

Leeds University Business School – Research and Innovation Podcast

International Women’s Day 2021 series

Episode 1: Celebrating International Women’s Day 2021

Speakers: Professor Edgar Meyer and Professor Jennifer Tomlinson

Edgar: Hello, and welcome to the special edition of Leeds University Business School’s Research and Innovation Podcast, to celebrate International Women’s Day 2021. I’m Edgar Meyer, Deputy Dean at Leeds University Business School, Professor in Management, and the Chair of our Athena Swan implementation group, and I’m having with me, Jennifer Tomlinson.

Jennifer: Hi. Yes, I’m Jennifer Tomlinson, I’m Professor of Gender and Employment Relations here at the Business School, and also the Faculty’s Athena Swan lead.

Edgar: Thank you. Well, what we have done is we have created some podcast episodes to mark International Women’s Day, highlighting some of the important and really quite impactful research that is going on here at the Business School. The focus of the series is how we through our research address gender equality and inequality. We really hope that you will enjoy listening to this fantastic selection. Jenny and I wanted to use this introductory episode, really, to talk a little bit about the Business School and what it is doing to achieve gender equality, particularly through the Athena Swan charter that we hold here at the Business School. And I thought it might best if I just start by saying a few words about what Athena Swan is and what it means to have a bronze award, which is the award that we as a Business School hold.

So, the Athena Swan charter was established in 2005 to encourage and recognise commitment to advancing the career of women, but at the time it was really focussed on STEM subjects, so subjects in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine. This included university departments but also research institutes. Now, in 2015, the equality challenge unit recognised that the university sector is much wider and the challenge around gender equity persists much more broadly across the higher education sector, and the award was opened up to all departments within universities, so including arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law, as well as professional roles within the universities.



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The Business School submitted its application in November 2019 and was awarded a bronze award in 2020. Now, a bronze award means that we, as a school, have recognised both the achievements of the school in terms of advancing gender equality, but more importantly it actually recognises how we have honestly reflected upon the work that is still needed from us. And not just us, but the work from our whole community to keep advancing gender equality. This may be a good opportunity to maybe hand over to Jenny who can say a little bit more about how we got to the award and what our future plan is to maintain our work towards gender equality.

Jennifer:

Sure, thanks Edgar. Well, we had to submit a really lengthy and comprehensive application dealing with our policies and procedures, connected to gender equality but more broadly EDI, information about our culture, some analysis of our culture survey. We had to submit data on staff and student demographics, providing insight and analysis, reflection of change and progress over time against key gender-based indicators. The self-assessment team was comprised of professional and academic staff across a range of functions and divisions, and we also had student representation at that committee too so that their voices and experiences were heard as we reflected upon how far we'd come in terms of gender equality, but what yet we had to achieve.

So, in that process you identify, I guess, achievements but also areas for further progress, and set, if you like, targets to achieve within around a four year period, and our action plan was fairly ambitious. I feel it was a really comprehensive document looking across a range of indicators about how we might progress the gender equality agenda, strive for gender balance, but also, more broadly, inclusion against a range of indicators relating not just to academic staff, but also professional staff and students too.

And I think, if we take, for example, academic staff as an example, given that this is what Athena Swan was originally centred upon, certainly we have been looking at how we can help female academic staff progress through... especially through mid-careers when we know they often have a range of other responsibilities, but also how we can make any policies and practices inclusive so that they don't just relate to gender, but are designed to support all staff in terms of progression and wider development. And how we really support and progress our equality culture more widely at LUBS.

Edgar: That sounds really good. What are some of the specific actions, maybe, that we're planning, Jenny?

Jennifer: Okay, so one of the first things that we are focussing our attention on is looking at how we support the progression through various career pathways within the Business School. We're also really interested, as this is very much a live working document, and we obviously began working on the action plan through the pandemic, how we help and support people in their careers, in their development at a time of quite significant change. We are also looking more closely at how we support people to work remotely. We're also very keen to make sure that we are recruiting and promoting in a very conscious way around equality, diversity and inclusion, which involves training staff who sit on interview panels, but more widely so it's mainstreamed across the Business School, and we're keen to make sure that at every stage in those processes, longlists, shortlists and interview panels, that they are diverse and reflect the diversity we hope to promote within the school.

Edgar: That sounds fantastic. Clearly quite a bit more work to do, but also lots of ideas and plans and enthusiasm to drive that forward. I mean, International Women's Day really gives us an opportunity to celebrate and spotlight the amazing work that our female colleagues undertake across the school. Colleagues, academic and non-academic, have impact across the whole of the school and with our academic colleagues making a noticeable difference, not only to the research community but also to the business community, and sometimes we forget it's more than just that. So, we want to acknowledge and recognise these achievements, particularly those of our female researchers, and highlight them because often they are not necessarily as visible. One of the things, for example, we may want to highlight are the achievements in generating research income. Jenny, are there any particular examples that you can think of?

Jennifer: Yes, absolutely. We have colleagues leading major research grants including UKRI funded projects in relation to COVID. So, for example, we've got capitalising on COVID-19 as a trigger for positive change in food waste behaviour, and another on the impact of COVID-19 on the provision of early years childcare and education in England and Wales. Recently, too, we have an ESRC funded project on whether father's involvement increases children's educational attainment at primary school, and an ESRC productivity insight network project on access to finance

and productivity enhancing investments in the UK. So, some very recent major successes with research initiatives. Our female researchers are working on a number of important and topical issues such as improving public communications about cervical cancer screening and climate change risk and mitigation.

Edgar:

That sounds fantastic, and of course the COVID ones are particularly interesting and timely, and it's amazing how, with all the constraints that this situation has brought about, people have been able to address that and drive our knowledge forward in that. But of course, it's not always just about research money, so, for example, I know that with many colleagues and female researchers in very senior external roles, which I always find is amazing because it recognises their deep expertise within their subject area. I think a couple to highlight might be colleagues... one of our colleagues is the vice president of the board of the European Institute for Advanced Studies in Management. Internally, we also are trying to recognise the work and the service that our female colleagues provide such as our director of sustainability who drives our ambitious plan to become net carbon zero as a school, and thereby contributing, of course, to the overall University of Leeds commitment around that. We also have fellows of the Academy of Social Sciences, and a fellow of the Psychonomic Society, and one of our colleagues is a non-legal member of the Employment Tribunal in London.

Jennifer:

Yes, and we also have some great achievements in terms of editorship roles taken up by some of our female researchers, for example, we have a co-editor of a new academy of management journal, the Academy of Management Collections and joint editor in chief of the International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation. One colleague, for example, has been invited to join the editorial board of Human Relations, and another has been appointed associate editor of the journal, Families, Relationships and Societies.

Edgar:

These are fantastic recognitions of the expertise and the commitment and we know particular editorial board roles take a lot of time outside of your standard academic work. This podcast series is really great because in that series you will hear from some of our researchers and, in some cases, not just our researchers but their external collaborators, and they will be covering a whole load of topics, but it will be aspects around, for example, diversity and economics. Jenny already mentioned father's involvement in childcare, but also university leadership

and the role of women as part of that. But we also have a live event that is coming up, and Jenny can say a bit more about that.

Jennifer: Yes, sure. The Business School is hosting an online panel event to celebrate International Women's Day on Monday 8th of March at 5pm. The event is being chaired by our Executive Dean, Professor Julia Bennell, and has an expert panel of inspiring women in our business community who are making waves in the world of technology. And, if you would like to attend, please do visit our website for more details.

Edgar: Thank you. Well, we really do hope you will enjoy listening to our International Women's Day series and find the conversations that you will be hearing inspiring. But of course also finding out more about some of the fantastic research that is taking place here at Leeds University Business School.

Jennifer: So, yes, if you would like to get in touch regarding any of the research topics discussed in the episodes, our contact details are in the episode description.

Edgar: Thank you so much, Jenny, for joining us talking a little bit about some of the fantastic work that is ongoing, not to forget your own work that you do within this area. So, thank you for taking our time. Thanks for listening to the podcast, thanks for switching in, and I hope you enjoy it all. Bye.