

Materials EDIA Gender Focus Group

Friday 26th February 2021

Statistics and Representation

Group were shown a series of charts and statistics regarding the gender split in the Department of Materials.

The department has obvious differences between the FBT and MSE groups. FBT has majority female representation, MSE has majority male representation. This sometimes skews the figures to make the department look more balanced than it is.

Within PS Staff there is an over-representation of females at lower grades and this changes as the grades get higher.

Students

FBT – low figures of male students. They may be put off fashion industry at the age of about 14 or 15 as fashion is not seen culturally as a “male” profession. It was pointed out that in India/Turkey/Sri Lanka it is more respected as a profession. Is there anything we can learn from these countries?

The low number of males is not reflected in the industry. Leicester are offering Apprenticeships in Textiles and materials science as they can see the need for professionals in the area. There may be a potential surge following the pandemic and Brexit. People are looking to source products closer to home. Can Manchester capitalise on this?

Could changing the language used in our FBT courses make them appeal more to men? For example, could “operations management” replace “manufacturing”?

ACTION: Investigate the career paths of our FBT and MSE graduates. Highlight positive case studies on our Internet pages, particularly highlighting successful students from underrepresented groups.

Action: Review the gender representation in the promotional material we put out.

On outreach days FBT staff are often asked what the gender split of their course is.

ACTION: AA to request historical figures of the gender breakdown for our courses to see if we are getting “better”. Produce a standard slide showing how our gender split has changed over time that could be used in outreach events.

PhD Level there is a high drop out of female student – why is this?

In FBT there is a high demand for the top UG students in industry.

ACTION: As a mandatory part of the academic advising process, all students that are on course for a 2:1 or First Class degree should be asked whether they have considered applying for a PhD.

UG Students could be given the chance to gain experience of working in a lab/research group prior to their fourth year projects (by this time it is often too late, as many students have already decided what careers they want to pursue). Perhaps we could offer summer internships, for example, or the opportunity to undertake projects in earlier years.

ACTION: Tom to speak to Arthur Wilkinson & Jo Cartwright about the potential for setting this up for UG students.

Academic Staff

Studies have shown that Men will apply for position if they only meet 50% of the essential criteria. Women will only apply if they can match or beat them all.

ACTION: Review what training is available to help build confidence and to help people accurately assess their chances of success when applying for jobs. Request new training courses are developed if existing courses do not cover these topics.

There used to be a very good Imposter Syndrome Training course that the University put on. It was very useful.

ACTION: Request that Imposter Syndrome Training is reinstated.

There needs to be encouragement from line managers to help you to build skills to be able to get a promotion. Line managers have to be given the time to be able to do this. Should be a standing item in P&DR for academics – have you thought of promotion? Advice on how to build your promotion case and broader strategies for promotion should be included.

ACTION: Ask for Promotion to be discussed routinely in all P&DRs.

Mentoring: There are no senior female academic mentors available in FBT, so staff often have to look externally.

ACTION: Investigate whether we can include external mentors in our mentoring scheme.

There are different perceived boundaries for men and women. Women sometimes find it hard to say no to requests, even if they won't help their promotion. They are more likely to act collegially and do things that are not built into the work load model and so do not "count" towards promotion cases.

ACTION: Develop training courses on negotiation and when and how it is appropriate to say no to certain requests. Ensure that workload management is discussed in P&DRs and in the new Departmental Mentoring Scheme.

Women are less likely to be asked to collaborate on grants.

ACTION: Set up sand pit events to focus on grant collaboration and on what skills can be brought to collaborations.

It was notable that there was only one male attendee. This may indicate that women want things to change, men happy for things to stay as they are. This could be a potential cause of the inertia in the department and university and why it can be challenging to enact change.

PS Staff

There was no real discussion of PS Gender problems as there was no PS attendance (AA was taking notes)

ACTION: Seek the opinions of PS staff on the new EDI committee on gender issues.