Name of institution: University College London
Year: 2009

Department: MRC Laboratory for Molecular Cell Biology

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Date of Bronze SWAN award: 01/03/2006

Applications at Silver level should demonstrate what the department is doing in addition to university-wide policies to promote gender equality and to address challenges particular to the discipline.

Click here for additional guidance on completing this form.

We recognise that not all institutions use the term ‘department’, and that there are many equivalent academic groupings with different names. If in doubt, contact Athena SWAN staff in advance to check whether your department, or equivalent, is eligible to apply.

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

Letter of endorsement from the Head of Department

An accompanying letter of endorsement from the Head of Department should explain how SWAN plans and activities contribute to the overall university strategy.

The letter provides the opportunity for the Head of Department to confirm their support for the application and to endorse and commend any activities which have made a significant contribution to the achievement of the university and departmental mission.

The letter should not exceed 500 words.
1. A picture of the department

Provide data on the following areas, and comment on their significance and how they have affected action planning. Data should be provided over a three-year period to enable comparisons to be made. The purpose of asking for this data is to identify what you are doing to create a pipeline for future appointments in your discipline, how you are attracting new staff and what you are doing to retain staff and promote them. The data also enable the recognition panel to get a snapshot of the department. If you are unable to provide any of the data please comment on the reasons for this.

We recommend that you use graphical illustrations to highlight the trends emerging from the data, in addition to providing the statistics and analysis. The tables and graphical illustrations must be included in a separate spreadsheet with the data clearly labelled.

There is a maximum of 100 words for the commentary on each section (i–xvi).

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 your 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 your 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 your 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: male students accepting 4-year MRC PhD studentship places has been ≥50%, and over the period since 1992
has been ≥50% in 9/16 years. This is 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. All MRC PG students are full-time, but one UCL student is part-time.

(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 admissions and describe any initiatives taken to address any imbalance and the effect to date. Comment upon any plans for the future.

Over the last 5 years (2004 to date), the proportion of female:male students applying for, interviewed, and offered 4-year MRC PhD studentship places has increased from 50 to 100%. Between 1993-2004, the proportion of female students ranged from 20%-80%. Notably, in the most recent year (2008-2009), female applicants were 51%, and female appointments were 100%. No imbalance is apparent, although a trend against male recruitment may be emerging. Additionally, data will be kept on students who turn places down. These data will continue to be monitored annually.

(vi) **Degree classification by gender** – comment on any differences in degree attainment between males and females and say what action you are taking 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/LMCB-directed process is in place to monitor progress and facilitate the decision to confirm transfer to PhD. All students to date who have submitted for PhD were successful (53). There is no apparent imbalance, no action is necessary. Data will continue to be monitored.

(vii) **Length of time for postgraduate completion by gender** – comment on any differences in completion times between males and females and say what action you are taking to address any imbalance.

Over the last 5 years, the average length of time to thesis submission is similar for female and male applicants (between 4.3-4.7 months). Up to 2002 year of intake, 5/55 (9%, 2 female, 3 male) MRC programme students did not submit a thesis for PhD. For intake year 2003-2004, 3 male students have not yet submitted but this is anticipated. All students are encouraged to complete if submission appears delayed. There is no apparent imbalance, so no action is necessary. Data will continue to be monitored.

**Staff data**

(viii) **Number of male and female staff (academic and research) at each grade** – comment on any differences in numbers between males and
females and say what action you are taking to address any underrepresentation at particular grades/levels.

At Dec 2008, at senior (tenured) MRC level, there are 4 male and one female Group Leaders (GL) and 2 male tenure-track GLs. In contrast, there are more female (5, 3 tenured)) than male (2, 0 tenured) UCL GLs. There are more female than male postdocs (17/26 for MRC, 9/12 for UCL) and research assistants (2/3 for MRC, 2/2 for UCL). Against the national picture, there is male under-representation at postdoctoral level. Our data are consistent with the recognised loss of female scientists during transition to scientific independence. Actions proposed range from encouraging training, improving mentoring and identifying role models.

(ix) **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 you are taking to address this.

Recruitment data has been kept inconsistently. For recent GL positions, more males applied than females. All GLs review applications and shortlist 6 for interview. The Director compiles the final shortlist. 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 will be checked for gender impartiality. In the future, full recruitment data will be accessed via the MRC eRecruitment and the soon-to-be launched UCL eRecruitment systems.

(x) **Turnover by grade and gender** – comment on any differences between men and women in turnover and say how you plan to address this. Where the number of women in the department is small you may wish to comment on specific examples.

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 appropriate to compare rate of turnover by gender.

(xi) **Maternity return rate** – comment on whether your maternity return rate has improved or deteriorated and say how you plan to improve further. If you are unable to provide a maternity return rate, please explain why.

Numbers of maternity leave and return are small and it is not appropriate to compare year on year. Over the last 3 years all GLs taking maternity leave returned to work, 4/8 postdocs returned, 1/1 Research Assistant and 1/1 Academic Support staff returned. For the 4 postdocs who did not return, all were at the end of fixed term contracts - 2 are known to be continuing in research in other posts, and the destinations of the remaining two are unknown.
(xii) **Paternity, adoption and parental leave uptake** – comment on the uptake of paternity leave by grade and parental and adoption leave by gender and grade and whether this has improved or deteriorated and say how you plan to improve further.

Numbers for paternity leave are low. In the last 5 years, 3 GLs and 4 postdocs took paternity leave. There was no known adoption and other parental leave. There are no cases where parental leave was appropriate but not taken up.

(xiii) **Promotion application and success rates by gender and grade** – comment on whether these have improved and say what further action may be taken. Where the number of women is small you may comment on specific examples of where women have been through the promotion process. Explain how potential candidates are identified.

UCL and MRC have criteria and procedures for promotion. Promotion numbers within the LMCB are small. In the last 3 years there have been 3 female and 2 male MRC and one UCL female postdoc promotions to senior level. For MRC GL, there is an established path to tenure. For UCL GL, promotion can be to tenure and to Reader or Professor. In the last 3 years 2 MRC male GL and 2 UCL female GL have secured tenure. One female MRC GL was not put forward, forcing her removal in time. Complete data will now be collected and monitored.

(xiv) **Male and female representation on committees** – provide a breakdown by committee and explain any differences between male and female representation. Explain how potential members are identified.

The LMCB has few committees. There is a good balance of male and female representation, particularly amongst research staff, on all. Potential members who are not present by position have usually been asked individually by the Director or volunteered. There is more male participation on MRC committees. There is no obvious encouragement to serve on these committees. However, now that the LMCB is a UCL Research Department, this may change for those at UCL.

(xv) **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 you may wish to comment on specific examples.

During the last 10 years, all (total 6) requests for flexible working have been granted. These include requests from 1 GL, 3 postdoc, 1 Research Assistant and 1 Academic technical support. All were female. The right of all staff to request flexible working will be further promoted.

(xvi) **Female: male ratio of academic 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 you are doing to address them.

At Dec 2008, more male (4) than female (1) MRC GLs are on permanent contracts, however all three tenured UCL GLs are female. Most (21/26) MRC postdocs have fixed-term contracts that can be extended up to 12 months only. There are a few (5/26, 4 female), recognised as high-calibre Investigative Scientists, awarded open-ended contracts. All UCL postdocs have open-ended contracts (subject to the availability of continuous 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.

2. Initiatives to advance and support women in the department

Provide commentary on the thematic areas below, explaining what the key issues are in your department, based on the data above, what steps have been taken to address any imbalances, what success/impact has been achieved so far and what additional steps may be needed (maximum 200 words each for sections i–xii).

(i) Promotion and career development – comment on the appraisal and career development process and the evidence of gender balance in the process of identifying people for promotion.

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 should take into account career breaks. Criteria for UCL schemes are readily available. Since numbers are small there is no evidence for or against gender balance in any past process. Female (and male) GLs who were formerly at the LMCB have left and subsequently become Professors.

(ii) Support for staff at key career transition points – comment on any initiatives, drawing out different approaches at different levels.

Postdocs can attend excellent UCL or MRC training events (up to 10 days/year) under the Roberts agenda (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/osd/research/index.php, MRC Portal). These courses cover different topics aimed at developing transferable skills and helping in personal development. Training needs are discussed at annual appraisals. In addition, the LMCB postdoc committee organises informal events tailored to areas of interest of current postdocs, 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’.

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. Many LMCB-
run events and tutorials count towards this, leading to a significantly higher total of training time. 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'.

Our survey 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.

(iii) **Flexible working** – comment on the numbers of staff working flexibly and at what grade 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 you raise awareness of the options available.

Formal flexible working arrangements in the form of reduced hours have been taken up by 1 GL, 3 Postdocs, 1 Research Assistant, 1 core research staff, 1 student, all female. 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. One unexpected finding from our survey was that many who perceived themselves to be impartial to those who took career breaks considered others would not be towards them. The option to formally consider flexible working will be raised as an additional question during the annual appraisal and will be promoted on our web site and Work-Life Balance notice board. To aid flexible working, most important meetings are held in core hours, avoiding school holidays. Lab-based activities are held outside core hours if this suits all members. However, up to now, almost all student or postdoc activities have been held in early evening, which limits accessibility for some. External clubs using LMCB facilities may hold their meetings outside core hours.

(iv) **Culture** – comment on how you demonstrate that the department is female-friendly and inclusive.

An Athena SWAN web page accessible from all LMCB web pages (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/LMCB/athena.htm) and a prominent Work-Life Balance notice board outside the tea-room have been established. 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. There is a significant female presence within the LMCB (62% overall) - there are similar female:male GLs, and most other staff categories have >50% female. In the current session half the seminar speakers are female, with reference made to those who are excellent role models. LMCB core hours have long been 10 am-4 pm. Few important meetings are held outside core hours or in school holidays. An annual family summer picnic is held in Regent’s park. The arrival of a new baby is shared with all staff. Young children can be present at residential Retreats when both partners work at the LMCB. A joint local Day Retreat is being planned with
the MRC Clinical Sciences Centre at Imperial College, whose Director is female Prof Amanda Fisher. Our survey did not reveal any major problems with LMCB culture, despite the long hours culture prevalent in our scientific field.

(v) **Recruitment of staff** – comment on how your recruitment processes ensure that female candidates are attracted to vacancies and how you ensure that recruitment processes comply with the university’s equal opportunities policies.

Apart from GL positions, there are no problems in attracting female applicants. Overall the % of female staff members is higher in UCL than MRC laboratories. All posts are advertised, and advertisements have to be approved by MRC or UCL, ensuring that they comply with equal opportunity policies e.g posts for senior UCL academics include a positive action statement. Recruitment processes, which have become more formalised in recent years, comply with MRC or UCL policies, and are overseen by the Senior Administrator.

(vi) **Representation on decision-making committees** – comment on evidence of gender balance in the mechanism for selecting representatives.

Within the LMCB, all GLs serve on the decision-making committee, and one representative from Postdocs (currently female) and Students (currently male) chosen by these groups, creating a gender-balanced committee. Six (3 female, 3 male) GL contribute to the wider life of UCL, with one female serving on a major decision-making committee (UCL Academic Board). One GL (male) recently chaired MRC grant awarding bodies, and two (1 female, 1 male) sit on a grant-awarding committee. This external participation has usually arisen from volunteering or de facto from a position of responsibility held in the LMCB. There is good gender balance, although there has been no formal method for ensuring this. This will be maintained.

(vii) **Workload model** – comment on evidence of transparency and fairness.

The LMCB is a research institute. Additional commitments consist of teaching for UCL by GLs which is 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. Workload data is not currently formally collected outside the LMCB, so transparency and fairness has not been monitored. Procedures for monitoring workload will be explored by consulting other UCL Departments where this is already established.

(viii) **Cover for maternity and adoption leave and support on return** – comment on the mechanisms for covering workload absence and specific support on return.
Cover is provided for maternity leave of core scientific (and support) staff e.g. a recent appointment of a new assistant was timed to coincide with maternity leave so that there was no break in support. 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. This was recognised to be GL-specific rather than LMCB procedure, which is addressed in the Action Plan. The Director keeps in touch with those on leave and invites them to events. Information that facilitates the return to work of new parents will be accessible via our Athena SWAN web page, and new parents will be encouraged to link with others in the Department to provide support.

(ix) **Timing of departmental meetings and social gatherings** – evidence of consideration for those with family responsibilities.

All important meetings are held within core hours (10-4) e.g. GL meetings. 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. The timing of lab-based meetings are at the discretion of the GL and are usually held in core hours. There is a monthly Department-wide social Cocktail event, organised by a lab, which starts at 5 pm. Irregular large gatherings to celebrate an achievement or to bid farewell to a key staff member are usually held at 4 or 5 pm. A recent initiative is the summer family picnic open to all at the LMCB, which is held in the day during school holidays. Lab-based social events are organised at a time that suits all lab members. GL social activities are usually held in the evening. Since social events present significant networking opportunities, the timing of some of these events will be considered.

(x) **Outreach activities** – comment on the level of participation by female and male staff and whether they get recognition for being involved and the time and work put in.

There is no formal collection of data for staff involved in outreach activities. However, two UCL female GLs are known to be involved in school science outreach (primary and secondary level) or disease-focused family support activities. UCL recognises these activities in promotion criteria. These efforts will be recognised in any workload model that is implemented. The students also host a one-day School visit to the Laboratory each year which is targeted at pre-GCSE pupils. Three out of five have been schools for girls. This outreach is vital, since our survey revealed that although most students and postdocs would equally encourage a boy or girl to consider a career in science, GLs would not, even though none wished to change their own career.

(xi) **Induction and training** – comment on the support provided to new staff at all levels, noting what new arrangements you may be planning, as well as details of gender training.
Induction training is provided by UCL, MRC and the LMCB, and is during core hours. Excellent further training is provided by UCL and the MRC and is available to all levels of staff. UCL is particularly committed to equalities training. In 2007 all GLs at the LMCB underwent training on ‘Race Relations’. All staff involved in recruitment undergo ‘fair recruitment’ training, of which gender equality is a key component. The Action Plan includes future training in ‘Gender Equality’ for the GLs.

(xii) Support for female students – comment on the support provided for female students to enable them to make the transition to a sustainable academic career, particularly from postgraduate to researcher.

All LMCB PhD students undertake their choice of three rotation projects in their first year. From this they are free to choose their supervisor and lab for their PhD thesis work – this allows choice based on scientific interest as well as lab culture, maximising the likelihood of a fulfilling postgraduate experience. UCL offers excellent training courses to facilitate all students to make the transition to postdoc and beyond. Specific support by UCL for female students, such as an Advisor to Women Students, is also available. Each LMCB Student can suggest the Members of their 3-person Student Committee which meets with them regularly (every 6-12 months, or as necessary), and whose main role is scientific advice, although Mentoring may also be given if requested. The Action Plan further addresses the issue of Mentoring and Networking, which may be of particular support to female students.

3. Case study: impacting on individuals

Describe how your department’s SWAN activities have benefitted an individual woman working in the department (maximum 200 words).

Dr Simona Parrinello is a scientist who trained in the USA, achieving an outstanding publication record. Following a move to the UK, Dr Parrinello was awarded a 2-year EMBO Fellowship in Dr Lloyd’s laboratory in the LMCB which began in Jan 2006, and led to an important first-author publication in a high impact journal. Subsequently, the LMCB, under its current Director, and in recognition of her research potential, encouraged and supported Dr Parrinello’s application for the independent 4-year Royal Society Dorothy Hodgkin Award, which began in March 2008, also in Dr Lloyd’s laboratory. This provides her with the security and flexibility of developing her independent research whilst also caring for two pre-school children, and she has worked both part-time and full-time during this time. In recognition of her work, Dr Parrinello was also invited by Prof Marsh to speak at the most recent LMCB retreat in 2007. More recently, Dr Parrinello has been given the responsibility of supervising a PhD student, which will further establish her independence as she gains senior authorships. This will put her in an extremely strong position when she applies for group leader positions in the future.
4. Further SET-specific initiatives

Comment on any particularly innovative programmes not covered above which have been undertaken, noting their effectiveness to date and any plans to introduce new initiatives and/or review present practice (maximum 200 words).

During this focus on SWAN initiatives, the SAT launched the ‘Athena @ LMCB’ web page, together with a notice board on Work-Life balance outside the tea-room. The purpose was three-fold: (1) to raise the profile of Athena SWAN related issues within the LMCB, to provide links to useful sources of relevant information, and to show that the LMCB cares about female scientists; (2) to show future students and postdocs exploring the LMCB that female scientists are valued, encouraged and supported; (3) to lead the way for other Departments within UCL and MRC Centres/Units to take up the Athena SWAN (or similar) challenge. This has been very successful, with students, postdocs and GLs suggesting further useful sites or articles. An important focus has become the need to identify female role models, which is now influencing future activities organised by the Postdoc Committee. This was exemplified by the nearly all-male initial list by GLs of proposed members of the LMCB Scientific Advisory Board.

From the responses to our survey questionnaires, we assembled a list of ‘Shocking Statements’ – those that surprised the SAT. These were used to prompt very specific discussion of issues within Staff focus groups that need to be addressed.

5. The self-assessment process

Describe the Self-Assessment Team members and the action planning process, as well as any consultation processes that were undertaken (maximum 500 words).

Dr Mole, SAT Leader, and Ms Claire Hebblethwaite, Senior Administrator, introduced the idea of the Athena SWAN project to the LMCB Director, who was very supportive of the process. The project was then introduced to the LMCB via the GL Meeting, and the core SAT group was formed of those who expressed a particular interest. The core SAT is made up of two senior personnel (Dr Sara Mole (Lead), Dr Rob de Bruin) representing non-CBU positions, and UCL-tenured and non-tenured positions; two postdoctoral researchers (Dr Alessandra Chittka, Dr Karine Pozo) representing those on short-term post-doctoral and personal fellowships, and one post-graduate student (Ms Jennifer Winter). Senior Administrator (Ms Claire Hebblethwaite) and Prof Mark Marsh (Director, representing MRC CBU) joined to make the extended SAT. Full and part-time positions, both genders, a variety of nationalities, experiences of academic life and international work ethics, ages, and experience of parenthood and career breaks are represented. All members have been enthusiastic and taken responsibility for different areas. In addition, Dr Mole attended recent relevant seminars and meetings.
After an initial meeting to launch the project, the core SAT met weekly to initiate activities and monitor progress. Ms Hebblethwaite gathered the data and attended meetings at UCL with the SAT Lead. Prof Marsh was kept informed of progress and gave regular input, including feedback on an early draft of the application (his work commitments prevented him from attending the weekly meetings). Work was intensive. The Departmental profile had to be assembled from data supplied by both UCL and the MRC, and from data held only by the Department. To provide a picture of what life was really like in the LMCB, survey questionnaires were devised for each staff group, distributed, answers entered into the database (SPSS), and results analysed. Former recent LMCB members were also contacted. Each major staff grouping had its own focused discussion, led by their representative SAT member. Informal discussions took place in the tea-room. The anonymous feedback from the survey, together with the discussions, were central to highlighting areas that need to be addressed, or showing where there was no real concern.

Considerable effort was made to raise the profile of the project within and external to the Department. Many resources were identified and their details added to the web page and some books identified that will be bought for reference. These activities are ongoing, not only by the SAT but also by members of the LMCB who are now sensitised to the aims of Athena SWAN and forward articles and links to SAT.

The Action Plan was devised from the Department’s response to the statistics, the survey and the discussion forums, and further comments from the major Departmental decision-making body. Many of the documents involved in this project are or will be made available on the LMCB Athena SWAN web page. Finally, those involved in UCL Athena SWAN also gave encouragement and feedback on our Action Plan.

6. Action plan

Please attach your action plan which summarises actions identified from the data and commentary above, naming the person responsible and time scale.

7. Any other comments

Please comment here on any other elements which you think relevant to the application, e.g. recent mergers between departments (maximum 100 words).

The LMCB has undergone a recent period of change and upheaval. In 2008, Prof Mark Marsh was confirmed as Director, and the LMCB became a UCL Research Department. Prompted by these major changes, the commitment of UCL and MRC to Equality, and the interest of existing LMCB staff, it was considered timely to address Athena SWAN issues.
For the last 2008 RAE exercise, a direct entry was not required from the LMCB. However, 8 of the current GLs were included with their affiliated UCL Department, with 62% being female (5 female, 3 male).