



# HE STEM Staff Culture Survey

## Guidance

## 1. Introduction

The steps that lead to gender equality within organisations are also those that promote good employment practice and an inclusive environment for all staff. However, the impact of not taking these steps disadvantages women more than men. Building gender equality is of particular importance in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM)<sup>1</sup>, where the representation of women in most subjects remains low<sup>2</sup>.

The HE STEM Staff Culture Survey has been designed specifically for university STEM departments to help them understand how male and female staff experience their working environment and what, if any, improvements may be needed to ensure equality of opportunity. It has been developed as part of the National HE STEM Programme, with the aim of sharing good practice in gender equality in higher education. This may be of relevance to university departments in completing the environment element of the Research Excellence Framework or in applying for accreditation within the Athena SWAN or Institute of Physics Juno award schemes.

The HE STEM Staff Culture Survey explores the experience, knowledge and views of your staff on how your Department promotes and manages gender equality. It focuses on four areas:

- Participation and promotion practices
- Workplace culture
- Leadership and management commitment
- Reputation and social responsibility

Your staff's responses will help you to assess the current culture within your Department, highlight existing good gender equality practice and identify areas where improvements can be made, benefiting department and staff alike.

## 2. Survey audience

To help maximise the number of responses to your survey, it is important that the survey is tailored to your survey audience. For example, the survey refers to 'Department' throughout, but can be also used at School and Faculty level, and the wording easily adapted to the relevant audience.

The survey is designed for completion by both academic and non-academic staff. However, you may wish to tailor it for use with specific groups. For example, adding statements specific to research careers such as the effect of taking a career break on long term career development and the need for a regular publication record; the tension between caring responsibilities and the need to travel overseas to build international reputation; the challenge facing dual career academic couples who both need to find work when one relocates to pursue a job opportunity.

The survey questions should also reflect the way your Department/Institution operates, to allow an accurate response from staff. For example, gender equality policies may be communicated at institution rather than department level and if so, question 16 may need altering.

It is also important to ensure that the roles of all staff being surveyed, including administration and technical support, are fully reflected in question 25 'What is your current role?' to avoid any groups feeling excluded, or less valued than others. This question should also be tailored where necessary to ensure anonymity of respondents.

<sup>1</sup> UKRC (2010), "Women mean Business – Why gender equality is essential in science, engineering and technology", Bradford, The UKRC.

<sup>2</sup> The UKRC (2010), "Women and men in science, engineering and technology: the UK statistics guide 2010", pp45 – 62, Bradford, The UKRC.

Finally, the terms 'positive action' and 'positive discrimination' have been explained in the body of the survey as there tends to be confusion between the two terms. However, you may also wish to explain other terms within the survey that may be unfamiliar to your audience and a glossary is included in appendix 3.

### **3. Survey format**

We recommend that you set up and run this survey using an online survey tool, such as SurveyMonkey or Bristol Online Surveys. This format is easier for the respondent to complete than a hard copy. The online survey tools vary in the automatic reporting they provide but will typically collate the responses for you, calculate the percentage responses to each question and provide export files of the data for transfer into software such as Excel or SPSS (which will allow for more detailed analysis). Some tools also provide cross tabulation and data filtering options.

Most online survey providers have good tutorials and/or FAQs pages on how to set up, amend and run their surveys.

### **4. Tips for maximising your survey response rate**

#### 4.1. Before the survey:

- a) Consider the purpose of your survey and what you hope to accomplish. This will help clarify whether and how you need to tailor the survey. This is also a good time to identify how the data will be used, who the results will be communicated to and the type of information that will be provided to each different group.
- b) Consider the timing of your survey e.g. availability of staff, timing of other institutional surveys.
- c) Determine your survey population, and tailor the survey wording to the workplace culture they will identify most strongly with, either the Department, School or Faculty.
- d) It is important to let staff know how the survey works. Provide brief instructions in the survey introduction on how to progress through the survey (this will vary depending on the online survey tool that you use). For example:
  - Click the 'Next' button to continue to the next page
  - Click the 'Prev' button to return to the previous page
  - Click the 'Done' button to submit your survey responses
- e) Pilot test the online version of your survey to make sure that it is working correctly and that the questions are clearly understood. One effective way to do this is to watch two or three volunteers as they complete the survey to get immediate feedback on the survey content and to see if they encounter any problems completing the survey.
- f) Brief your survey population about the upcoming survey, highlighting why it is important.

#### Suggested messages:

- Why gender equality is important to the [Department/School/Faculty]
- Why it is important to have gender equality for both women and men
- How completing the survey will contribute to improving gender equality
- If relevant, how the survey fits within other [Department/School/Faculty] initiatives e.g. Athena SWAN applications; wider diversity initiatives
- The survey is short and will take less than 15 minutes to complete

Recommendations for communicating the survey:

- Send out posters, articles and/or e-letters a couple of weeks before the survey highlighting the messages you want to get across about the survey.
- Brief line managers/supervisors and ask them to flag up the survey in team meetings shortly before the survey is circulated. Ask them to highlight the messages that you want to get across.
- Ask the Head of the [Department/School/Faculty] being surveyed to send out an email or letter shortly after the briefings, reinforcing the messages and encouraging staff to respond (see example in Appendix 1).

g) Consider whether to send out individual email invitations or a general web-link. Individual invitations will allow you to target non-responses if there is a low response rate. However this removes anonymity and is more work to administer. One solution is to add a monitoring question to identify which team or department respondents work in. Areas with low response rates can then be chased up while preserving anonymity. Another option is to send out separate survey web-links to individual departments or teams. The survey results can be collated at the point of analysis.

4.2. When the survey is issued:

a) When the web-link to the survey is sent out to staff, use this email to again reinforce your messages and encourage responses. We recommend that the email is sent from the Head of the [Department/School/Faculty] to demonstrate senior commitment to the process and the importance placed upon staff views. Emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers to the survey, what you want are staff's perceptions, views and experiences. Highlight the closing date for the survey (we recommend that it is open for two weeks) and that responses are confidential (see example in Appendix 2).

4.3. During the survey:

a) Review the response rate after the first week. A response rate of at least 30 per cent overall, and for each group being analysed (e.g. women and men), is required to have confidence that the survey results are representative of each population being considered<sup>3</sup>. However, the survey and survey analysis can still be a worthwhile exercise even if the response rate is lower as it highlights the views and perceptions of survey respondents and starts a dialogue about gender equality within the Department.

b) Celebrate a good response rate by communicating it to staff (and encouraging an even higher response).

c) Take action to improve a low response rate. For example:

- A reminder email from the Head of [Department/School/Faculty]
- Reminders to teams from line managers/supervisors (prioritise those areas with low response rates)
- Consider providing a set time and place for staff to drop in and complete the survey (serve refreshments to entice people along!)
- Consider giving certain teams a period of 'free time' to do the survey at home e.g. they could start later or leave earlier on a particular day. This 'down-time' could be arranged and communicated by individual line managers/supervisors

You could also extend the survey deadline if necessary.

<sup>3</sup>. Bryman, A. (2001), "*Social Research Methods*", Oxford, Oxford University Press

## 5. Analysing and using the survey results

The HE STEM Staff Culture Survey is intended to be a practical tool to quickly identify areas of good practice and areas where improvements can be made. It is therefore recommended that any analysis is kept simple. We suggest that you calculate both the overall percentage levels, and the percentage levels by gender, of agreement, disagreement and 'neutral' responses for each statement. Based on the pilot survey results from ten UK university STEM departments, we suggest that statements scoring 77 per cent agreement or above can be considered as indicating areas of good practice, and those scoring 28 per cent disagreement or above as indicating areas for action.

Also consider the differences in results between men and women. It may be that the numbers of female respondents are too low for an analysis of results by gender to be statistically valid. However it is still useful to review those statements where there is a substantial difference in response between men and women. For example, if 80 per cent of male respondents agreed with a statement but 100 per cent of women disagreed, it may be worth initiating discussion with female department members about their views and experiences on this particular topic.

Monitoring questions on ethnicity, role, type of contract, caring responsibilities and take up of flexible working allow further exploration of whether views on, and experiences of, departmental culture are different for these groups and whether gender plays a part here too.

When presenting the results, summarise the top areas of good practice and areas for improvement. Our experience suggests that it is better to have a roughly equal number of points for each category, and that the areas of good practice be listed first. This promotes both engagement with the results and positive discussion. Also list any statements not covered in the first two areas, where there is a substantial difference in response between genders (or other groups analysed e.g. grade).

It is also a good idea to limit the number of points for each category reported on in the summary e.g. top five areas of good practice, areas for improvement etc. This is more likely to promote action in the areas that most need it. The detailed figures can be provided as an appendix.

When presenting the results to departmental management, aim to gain agreement on what areas should be targeted for improvement and the steps to move the improvement process forwards. This could be done by inviting key stakeholders to a short meeting or workshop in which attendees across different levels/departments work in groups on key issues and agree a set of actions. It is also important to agree on when and how the results will be communicated to staff. Ensuring that survey results, and subsequent actions and successes, are communicated to all staff in the department will promote continuing engagement with the issues raised.

## **6. The UKRC-WISE**

This survey has been developed by the UKRC-WISE, as part of the HEFCE funded National HE STEM Programme with the aim of sharing good practice in gender equality in higher education. The UKRC-WISE works with employers, professional bodies, education institutions, women's organisations and networks, sector skills councils and other STEM stakeholders to promote women and girls in science, engineering and technology from classroom to boardroom.

The UKRC-WISE can provide support in setting up and running the survey, analysing the results and in planning follow-up actions. Additional UKRC-WISE services include policy reviews, training in gender equality and understanding unconscious bias, focus groups, setting up mentoring schemes and advice on women's networks. For more information:

Telephone: 01274 436485

E-mail: [info@theukrc.org](mailto:info@theukrc.org)

[www.theukrc.org](http://www.theukrc.org)

## **Appendix 1**

### **Example email from Head of Department to staff about the HE STEM Staff Culture Survey**

As part of this Department's commitment to diversity, and to a workplace where all staff are treated fairly, we have decided to undertake a gender equality culture survey. The focus of this survey is gender diversity, as this is a cross-cutting diversity issue where we feel we can have the greatest positive impact, contributing to development and advancement of the Department and all our staff.

The survey results will tell us what we are doing well in terms of gender equality and where we need to make any improvements. The Department is committed to using this data to improve our policies and practices.

You will be sent a link to the online survey next week and I would strongly encourage you to take part. Understanding your views is an important first step to improving the [name of Department]'s workplace for all our staff.

Your response will be confidential and only anonymous results will be seen by management, and communicated to staff.

The key findings from this survey will be published in [Date].

This is your chance to have your say – please take this opportunity.

## Appendix 2

### Example email to staff to accompany the link to the HE STEM Staff Culture Survey

As you have read in [name of Department Head's] recent email, the Department is carrying out a gender equality culture survey as part of its commitment to diversity and to a workplace where all staff are treated fairly. As previously communicated, the focus of this survey is gender diversity, as this is a cross-cutting diversity issue where we feel we can have the greatest positive impact, contributing to development and advancement of the Department and all our staff.

The survey results will tell us what we are doing well in terms of gender equality, and where we need to make any improvements. The Department is committed to using this data to improve our policies and practices.

We know that you are extremely busy, but this project will only be successful with your help and input. The link to the online survey is below and we would encourage you to take 15 minutes to complete it:

The survey will remain open for your response until [Time] on the [Date].

Your response will be confidential and only anonymous results will be seen by management and communicated to staff.

The key findings from this survey will be published in [Date].

This is your chance to have your say – please take this opportunity.

### Appendix 3 - Glossary

**Career break:** a period of time when you choose not to have a job, for example because you want to travel, or look after your children

**Compressed hours:** working normal hours but over fewer days than the norm for your organisation e.g. working 37 hours over four rather than five days.

**Discrimination:** treating someone less favourably than others, denying them an opportunity or misjudging them because they have a specific characteristic e.g. race, gender, religion.

**Equal pay:** the principle that women and men should receive an equal amount for doing the same work, or work of equal value, and that any gaps are not due to the difference in sex.

**Flexible working:** work practices that allow employees a certain degree of choice in terms of where, when, how and/or what work is done.

**Gender equality:** the principle that women and men should have equal access to opportunities to fulfil their potential.

**Harassment:** unwanted and uninvited attention on a particular ground e.g. racial harassment, sexual harassment.

**Mentoring:** a mentoring relationship is a partnership between two people (mentor and mentee) normally working in a similar field or sharing similar experiences. It is a helpful relationship based upon mutual trust and respect. The aim is "...to support and encourage people to manage their own learning in order that they may maximise their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance and become the person they want to be." (Eric Parsloe, Oxford School of Coaching and Mentoring).

**Networking:** networking can be formal or informal and offers people from specific groups the opportunity to meet together to share information and support.

**Parental or carer's leave:** unpaid leave which can be taken under certain conditions for employees with responsibility for a child or other dependants.

**Role model:** women and men who are in senior, expert or technical roles who are happy to use their experiences to encourage others to get involved in these areas.

**Stereotype:** a fixed idea about a group of people who share the same characteristics (e.g. gender, race, religion) which is often based on inaccurate or incomplete information.

**Treat staff on their merits:** treat staff according to skills, abilities, knowledge and experiences.

**Under-representation:** involvement of a particular group in smaller numbers than is statistically expected or warranted.



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