“It was a honour to take up the role of Athena Swan SAT Head from Prof Kerry Chester at the end of 2015. Previously, I was a member of the SAT for over two years and contributed to our successful application for the Athena Swan Silver Award. I look forward to building on previous success and drive new initiatives aimed at tackling the issue of gender unbalance at senior academic level.”

Prof Paolo Salomoni, SAT Head, April 2016

About Athena Swan

The Athena Swan Charter was established to support and promote the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM) in research and higher education. The UCL Cancer Institute (CI) fully endorses the AS Charter, as we believe that inclusiveness and gender balance are fundamental principles as well as key assets for the growth of our Institution. However, within the CI, despite a larger proportion of women at the postdoctoral and lecturer/senior research fellow level, women do not seem to progress as well or as quickly to the next stage of their career progression ladder as male counterparts (see Figure 1, adapted from our Athena Swan Silver Award application). This is a well-recognized phenomenon observed across the entire UK academic sector.

To try and address this anomaly, we have established a number of measures that might help to redress this imbalance. Overall, we are convinced that by tackling gender inequality the CI will become a better place to do research. This in turn has the potential to increase our effectiveness in making fundamental discoveries that can ultimately affect survival and quality of lives of cancer patients.

The Cancer Institute Athena Swan Challenge

In recognition of the CI’s commitment to tackling inequality we were awarded the Silver Athena Swan Award in 2014. The main challenge now is to build on this success and to start tackling the issues underlying gender unbalance at senior academic levels. We are implementing a number of actions/initiatives (see page 2 for details), which are run and monitored by the Institute’s Self-Assessment Team. If you have a commitment to gender equality and would like to join the team, please contact Prof Paolo Salomoni (p.salomoni@ucl.ac.uk); we welcome colleagues of all genders and grades.
Cancer Institute Initiatives

Senior promotions. The Senior Promotion Panel includes CI Heads of Research Departments and the SAT Head. We are currently trialling a system across Research Departments to identify and encourage members of staff eligible for promotions at senior level. Activities of the Panel will also include reviewing promotion applications using dedicated mock panels.

Students. Gender balance among students and success rate are above the UK average. Destination data of CI MSc and PhD students are now being closely monitored, as this will provide key information on how training within the CI has supported the careers of its students with respect to gender.

Mentoring scheme (female postdoctoral fellows). We have just restarted the mentoring scheme and strongly encourage female postdoctoral fellows to join up. Our pool of ad hoc trained academic mentors provides one-to-one mentoring/coaching to any junior member of staff. This together with the Mentoring scheme for junior PIs (see below) provides key support at critical career stages.

Mentoring scheme, grant clinics and mock interview panels (male and female junior group leaders). We have set up a mentoring programme for junior group leaders that provide support at critical steps of their careers. In addition, we offer to all group leaders across the career ladder grant clinic and mock interview panels. Our current record/output (2012-2016): 11 researchers, out of them four females, have undergone grant (three females, one male), manuscript (one female, one male) and/or mock interview (one female and four males) clinics, with seven large program grant/fellowship application being funded (two females and four males) and three manuscripts published in high-impact factor journals (two males and one female). All these schemes will be advertised regularly to ensure that all group leaders are aware.

Gender balance in panels/committees. Most panels/committees in the CI are now gender-balanced. Importantly, the Executive Board is now gender-balanced. We will try to achieve at least 50% gender balance for all panels, although we need to ensure that this does not result in overburden to female academics (not at the moment).

Career Development/Organisation and Culture. Appraisals have increased substantially and should reach 75% by the end of March 2016. Furthermore, online “Diversity in the workplace” training is now mandatory for all new staff (data on completion is being collected).

Seminar series. Time of seminars has been moved late afternoon to 12 noon, to ensure delivery within the UCL core hours and allow for parenting duties and more generally work/life balance. In the last term, a total of seven women and eight men have given presentations. We aim to achieve gender balance.

Survey. We plan to send a new ATHENA Swan Survey to CI Staff in June (Rosemary Gale, Professor of Haematology, and Paolo Salomoni). Results will be discussed at the UCL CI Annual Conference on 14th July 2016.

Newsletter/webpage. We have a number of useful links, such as Funding and Resources (regularly updated by Clare Bennett, Senior Lecturer, UCL Department of Haematology). We are also advertising key events ranging from information days on Athena Swan initiatives to International Women’s day events (this activity is managed by Wendy Russell, CI). Finally, we regularly update our Twitter account (Wendy Russell, Marketing and Communication Manager, UCL-CI; Adele Fielding, Professor of Haematology, UCL Department of Haematology).

Please send your comments on any of these initiatives to p.salomoni@ucl.ac.uk (anonymously, if desired)
Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team

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