

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

Department of Experimental Psychology

Anna Watts Building, Radcliffe Observatory Quarter,
Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6GG, UK

Professor Anna Christina Nobre

Chair in Translational Cognitive Neuroscience and Head of Department

Email: kia.nobre@psy.ox.ac.uk Tel: +44 1865 271355



Oxford, 27 November 2020

Equality Charters Manager
Equality Challenge Unit
7th Floor, Queens House
55/56 Lincoln's Inn Fields
London WC2A 3LJ

Dear Dr. Ruth Gilligan,

As Head of the Department of Experimental Psychology and an active member of our self-assessment team, I am delighted to present this application for renewal of our Athena SWAN award.

Our department has been through an extraordinary journey since our Silver Award (2015), with two unexpected transformative setbacks in addition to the recent pandemic. We feel fortunate to have firmly embedded the values of the Athena SWAN charter early on into our department. These were essential for getting us through such difficult times as a community and maintaining our profile in research and teaching. I will use some of the extra words we have been allowed to explain our circumstances in the next two paragraphs.

Having just been appointed to a newly established statutory chair, I became department head upon the devastating unexpected death of Professor Glyn Humphreys (in 2016). His passing shook the morale of the department and left the individuals in his sizeable group (54 total, 39 women) disoriented and with uncertain futures. The clear priority was to tend to their situation, working with funders to maintain grants, with colleagues to shoulder additional research and supervision, with students to adapt plans, with postdoctoral researchers to prepare applications, etc. The outcomes were positive, but the painful conversations revealed the importance of supporting individuals with advice, feedback, mentorship, and skills. This message was amplified as I sought views about departmental wellbeing from academic and support staff. As a result, I created an Associate Head post for People and Culture and inscribed our ethos of inclusion, diversity, equality, and respect into the mission statement of the department. Work on various fronts was just beginning when a second shockwave hit.

In February 2017, our building closed with one day's notice. The scale of disruption is hard to exaggerate. Again, the clear priority was to look after individuals whose lives were upended, especially the support staff whose jobs were building-dependent (e.g., intake, catering, cleaners). We provided intensive personalised support, for example identifying posts and enhancing skills (e.g., IT, CV preparation, interview practice). We also took a personalised approach to understand specific problems and tailor mitigations in other particularly affected groups – early career researchers and graduate students. We made psychological support available to all. Beyond managing individual cases, the dimensions of the crisis were many: guaranteeing our health and safety, making alternative

teaching arrangements, finding (and building) suitable workspaces, enabling the continuity of research – each area filled with challenges over many timescales.

Unsurprisingly, our building closure, then scattering across sites, then relocation to our interim base, and now planning our future building, severely derailed business. The additional and evolving pressures prompted a flexible approach to our ‘action plan’, which we transformed into a living document adapting to changing circumstances. Whenever possible, we returned to important action points set in 2015. For example, we succeeded in:

- increasing number and visibility of women in leadership positions
- increasing number of women awarded titles of distinction
- appointing two newly created faculty positions (1F, 1M)
- strengthening support for women’s grant applications.

Other areas also emerged as critical: improving communication, rebuilding community cohesion, increasing transparency and involvement, and supporting early-career researchers. We responded by launching a weekly newsletter covering all aspects of departmental life and publishing all departmental documents on our intranet; by holding enjoyable celebrations, awareness days, social gatherings, informal lunches to discuss different group’s needs and concerns; by bringing student and ECR representation to committees, bolstering student consultative committees, and creating the ECR committee to spearhead useful events and procedures; and by improving input to fellowship applicants, providing constructive reviews for fellowship holders, offering bespoke training in psychology teaching, and creating career-development lectureships to provide meaningful experience for individuals transitioning to permanent academic posts.

In a context where we were *all* struggling, it was counterproductive to focus exclusively on gendered actions, so we embraced a pluralist approach toward supporting all individuals. As a department with a large female population, the general actions nevertheless had positive impact on large numbers of women.

The current pandemic echoed our previous disruptions, but this time globally. Our previous experiences served us well, helping us through the situation with a personalised and flexible approach.

Looking back, in light of the debilitating setbacks, we are satisfied with our achievements. Our 2020 survey shows that 90% of staff feel able to be themselves at work, and 85% would recommend working in the Department to a friend. Looking ahead, we recognise potential for improvement across multiple areas.

In this application, we present an honest, accurate, and true representation of our department. The information highlighted to us areas that require energising and improving on previous efforts, as well as new domains requiring attention. **We anchor our new action plan with intentions to measure the protracted consequences of the pandemic on our female and male students, researchers, and staff; roll out best practice to support other aspects of diversity, such as race and ethnicity; open conversations about work-life balance and issues related to women’s health;** raise awareness about Athena SWAN particularly among our students; grow our academic community by increasing the number and duration of our new career-development lectureships and the number of permanent faculty positions; develop career-development programmes for undergraduate and graduate students, researchers, academic faculty, and professional support staff; improve further our communication and involvement in departmental decision-making and governance; and once again rebuild and foster our departmental community and mutually supportive collaborative culture as we recover from the pandemic. For our new building (2024), we are blending the values of personal

wellbeing, diversity, equality, inclusion, and collaboration into the architectural plans, by including welfare rooms, gender-neutral toilets, social areas, quiet reflection zones, open-plan working, shared laboratories, and more.

We look forward to building on the strong foundation the Athena SWAN charter has helped us build, hoping the coming years will be more tranquil and allow us to implement our exciting action plan aimed at supporting, promoting, and celebrating the careers of women and other minority groups in our department.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christina Nobre', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Anna Christina Nobre, FBA, MAE, fNASC
Chair in Translational Cognitive Neuroscience
Head of Department for Experimental Psychology
Director of the Oxford Centre for Human Brain Activity
University of Oxford