

# The Gender Initiative at Queen's University Belfast

## **Executive Summary:**

This paper is a case study of how a very traditional university may be persuaded to change, very slowly, and under certain conditions.

In 1998 Queen's University Belfast undertook a programme to address the problem of staff gender imbalance, especially at senior levels. Senior women were called in, a Women's Forum formed, a listening exercise embarked upon and a report from the Forum taken through the committee structure of the University.

The Women's Forum report contained twelve recommendations:

- 1) Work-life balance;
- 2) Maternity cover;
- 3) Staff childcare;
- 4) Enhancement of all categories of staff;
- 5) Mentoring;
- 6) Networking through the Forum and other means;
- 7) Monitoring of Equal Pay;
- 8) Transformational assaults on the culture;
- 9) Resources for the initiative;
- 10) Representation of women on committees;
- 11) Targets and timetables;
- 12) Research, communication and publicity.

These have been taken forward by the Director for the Gender Initiative with an administrator and secretary, as well as by 'champions' for all the recommendations and for all categories of staff.

Four years into the implementation is a little early for outcomes, though an evaluation exercise in 2004 has been positive. The Initiative has won the Northern Ireland Opportunity Now Education Award and the first Athena Award for the Advancement of Women in Science in the UK. The

University has been rated platinum overall for its gender equality, the highest rank in Northern Ireland, and in the UL education sector.

We have worked with the culture rather than against it, and we hope to improve life for all in the University. We rely on support from the senior management team and above all from the women of Queen's.

**Professor Margaret E. Mullett, Professor of Byzantine Studies and Director of the Gender Initiative at Queen's University Belfast.**