



A Toolkit for Gender Equality in Practice - Initiative

Athena Swan Charter for Women in Science

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Summary of the initiative

The Athena Swan Charter evolved from work between the Athena Project and the scientific Women's Academic Network (SWAN), to advance the representation of women in science, technology, engineering, medicine and mathematics (STEMM). The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), the Royal Society, the Biochemical Society and the Department of Health manage the Charter.

The Athena Swan Charter was founded in 2005 and is a scheme that recognises excellence in science, engineering and technology employment for women in higher education (HE). It operates through providing an annual round of awards, workshops, guidance and opportunities to share effective practice. There are currently 86 HE institutions that have gained the charter, which is structured around the Athena Swan principles and three levels of award: bronze, silver and gold.

The Athena Swan Principles: once an institution has gained the award they sign up to accepting the principles of the Charter:

- Addressing gender inequalities requires commitment and action from everyone, at all levels of the organisation.
- A change in cultures and attitudes across the organisation is required to tackle the unequal representation of women in science.
- The absence of diversity at management and policy-making levels has broad implications, which the organisation will examine.
- The high rate of loss of women in science is an urgent concern, which the organisation will address.
- The system of short-term contracts has particularly negative consequences for the retention and progression of women in science, which the organisation recognises.
- There are both personal and structural obstacles to women making the transition from PhD into a sustainable academic career in science, which require the active consideration of the organisation.

In 2011, the Equality Challenge Unit and the UK Research Council conducted research into the impact of the award since its inception in 2005. The research identified impacts on organisational structures and cultures, with increases in the proportion of women, better representation of women on committees, improvements in the transition from postdoctoral researcher to first academic post, improved working practices to support career progression and growth in women's networking across institutions. The key findings from five in-depth case studies are as follows:

- Increased visibility of senior women on management teams, as deans and pro vice-chancellors, and as role models for junior staff and students.





- Providing a focal point and formalising processes – bringing focus, awareness and recognition for good practice, and helping institutions and departments to work towards specific outcomes such as the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) 2008 and Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014.
- Better data and understanding of staff – in terms of data collection, analysis and asking questions that ordinarily would not have been considered, as well as highlighting the need to reduce barriers and be the place where the best people come.
- A catalyst for change – providing a driving force for greater awareness around gender equality issues, such as the need for improved support on return from maternity leave and taking into account career breaks in appraisal, promotion and recruitment processes.
- Better communications – influencing a culture of collaboration and sharing of good practice, which was lacking before, and providing opportunities for wider networking for staff.
- Greater encouragement – a valuable tool in encouraging women to have higher expectations and ambitions, helping to show current and prospective staff and students that they have a future at the institutions, and the power good practice has on attracting and retaining the best people.

Priorities

Addressing gender roles, Promoting women in decision-making

Sector(s)

Higher Education

Type

Social Partners

Country

United Kingdom

Model of social partnership

Bipartite

Launch date

2005

References

<http://www.athenaswan.org.uk/content/impact-report>

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/key-projects/sexandpower/>

This initiative was submitted by:

member organisations of CEEP

Website

<http://www.athenaswan.org.uk/>

