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16 April 2013

Dear Sir/Madam

I am delighted to be a part of the application for an Athena SWAN Silver Award from the Division of Otorhinolaryngology, University of Nottingham. As one of the Heads of Division, I have personal experience of issues facing female scientists and their career progression to more independent, senior research posts and leadership roles.

The Division is fully committed to the principles of Athena SWAN and so am I, as one of the Heads of that Division. There has been intensive reflection about how we could make further improvements to our working practices and culture. We believe we have developed a challenging Action Plan and are confident this will result in an even more cohesive and equitable working environment for all our colleagues in the Division. Personally, I have been very much involved with embedding the principles of Athena SWAN in the Division and have supported the decision making process to make things happen as well as ensuring adequate resources are in place to implement these changes and monitor their impact.

Examples of good practice that have already been implemented include:

- A comprehensive training and communication plan for managers and all staff to heighten awareness of employment policies that support work life balance such as flexible working, remote access to IT systems to enable homeworking and flexibility of working hours. This has resulted in increased take up of these policies and positive feedback from staff. We have recently supported a PhD student with suspending her studies for 4 months to accommodate family commitments.
- A robust Personal Development and Performance Review scheme where the career development of female staff is actively encouraged. The Division's Training Lead is a senior female academic, Dr Heather Fortnum, whose role includes dedicated time for staff and student development.
- We have a lively and active range of outreach activities aimed at promoting awareness of hearing and hearing research and also encouraging young people, females in particular, to get involved in science. An example of this is a female post-doctoral research fellow acting as a STEM Ambassador, visiting schools and delivering lessons and demonstrations on medical physics to increase engagement in STEM subjects.

We have a good gender balance within the Division, especially at senior level, as the senior management team comprise 4 males and 4 females. Our culture has always been very much focussed on staff development and promoting a positive, inclusive and flexible working environment. We recognise that there are areas where further improvements could be made such as encouraging the career progression from post-doctoral research fellow to more senior independent roles and this will be addressed in the on-going Divisional Action Plan.

One of my key responsibilities as Director of the Nottingham Hearing BRU is to serve as a role model to ensure all Divisional Managers play an active part in executing our action plan. This will be especially important for us given our large proportion of female research fellows at the start of their academic careers. We look forward to being able to make real difference to the career trajectories of these colleagues, as well as making sure everyone benefits from our constantly improving employment practices.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Hall', written in a cursive style.

Professor Deborah Hall

Professor of Hearing Science and Director of National Institute of Health Research Nottingham Hearing Biomedical Research Unit.