Investigating Staff Tutors careers across the STEM departments

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Introduction

The staff tutor role is varied and complex. Whilst a key part of this role is the responsibility for appointing and managing Associate Lecturers, there are a number of ways in which staff tutors contribute to the running of their respective departments including contributions to the writing of teaching material, taking key roles in the presentation of modules and undertaking scholarship and research. The distribution of the depth and breadth of the range of contributions by staff tutors in each of these areas differs between the STEM departments at the OU.

In Spring 2014 both the Mathematics and Statistics department and the Department of Physical Science received bronze awards from Athena SWAN, a national body that provides awards to recognise the work in advancing the careers of women in STEM. The Department of Physical Sciences also obtained a Project Juno Practitioner award, the Institute of Physics equivalent of Athena SWAN. Part of their respective three year action plans, and a point identified as requiring additional work in all three sets of feedback to the awards, includes looking in more detail at the staff tutor role. Comparisons between all the departments in the two faculties will feed into future submissions and outcomes will be embedded within the support provided within each department.

Background

The proportion of women differs between the departments;

Department	Maths and Stats	Computing and Communications	Engineering and Innovation	Faculty of Science
No. of staff tutors (No. female)	17 (11)	17 (11)	15 (9)	22 (16)

The dispersed nature of the staff tutor role means career progression goals for this group of employees is particularly complex and difficult. There are areas of support which need to be explored if staff tutors wish to engage in certain activities to a greater depth.

The new promotions criteria and the development of the Academic Development Framework also dictates that investigating the recruitment and development of staff tutors is urgently needed, particularly within STEM where such activities are now under external scrutiny.

Questions of interest

- Is there a difference between the STEM departments in range and depth to which Staff Tutors engage with all areas of their academic roles?
- Why does the staff tutor role seem to attract a greater proportion of females and why does this differ between departments?
- How do staff tutors feel their role is perceived within the different departments, faculties, the university and the wider HE sector?

Methodology