

Case studies of support groups for women academics

Women in Science, Engineering and Technology: WiSET

What is it?

It is a network of academic staff from across the University of Southampton to encourage and enable women in their careers at the University.

What do they do?

They have contributed to reviews of promotion processes, as well as diversity and career development activities. Through these activities they have three main objectives: celebrating success, ensuring success and supporting success. To celebrate success they try to increase the visibility of women scientists and academics. In ensuring success, they address barriers and facilitate career development. By supporting success, they develop and advise on training and resources for women in respect to equality issues. To meet these goals, they have a mentoring programme for female academics, hold workshops, invite speakers and hold meetings. These meetings can be formal and informal meetings over a meal or coffee. In addition, the group is active on social media.

Who is it for?

It was founded in 2002 and designed for the promotion of female academics in STEM fields. The group is now open to female academics university wide.

How is it organised?

The group has a formal steering group of around 20 academics. The majority of the steering group are from STEM disciplines though the members rank from professors to research fellows.

Analysis:

This is an active group that promotes equality, career development and mentoring. As the name suggests, the group was formed to promote women academic needs in the STEM fields as these fields are among the least gender balanced. However, the group has now expanded to include all disciplines. Despite this, the majority of its work remains STEM focused. Among the group's successes has been the creation of childcare vouchers for University employees. They do review and promote the academic literature on gender inequalities and senior members' experience with the hope that it can be used for improvement. They are committed to improving their member's careers and the working environment at the University.

Wonder Women

What is it?

It is an annual feminist festival at the University of Manchester to highlight achievements of female students, alumni and faculty member.

What do they do?

This is an annual campaign each spring, culminating with an event each March to celebrate the contributions of women across the University of Manchester. The campaign's final event, scheduled to coincide with the anniversary of women winning the partial right to vote in the UK in 1918, is usually a panel discussion or debate on women at the university or in UK higher education.

The festival includes events on campus and in the city of Manchester. They include: academic talks, art exhibitions, theatre, music and women's groups and networks. The academic talks centre on women's rights, women in academia and gender differences in the workplace. The art exhibitions, theatre and music are intended to showcase local female artists. This festival is open to the wider community in the Greater Manchester area. The women's groups that meet are mainly from academic disciplines on campus. This gives the various groups a chance to come together to learn from each other and to co-ordinate activities to improve the university environment.

Who is it for?

The festival is open to anyone in the University of Manchester and the Greater Manchester area.

How is it organised?

The group has a formal steering group of academics, administrators, students and alumni from every area of the university.

Analysis:

This is a joint effort from the University and the local authority in working together to form a series of events around International Women's Day to promote women's contributions and achievements. This is a relatively young event that began in 2015 in an attempt to create an entertaining and educational experience for those that take part in the festival activities. It is also used to bring various women's groups together, as it appears that in the past there have been many separate groups working towards the same goal. This collaboration between the groups has helped to create greater awareness of women's issues than before.

Women in Academia Group (WinA)

What is it?

This is a campus organisation designed to enable women at the University of Reading

What do they do?

The group holds meetings four times a year. The events are held over an hour at lunchtime and comprise a discussion centred on a topic and a guest speaker. The topics are designed around workplace issues and career development.

Who is it for?

The events are open to all University staff and postgraduate research students.

How is it organised?

There is an eight member organising committee consisting of academics and local women's club members.

Analysis:

This organisation is designed to help women academics in career development. It appears that the group is part of the University's Athena Swan initiatives.

NU Women

What is it?

Newcastle University's network for women staff

What do they do?

This group supports the career development and advancement of women across the University. They organise activities throughout the year including talks, workshops, a Professors' network and writing groups. Their aim is to increase awareness and engagement in gender equality at the University and in the community.

Who is it for?

This group is for any staff member, academic or professional support staff member at Newcastle University.

How is it organised?

The group is organised by a 13 member steering group comprised of academics from around the university.

Analysis:

The group provides a platform for communication and action in terms of promoting gender equality on campus. It organises a variety of events from career related advice to empowerment seminars. The group has high visibility across campus as the events have good attendance. The group also maintain a busy schedule to help cater to the needs of the University community.

Women@TUOS NET

What is it?

This is an organisation for women academics at the University of Sheffield

What do they do?

This organisation has a diverse range of activities and subcommittees designed to aid female academics in aspects of work, work-life balance and working towards gender equality on campus. They put on a large range of events including: a lunchtime talk series with external speakers, training workshops, role model events, speed networking, a working parents talk series, women and the media, International Women's Day celebrations, a writing club and help in developing a CV. In addition, the group works with female academics in other universities in the UK to create academic organisations for women.

Who is it for?

As the group formed from the science and technology fields, it was originally for academics in those areas. However, the group has expanded across the university and is now comprised of female academics from across disciplines, and also includes professional support staff and PhD students.

How is it organised?

The group is organised by a 21 member steering group of academics and professional support staff from around the university. Due to the great breadth of its activities, the group has four subcommittees to organise the workload associated with the events and programmes being run. In addition, the steering group and its leadership group works with the University Equality and Diversity Board and the University's Athena Swan committee.

Analysis:

This organisation has high visibility and impact on campus. It is well-organised and distributes tasks to its members to organise events and programmes that appeal to the various needs of women academics, professional support staff and PhD students at Sheffield. In addition, the group is able to work within the university structure to implement its goals. The group has been successful to the point of creating web-based informational publications geared towards other universities thinking of forming similar organisations. This information includes tips on organisational structure and how to influence others to bring about change.

Win-Win Network

What is it?

It is a network of academic staff from across the University of Birmingham intended for academic women to come together, share experiences, develop reciprocal support and facilitate action on gender issues in relation to employment, career development and leadership.

What do they do?

They organise a series of events involving speakers, support networks and mentoring workshops. Many of their events revolve around a speakers' series. The speakers generally present on research related to gender issues in academia and advice on navigating academic careers. In addition to the speakers' series, the group organises career development workshops for early career academics and mentoring programmes.

Who is it for?

It was founded in 2013 and designed for the promotion of female academics in the College of Social Science. The group is open to female academics, academic-related staff and PhD students university-wide.

How is it organised?

The group is organised on a volunteer basis by female social scientists.

Analysis:

This is an active group at the Birmingham campus to promote career development and mentoring. The name, Win-Win, comes from the idea that better career development will help both female academics and the University. It helps participants by giving them better strategies in general career development and more specific approaches to navigate around and overcome forms of gender based discriminations. It also benefits the University training and advocating a more diverse workforce at every salary grade. Evidence of the impact that the group is having on campus is yet to emerge given its relatively recent formation though the speakers' series events and workshops are well attended (averaging 40 per event) and growing. In addition, the mentoring programme is growing well.