

## University of York trail blazes for women in Physics

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**The University of York has received a top national award from the Institute of Physics (IOP) for its work to reduce gender inequality among staff and students in university physics.**



The University's Department of Physics has met the five principles set out in the Juno Code of Practice, a set of actions recommended by the IOP to address the under-representation of women in physics higher education, and is now a Juno Champion.

The Juno Code of Practice seeks to redress the issue of under-representation of women at the very highest level of physics academia in the UK and Ireland. While approximately 20 per cent of physics undergraduates and lecturers are female, the same can only be said of five per cent of professors.

James McNish, Diversity Programme Leader at IOP, said: "To effectively tackle the barriers to the progression of female physicists in academia, a department must undergo fundamental cultural changes. For this, a department needs to examine all aspects of how it operates to identify how to make changes in policies and practices for the benefit of all staff and students.

"This is a challenging process, but our new Juno Champion has shown how much can be achieved – York's approach to tackling the issues will act as a beacon of good practice for others in the physics community."

Women make up 20 per cent of academic staff at York, well above the national average of 12 per cent. This includes two Professors, one senior lecturer, three lecturers and a reader.

The award is the result of the hard work of the departmental Gender Equality Committee formed in July 2008, which evolved into the Departmental Equality Committee. The committee helps the Department provide a working environment where all staff are encouraged to work to their full potential and are rewarded without regard to gender, race, age, sexual orientation, disability or belief.

The Juno Champion award comes just over a year after York gained Juno Practitioner status, which involved devising an action plan to demonstrate how the Department aimed to achieve Champion status.

Dr Irene D'Amico, Chair of the Department of Physics' Departmental Equality Committee, said: "The various stages of the award process are based on awareness, analysis and action. It's important first of all to recognise that the under-representation of women in physics is a problem, then to look critically at the current culture and practices, and to put into place an action plan to address gender imbalances.

It's about creating a better, more efficient, productive environment for everyone, not just women

Dr Irene D'Amico

"The Juno Champion award is recognition that we are improving the practices within the Department and ensuring that these are fair, friendly and inclusive. It's about creating a better, more efficient, productive environment for everyone, not just women."

The Juno Champion award will be in place for three years. The University of York is also actively involved in the Athena SWAN awards scheme, which provides recognition of a university's success in providing positive support for women scientists during their career. The University's Department of Chemistry holds a gold award, the Departments of Biology and Psychology hold silver, while the University as a whole holds a bronze award.

Much of the Department of Physics' success stems from leadership and a strong commitment from the senior management team to ensure consistency of experience for staff at all levels within the Department, particularly in induction, appraisal and support for professional development.

Flexible and part-time working are accommodated at the University when possible. In recent years, the Department has had academic and research staff on part-time contracts, job-share arrangements and on career breaks, all arranged to meet the personal circumstances or career development of individuals.

The Department has also looked critically at all its literature and website to ensure this promotes gender equality to current and prospective students.

Former Head of Physics, Professor Brian Fulton, who became the University's Academic Co-ordinator for Sciences this month, said: "This is a great achievement for the Department as the standards are set very high and only a handful of universities have so far achieved the top Juno Champion status."

Dr D'Amico was presented with the Juno Champion certificate at the IOP Awards Ceremony on Thursday 6 October. She was accompanied at the awards ceremony by Professor Sarah Thompson, who recently became Head of Physics at York.

Professor Thompson said: "We are very proud of what the Department has achieved but see this as an ongoing project. While achievement of Juno Champion status is an important stepping stone, we will continue to work towards an improved gender balance in the future."

York's accreditation takes the total number of UK physics departments accredited with Juno Champion status up to six. The Department joins the Universities of Cambridge, Glasgow, Imperial, Royal Holloway and Warwick.

### Notes to editors:

- The Institute of Physics (IOP)'s Juno Code of Practice was developed in response to a recommendation of the *International Perceptions of UK Research in Physics and Astronomy* report that a special focus to attract and retain women in physics is needed. The Code is based on best practice identified from *IOP's Women in University Physics Departments: a Site Visit Scheme*, which ran from 2003 to 2005. It sets out practical ideas for actions that departments can take to address the under-representation of women in university physics and emphasises the need for dialogue, transparency and openness.

There are three levels of engagement with the Code. As a Supporter, physics departments endorse the five principles set out in the Code of Practice. Practitioner status requires the department to demonstrate that its Juno journey is well underway and an initial evidence-based action plan demonstrating how the department aims to achieve Champion status is created. As a Champion, physics departments are confirmed to have met the five principles set out. There are now six Champion departments, five Practitioners and 21 Supporters. For further information visit [www.iop.org/juno](http://www.iop.org/juno)

- The Institute of Physics is a leading scientific society promoting physics and bringing physicists together for the benefit of all. It has a worldwide membership of around 40,000 comprising physicists from all sectors, as well as those with an interest in physics. It works to advance physics research, application and education; and engages with policymakers and the public to develop awareness and understanding of physics. Its publishing company, IOP Publishing, is a world leader in professional scientific publishing and the electronic dissemination of physics. For further information visit <http://www.iop.org/>.
- For more information on the Department of Physics at the University of York visit [www.york.ac.uk/physics](http://www.york.ac.uk/physics).

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