘Working in Technology transfer/patent’, ‘How to get grant funding’, ‘Working in Industry’. Some of the speakers are
suggested by the Director or GLs, thus showing our support to alternative scientific career paths (Action 5.5).

Our 2009 and 2012 surveys revealed that experience at the LMCB did not significantly discourage the pursuit of an academic career, but that training and advice on alternate careers is much appreciated. We now give more encouragement to our students and postdocs to explore unconventional career paths, to take advantage of opportunities and showcase themselves as appropriate whilst they are with us, and will continue to do so (Action 5.5). They have been successful in this: e.g. several now work at the MRC and The Wellcome Trust, Dr Jennifer Rohn is a successful science novelist, blogger and leader of Science is Vital, as well as now heading her own lab elsewhere in UCL (and see Section 4 Career development (a)(ii)).

We, unusually, have long advertised and recruited external postdocs for Career Development Awards that UCL considers a bone fide route to a permanent University position (Action 4.2). We actively advise on their application and act as the sponsoring department but at present cannot offer a place if initially unsuccessful. UCL, however, is currently developing a scheme to sponsor these individuals for one year to allow them to submit further applications if necessary. We will now positively encourage external female postdocs to apply.

Career development

a) For each of the areas below, explain what the key issues are in the department, what steps have been taken to address any imbalances, what success/impact has been achieved so far and what additional steps may be needed.

(i) Promotion and career development – comment on the appraisal and career development process, and promotion criteria and whether these take into consideration responsibilities for teaching, research, administration, pastoral work and outreach work; is quality of work emphasised over quantity of work?

Staff who are potential candidates for promotion are identified at annual appraisals by their line manager. This discussion looks at achievements, goals, training needs, and criteria for career progression and promotion should be discussed if appropriate. The discussion takes into account career breaks and work-life balance issues. Criteria for UCL and MRC schemes are readily available. Since numbers are necessarily small there is no evidence for or against gender balance in any past process, and we are aware that we need to ensure consistency. Female (and male) GLs who were formerly at the LMCB have left and subsequently become Professors in the past three years. However, our survey showed that at all levels discussion about career development and promotion plans were still not addressed in annual appraisals as well as appraisees hoped they would be, which we will address (Actions 4.2, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3). This includes a new approach to mentoring.

(ii) Induction and training – describe the support provided to new staff at all levels, as well as details of any gender equality training. To what extent are good employment practices in the institution, such as opportunities for networking, the flexible working policy, and professional and personal development opportunities promoted to staff from the outset?

We have a comprehensive in-house induction and training for all new staff and students coordinated by in-house administration that includes, heath and safety, computer facilities etc, as well as centrally, that includes equalities and diversity. Each GL covers more tailored requirements
such as opportunities for attendance at meetings, networking, flexible working, development opportunities, etc. according to the post. UCL recognises equality and diversity as key to its academic, social and business success. This includes good practice in gender, age, race, disability, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, and religion and belief equality, that has been recognized widely (e.g. by UCL getting in the Stonewall Top 100 for LGB equality).

(iii) Support for female students – describe the support (formal and informal) provided for female students to enable them to make the transition to a sustainable academic career, particularly from postgraduate to researcher, such as mentoring, seminars and pastoral support and the right to request a female personal tutor. Comment on whether these activities are run by female staff and how this work is formally recognised by the department.

All LMCB PhD students undertake their choice of three rotation projects in their first year. They can choose from approx. 40 supervisors, and we have been deliberately increasing the % of females on this list year on year. Currently this is at male:female 29:12, an improvement from last year of 32:12. We will review again in the next month and anticipate a change to 31:15 or better and this will continue year on year until we reach 50:50 (Action 6.4). The MRC LMCB PhD students are free to choose their supervisor and lab from these candidates for their PhD thesis work – this allows choice based on scientific interest as well as lab culture and personalities, maximising the likelihood of a fulfilling postgraduate experience.

Specific to our department, each LMCB Student can suggest the members of their 3-person Student Committee from the current list approx. 40 supervisors (excluding the head of their research lab.). This committee meets with them regularly (every 6-12 months, or as necessary), and its main role is mentoring but in practice focuses on scientific oversight and advice (Action 5.1).

UCL offers excellent training courses to facilitate all its students to make the transition to postdoc and beyond and specific support for female students, including an Advisor to Women Students. Under the UCL Graduate Programme, all postgraduate students electronically log progress, which includes attendance at training courses. The required attendance is the equivalent of two weeks (20 points) per year (Action 5.4). Many LMCB-run events and tutorials count towards the UCL training requirement, leading to a significantly higher total of training time for our students. The LMCB PG Student Committee also organises events of interest to its PG students, such as ‘Roles of charities in funding and research’, ‘Choosing a post-doctoral position’, ‘Choosing a lab for the 3-year PhD’ (Action 5.5).

As highlighted in Section 4 Transition points (b)(ii) our surveys (Action 6.7) revealed that training and advice on alternate careers is much appreciated. As a result of this we have begun to better encourage our students and postdocs to explore unconventional career paths and to showcase themselves as appropriate. For example, one current female student is particularly interested in public engagement and a (SAT) GL asked her to edit an article she had written for a magazine which the student was able to improve, and she has also been encouraged to enter competitions in public speaking and has entertained at UCL Bright Club (“the thinking person’s variety night, blending comedy, music, art, new writing, science, performance, and anything else that can happen on a stage”). We will continue this (Action 5.5) and our goal that GL do not differ significantly in their supportive approach (Action 6.10).

Organisation and culture
Within the LMCB, all GLs serve on the decision-making committee, and one representative from Postdocs (currently female) and Students (currently male), creating a reasonably gender-balanced committee. Since 2009 we set up an Executive Committee to look in more detail at policy and strategy. This consists of all Professorial Staff (currently 3 male and 1 female) so this is somewhat gender imbalanced, but the arrival of a new female professor in 2013 will help to address this (Action 6.3).

In terms of other LMCB committees (safety, equipment, crisis management, seminar and IT), all except one are currently chaired by male GLs, as well as being male-dominated. The proportion of females (not counting those taking minutes) is currently 33-42% which needs to improve, but avoiding overload (Action 6.3). We need to address gender chairing particularly at our next review of committees, as all GLs should be offered experience in chairing (Action 6.2).

(ii) **Female: male ratio of academic and research staff on fixed-term contracts and open-ended (permanent) contracts** – comment on any differences between male and female staff representation on fixed-term contracts and say what is being done to address them.

At Sept 2012, the five UCL female GLs are tenured, but not all male GLs are. Most MRC postdocs have fixed-term contracts that can be extended for up to 12 months only. There are a few recognised as high-calibre Investigator Scientists, who have been awarded open-ended contracts (Action 4.1). All UCL postdocs have open-ended contracts (subject to the availability of funding). All LMCB Research assistants and Academic technical support staff have open-ended contracts. The numbers in each type of contract reflect the proportion of females:males in each staff grouping, and are not of concern.

b) For each of the areas below, explain what the key issues are in the department, what steps have been taken to address any imbalances, what success/impact has been achieved so far and what additional steps may be needed.

(i) **Representation on decision-making committees** – comment on evidence of gender balance in the mechanism for selecting representatives. What evidence is there that women are encouraged to sit on a range of influential committees inside and outside the department? How is the issue of ‘committee overload’ addressed where there are small numbers of female staff?

As already summarised, within the LMCB, all GLs serve on the decision-making committee, and the postdoc and student representatives are chosen by these groups. 8 GLs sit on other internal LMCB committees (safety, equipment, crisis management, seminar and IT), some on two (but there is no LMCB ‘committee overload’) – these are by invitation of the Director although volunteers are always welcome, and are reviewed annually. Other internal committee members are de facto from their position. We aim to further improve the dynamics and gender representation of these committees (Actions 6.3, 6.6).
GLs contribute to the wider life of UCL, with all professors (4) automatically and one non-professorial female elected to serve on the major decision-making committee (UCL Academic Board); the same non-professorial female represents Academic Board on the UCL Equalities Committee and one male serves on the UCL-wide 50:50 gender equality group. The Director serves on a variety of UCL committees including directing the Biosciences Recruitment Panel and the Crick Strategy Board which allows his experience with Athena to be directly applied to a large UCL Faculty and a highly strategic new scientific initiative in London. One male professor sits on an MRC grant-awarding committee. This additional participation has usually arisen from volunteering or de facto from a position of responsibility held in the LMCB or at UCL. There is good gender balance in this wider participation, although participation is at the discretion of the GLs. Most GLs also serve on various UCL, or national research related committees or those for national or international meeting organisation – providing good role models to the LMCB for wider involvement and recognition.

(ii) **Workload model** – describe the systems in place to ensure that workload allocations, including pastoral and administrative responsibilities (including the responsibility for work on women and science) are taken into account at appraisal and in promotion criteria. Comment on the rotation of responsibilities e.g. responsibilities with a heavy workload and those that are seen as good for an individual’s career.

The LMCB is a research department of UCL and the MRC Unit is not yet fully integrated as a University Unit. Additional commitments to research for GLs consist of teaching for UCL which is currently controlled by their affiliated UCL Department in consultation with the Director of the LMCB; serving on LMCB, UCL or MRC committees; and outreach activities relevant to their research or interest in widening participation. Occasional high intensive tasks exist, such as leading the Athena SAT, are undertaken and given appropriate recognition in the context of overall workload. Workload data is not currently formally collected within the LMCB and compared with those of the affiliated departments, so transparency and fairness has not been monitored. Procedures for monitoring workload will be set up once full integration is established, drawing on some excellent existing UCL good practice (Action 3.2).

(iii) **Timing of departmental meetings and social gatherings** – provide evidence of consideration for those with family responsibilities, for example what the department considers to be core hours and whether there is a more flexible system in place.

All important meetings have been held within core hours (10 am - 4 pm) for many years. All LMCB seminars are held at lunch-time or finish by 5 pm. However, some of the hosting activities for external speakers are after 5 pm, but these involve only a few people who have sufficient notice if any rearrangements need to be made. The timing of lab-based meetings are at the discretion of the GL but are held in core hours. There is a monthly Department-wide social Cocktail event on a Friday, organised by a lab, which starts at 5 pm. Our cake-based celebration events that sometime include champagne for important papers, grant awards, people leaving or other life- events in the last 3 years have naturally moved to early in the afternoon to allow more to attend. Our annual summer family picnic open to all at the LMCB is held in the day during school holidays and our Christmas activities begin in the afternoon to allow families to attend but then continue into the evening. Lab-based social events are organised at a time that suits all lab members and so are usually weekday lunch-time or evening events but occasionally are weekend events. GL social activities are usually held in the evening. Since social events present significant networking
opportunities, we are aware that varied timing of these events is essential (Action 6.12) and are pleased to recognise changes in timing to allow greater flexibility arising quite naturally.

(iv) Culture – demonstrate how the department is female-friendly and inclusive. ‘Culture’ refers to the language, behaviours and other informal interactions that characterise the atmosphere of the department, and includes all staff and students.

The first indication that the LMCB is female-friendly and inclusive is that there are visibly many women in the department at all grades going about their respective activities and interacting with all in the department (currently 57% female overall, with all staff categories >50% female except GLs which is at 35%). Specifically, we demonstrate our inclusive culture by prominently displaying our Athena SWAN Silver award in the Reception area and on our web site (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lmcb/athena-page) where more details about Athena SWAN and all our work in this area can be found (Action 6.8). We have recently updated the whole LMCB web site ensuring every paragraph and photo fits with Athena Gold culture (Action 6.8) and have just begun to monitor visits. There are pages describing our work for Silver and Gold levels, our surveys and applications, and useful and interesting links. We keep the notice board on Work-Life balance outside the tea-room fresh, adding interesting (and occasionally amusing) newspaper clips. These informal activities have continued to be very successful, with students, postdocs and GLs suggesting further useful sites or articles.

There is a prominent Work-Life Balance notice board outside the tea-room where we display information from UCL or the MRC, interesting articles, examples of female role models, notices about forthcoming grant applications etc (Action 6.9). These sites demonstrate our commitment to gender equality and provide useful and interesting (and occasionally amusing) links to items of particular interest to female research staff. A female GL has been chosen as an impact case study to illustrate clinical relevance in the forthcoming 2014 REF exercise, so as well as providing a good local role model, this should also add to the female role models at UCL. We survey the department anonymously every 3 years which allows us to see how life in our department is really viewed and initiate actions as necessary.

Furthermore, we now always have 50:50 external seminar speakers (Action 6.1). LMCB core hours have long been 10 am-4 pm. Few important meetings are held outside core hours or in school holidays (Action 6.11).

We welcome family participation in an annual family summer picnic held in Regent’s Park, and with an event at Christmas. The arrival of a new baby is shared with all staff and celebrated (as is any good news – papers accepted, grants, promotions etc). Young children can be present at residential Retreats when both partners work at the LMCB (Action 7.4). There are many social opportunities – football (male-dominated(!)) in Regents Park, and several small running groups (female and male) arise at intervals to raise money for charities in half-marathons, even a group of males who grow moustaches in November. There is a tradition for a comedy film to be made by the students to be shown at our Retreat. There has even been a postdoc-student group who dined at restaurants that reflected their nationalities. Most labs hold regular social events from cakes to celebrate birthdays, meals when someone is leaving, to trips out around Christmas or in the summer.

Our most recent survey again did not reveal any major problems with LMCB culture, despite the long hours culture prevalent in our scientific field.
(v) **Outreach activities** – comment on the level of participation by female and male staff in outreach activities with schools and colleges and other centres. Describe who the programmes are aimed at, and how this activity is formally recognised as part of the workload model and in appraisal and promotion processes.

We are very enthusiastic about outreach activities and have supported a huge variety since 1992 (Action 6.13). Data on these by staff and students is now collated so that this is formally recognised as an important department activity as well as being recognised at an individual level in appraisal and promotion processes.

A few specific examples over the last 3 years include: students, postdocs and research assistants involved in Science Festivals (e.g. Big Bang Science Fayre event); GLs host many work experience or summer students; students run an annual Schools visit programme for pre-GSCE secondary school students, often from girls schools; many public lectures including in house to core staff and to MRC hosted groups; media appearances; social media (Facebook, Twitter) for interaction with disease-focus groups; market-place event at international science conference for public to interact with variety of professionals (co-sponsored with UCL); curation of freely accessible disease databases within wider disease focused web site (NCL Resource); work with a composer over a 6-month residency; one former postdoc, Jennifer Rohn, has published several novels set in a science research setting, is editor of the webzine LabLit.com and founder of the Science is Vital organization. Thus, we model very creative and innovative ways to do and promote science.

Since our young students and postdocs especially are a good example of gender balance then we present >50% female role models in these varied outreach activities to school children and their parents. This outreach is vital (Action N.2), since our 2009 survey revealed that although most students and postdocs would equally encourage a boy or girl to consider a career in science, at that time GLs would not, even though none wished to change their own career. This had improved by 2012 although a few (13%) would still not give equal encouragement.

**Flexibility and managing career breaks**

a) Provide data for the past five years (where possible with clearly labelled graphical illustrations) on the following with commentary on their significance, how they have affected action planning, and any improvements since the department’s Silver award.

(i) **Maternity return rate** – comment on whether maternity return rate has improved or deteriorated and any plans for further improvement. If the department is unable to provide a maternity return rate, please explain why.

Our number of maternity leave and returns is small. However, over the last 3 years all four (3 postdocs and 1 research assistants) have returned to work. There is no need for action.

(ii) **Paternity, adoption and parental leave uptake** – comment on the uptake of paternity leave by grade and parental and adoption leave by gender and grade. Has this improved or deteriorated and what plans are there to improve further.

Our number of paternity leaves is small. However, over the last 3 years six (1 GL and 5 postdocs) were taken up. There is no need for action. There has been no demand for adoption leave, nor any extended parental leave in addition to the normal flexibility available for children’ illnesses etc. We use our Notice Board and web site to draw attention to new UCL/MRC or government initiatives such as the Additional Paternity Regulations.
(iii) **Numbers of applications and success rates for flexible working by gender and grade** – comment on any disparities. Where the number of women in the department is small applicants may wish to comment on specific examples.

The number working flexibly formally is small and over the last five years has included all grades. Over the last three years, there have been no formal requests for flexible working. However, it is possible that not all consider the option of flexible working (Action 7.1). There are many who work flexibly informally (see next section).

b) *For each of the areas below, explain what the key issues are in the department, what steps have been taken to address any imbalances, what success/impact has been achieved so far and what additional steps may be needed.*

(i) **Flexible working** – comment on the numbers of staff working flexibly and their grades and gender, whether there is a formal or informal system, the support and training provided for managers in promoting and managing flexible working arrangements, and how the department raises awareness of the options available.

We operate both formal and informal flexible working. Formal flexible working arrangements are usually in the form of reduced hours and over the last five years have been taken up by all staff grades, of both genders. Informal flexible working that does not reduce hours is used by many, taking advantage of the flexible nature of research – in particular GLs and some postdocs – often to cover caring responsibilities. In practice this means that slightly shorter hours at the LMCB are balanced by longer working hours at home. All GLs are aware of flexible working and welcome this in their laboratories. Those currently formally working flexibly include men and women and different grades (See Case reports), and are currently 1 GL, 1 senior Postdoc and 1 core research staff.

We propose to raise the option to formally consider flexible working as an additional question during the annual appraisal (Action 7.1), and for flexible working to be promoted on our web site and Work-Life Balance notice board. To aid flexible working, important meetings are held in core hours, avoiding school holidays. Lab-based activities are held outside core hours only if this suits all members. However, almost all student or postdoc activities are held in the early evening since some of those who attend do their research in other buildings across the large UCL campus. This may therefore always limit accessibility for some, and we are aware of this. We encourage students and postdocs to recognise how flexible research can be as a career (Action 6.5).

Our survey found that part-time working was considered disadvantageous but flexible working was not, as research is momentum driven. Significantly, almost all, at all grades, still thought that others would be against them if they worked part-time, but now did not consider that they were prejudiced themselves, demonstrating our shifting culture.

(ii) **Cover for maternity and adoption leave and support on return** – explain what the department does, beyond the university maternity policy package, to support female staff before they go on maternity leave, arrangements for covering work during absence, and to help them achieve a suitable work-life balance on their return.

Cover is always provided for maternity leave of core scientific and support staff to ensure that their duties are maintained. For GL maternity leave, arrangements are made for supervision of postdoc and PhD students, as necessary. No cover is usually provided for postdoc or PhD student
leave – research work is usually held in stasis unless urgent, in which case this work has to be picked up by another lab member, and other work delayed. Recognition is given to those who contribute to a project in this way.

Support on return includes appreciation of more restrictive working hours. In 2009 this was recognised to be GL-specific and so is now overseen by the Director as LMCB policy (Action 7.2 and Case Report). The Director keeps in touch with those on leave and invites them to events. Information that facilitates the return to work of new parents is accessible via our Athena SWAN web page, and new parents are encouraged to link with others in the Department to provide support. UCL has a work-place Nursery and operates a salary-sacrifice scheme which helps financially. None have needed to take recent advantage of the UCL maternity sabbatical scheme for teaching commitments.

We have also recently supported an extended but not continuous period of sick leave of a female GL and of a member of core staff. Both were tailored to their individual needs and overseen by the Director (Case Report).

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5. Any other comments: maximum 500 words

Please comment here on any other elements relevant to the application, e.g. other STEMM-specific initiatives of special interest that have not been covered in the previous sections. Include any other relevant data (e.g. results from staff surveys), provide a commentary on it and indicate how the department plans to address any gender disparities identified.

We conduct a survey and focus discussion groups every 3 years to capture life in the LMCB. This year’s response rate was excellent: 100% (15/15) for GLs, 87% (26/30) for postdocs, 77% (27/35) for students and 65% (13/20) for core staff. Members of SAT ran focus groups for their peers. This generated valuable information that we fed into our Action Plan. For example, we are now aware of how neglected our core staff and research assistants feel, and they struggle most with activities that are outside core hours (Action 5.7).

In our work for Silver we had assembled a list of ‘Shocking Statements’ – those that surprised the SAT – which were used to prompt very specific discussion of issues. We were pleased that there were no unexpected shocks this time, though certainly strong acknowledgement of known issues as well as new perspectives that we address in our Action Plan (e.g. Action 5.6). We consider the raising of these new issues (which reflect experiences over many years) indicate an increased level of confidence in the SAT and a greater awareness of gender issues.

As part of our work towards Gold level we took a much wider look at life in the LMCB. As well as maintaining our excellent provision and standard of scientific equipment and facilities (Action 7.3) we also completed general refurbishments so that it is now a more pleasant place to work.

As we were one of the first UCL Departments and the first MRC Unit to gain Silver status we are keen that our experience helps other UCL and MRC departments to improve their gender equality. Therefore we act as Champion for the Athena SWAN charter and its principles within UCL and the MRC (Actions N.1, N.2, N.3). Dr Mole and de Bruin have been consulted informally and formally by other UCL departments (e.g. Medicine, Inst of Ophthalmology, others already holding Silver
awards), by MRC Head Office, and invited to give presentations by UCL, the MRC and other Universities. They also contribute to wider equality issues across UCL – Dr Mole serves on the Committee for Equal Opportunities and Dr de Bruin on the 50:50 gender group. Dr Mole has served on an Athena Judging Panel and was invited to join UCL’s REF Equality and Diversity Panel. Both take every opportunity to sensitively raise equality issues e.g. when planning speakers for a meeting with UCL colleagues outside the LMCB suggesting a 50:50 balance, and are also part of an informal UCL gender equality group who comment on news stories and reports by email. We consider that these are excellent Beacon activities.

Our continued purpose for Athena activities is three-fold: (1) to keep the profile of Athena SWAN related issues high within the LMCB, to provide links to useful sources of relevant information; (2) to show future LMCB students and postdocs that female scientists are valued, encouraged and supported; (3) to lead the way for other UCL Departments and MRC Centres/Units to take up the Athena SWAN (or similar) challenge.

(Words 499)

6. Action plan

Provide an action plan as an appendix. An action plan template is available on the Athena SWAN website.

This should be a table or a spreadsheet comprising plans to address the priorities identified by the analysis of relevant data presented in this application, success/outcome measures, the post holder responsible for each action and a timeline for completion. The Plan should cover current initiatives and your aspirations for the next three years.

See appended Action Plan for Gold and a summary of Actions since our Silver award.

Our Action Plan highlights our decision to focus on three activities that will make the most difference to the LMCB: (1) the need to reach 50:50 in terms of visible role models in all areas, (2) specific training and support for career progression to provide necessary opportunities in attracting financial support, leading a research group, teaching, and public engagement, and alternate careers, (3) provision of mentors.

7. Case study: impacting on individuals : maximum 1500 words

Describe how the department has changed and how its staff have benefited on the journey to applying for Gold.

Provide a small number of case studies of individuals working in the department and show how the inclusive culture and working practices of the department have enabled them to pursue a career in STEMM.

At least one of these case studies should be a member of the self assessment team, and at least one should be someone else in the department. There should also be at least one case study from a male member of staff. More information on case studies is available in the guidance.
The LMCB has changed as we successfully implemented Silver Action Plan initiatives as well as others evolving organically as the culture changed due to our raised awareness of equality issues:
- A noticeable shift from neutrality to enthusiasm for gender equality amongst GLs: e.g. one previously neutral GL was heard to encourage a PhD student that she was as good as any male student. We now naturally consider the impact of any change on gender equality.
- Achieved our target of 50:50 for external seminar speakers and our 2012 Retreat (Action 6.3).
- Ensuring most LMCB-wide networking and social activities take place in core hours (Action 6.12).

We have sought to embed this improved awareness and attitude within wider equality aims by:
- Implementing new career development provision for postdoctoral researchers (Action 5.4).
- Continuing promotion of science as a career to children and its importance to the adult public (Action 6.13).
- Continuing to promote the ethos of the Athena SWAN Charter through formal GL meetings, informal discussions, our new web site, and work-life balance noticeboard (Action 6.8).
- Extending our vision of equality by establishing a LMCB Equalities Committee that encompasses gender equality as well as other areas (Action 3.1),

We present new case studies for each staff and student category to illustrate our wide-reaching support and the benefit to all – we could have included many more. We highlight part-time and flexible working for those with caring responsibilities or illness, targeted and long term support in a variety of career progressions. We are pleased that some of this exemplified support is for those who have now left the LMCB, showing how ingrained is our good practice.

*Note:* For displaying via the web some names of each Case Study and some personal details have been removed.

**Case Study 1: ex-PhD student (male)**

*Example of support to a male student with major life changes*

I started my PhD at the LMCB in October 2006, and always found the atmosphere to be very welcoming. I got married (in 2008) and my son was born early in 2010. I took two weeks paternity leave and after worked quite flexibly. My supervisor was especially supportive during this time, and also gave a great deal of input and feedback while I was writing my thesis, part of which took place while I was at home looking after my son with my wife back at work. When applying for post-doc positions and funding both my supervisor and my PhD committee were of great help in the writing of applications and for references. I am now working as a post-doc for Cancer Research UK, and am trying to implement some of the positive aspects I experienced at the LMCB into my new workplace.

Across the LMCB student body there was a good community spirit. While chair of the student committee I had the opportunity to attend group leader meetings and to directly present student-related matters. I feel I benefited greatly from the student-focused program at the LMCB, which helped me maintain a good work-life balance during several major life changes while conducting exciting research in a friendly, supportive environment.

**Case Study 2: Postdoc**

*Example of support for postdoc transitioning to independent GL*

I joined the LMCB in 2003, as an MRC Career Development Fellow in the lab of Yasu Fujita. After several successful years, I was offered a permanent researcher position. Dr Fujita relocated to Japan late 2010. By the time his lab had closed, I had a new avenue of research up and running and was becoming short-listed for independent fellowships. This was a stressful time for me as I
was losing a team and a mentor. However, I was hugely supported by Director Mark Marsh, and group leaders Alison Lloyd and Buzz Baum have continuously encouraged me to progress with my independent research and with grant and job applications; critical reading of grant proposals, interview preparation etc. Others, like Martin Raff, Julie Pitcher and Franck Pichaud, have helped me with interview preparation and critical reading of my proposals.

I’m still working at the LMCB, and have yet to secure an independent position. My baby daughter was born in Dec 2011 and I took 8 months maternity leave. I’ve recently returned to work full-time and was able to pick up where I left off. Since returning, I’ve had a lot of support and understanding from Mark Marsh and my colleagues as I adapt and balance my working life with childcare.

Case Study 3: ex Postdoc
Example of support for postdoc and transitioning to independent GL
I joined Stephen Nurrish’s lab at the LMCB in 2003 as an MRC Career Development Fellow. The LMCB is an extremely supportive research environment. I developed my ability to discuss my ideas and results with others which was invaluable during the preparation of my fellowship applications and the set up of my own lab at Imperial. I am currently establishing an internal seminar series in my new department, hopefully spreading similar good practice.

After four years I became an MRC Scientific Investigator. I obtained independent preliminary data, allowing me to apply for Career Development Fellowships. I am very grateful to the support by other members of the CBU and LMCB providing advice and interview practice. In 2010 I moved to the Division of Cell and Molecular Biology at Imperial College London as a Wellcome Trust Career Development Fellow.

Case Study 4: Core Staff - Head of Electron Microscopy
Example of part-time working and flexibility for core staff
I took 9 months maternity leave in 2008. I returned initially at 3 days then 4 days a week, and eventually will return to F/T. Whilst I am contracted for 80% FTE (Monday to Thursday), I have also been trusted to manage my time according to the needs of the research. The nature of my job is suited to this, as part of the work is time sensitive and may require >8 hour day, but the majority is time insensitive and can be fitted around my commitments. Each time I have put forward my case for part-time working or a change in my hours, the Director and Head of Administration have been very supportive in agreeing and arranging everything. They could not have made these transitions any easier for me, and for this I am extremely grateful as it has allowed me to return to a job that I love whilst also enabling me to care for my daughter.

Case Study 5: ex-research assistant and PhD student
Example of recognising and supporting a talented research assistant through two maternity leaves, and who achieved a PhD and is now at Medical School.
I was born in Blantyre, Malawi a small country in southern Africa. In the 1990s there was political upheaval and my father was sent to prison for a year without a trial. After his release, we flew to the UK where we sought and were granted political asylum. My brothers and I were the only refugees in our new English school. I remember struggling to understand the language used, the other children’s behaviour, even the humour was very different. I studied 9 GCSEs and 3 A levels, then in 2001 achieved an Upper Second Class (Honours) BSc in Biochemistry at Queen Mary, University of London. In Oct that year I began as a F/T research assistant in the LMCB in the laboratory of Dr Louise Cramer. I was promoted to laboratory manager in 2004. With Dr Cramer’s encouragement and support, I registered for a PhD in 2006, which I defended in 2011, and now have three excellent first author scientific publications. In this time I also had my two children
(2003 and 2008), taking maternity leaves after both. In 2009 I embarked on the accelerated 4-year medical training course at the University of Southampton, and am now in my final year. I am very grateful for the opportunities I was given at the LMCB which have enabled me to show my true potential and realise this dream of becoming a doctor. Although I now call the UK home, I hope that maybe one day I will go back to Malawi and work in the same hospital where I used to play in as a child when my mother worked there.

Case Study 6: GL (SAT)

*Example of support during illness and flexibility in caring responsibilities*

Within the last year I have taken significant periods off work for medical treatment and am pleased to acknowledge the support given by the Director, my colleagues and UCL, to work or not, at home or in the department, as I felt able. This meant that I could prioritise supporting those in my lab to ensure that their progress did not suffer from my absence, and drop other work commitments with absolutely no pressure. I was however pleased to continue leading Athena aims for the LMCB – this has been a welcome distraction at times! In addition, I have needed time to support my father who has a terminal diagnosis, and mostly I fit time with him into my ‘resting’ weeks.

(Words 1499)