

**Achieving Gender Equality at Edith Cowan University (ECU) – Discussion Paper
The Science Academic Gender Equity (SAGE) Pilot of the Athena SWAN Charter in Australia**

What is Athena SWAN?

Athena SWAN is now an international accreditation scheme which recognises a commitment to supporting and advancing women's careers in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM) in higher education and research.¹

- The term 'Athena' refers to a UK based 'Athena Project' that began in 1999 with the aim of addressing the loss of women in science, engineering and technology based disciplines as they progressed through academia. By establishing extensive associations throughout the UK higher education sector, the project developed good practice guidelines which improved female academic retention. The project closed in 2007 however its mission continues through initiatives including the Athena SWAN Charter.
- The acronym 'SWAN' stands for the Scientific Women's Academic Network, an entity that collects real life views and experiences of women in academia across the UK.

The Athena SWAN Charter combines these two elements in advancing the representation of women in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine (STEMM). Having commenced in the UK, the initiative has an extensive history there of advancing the careers of women in higher education and research sectors since it was established in 2005, and the scheme has been highly successful in improving the promotion and retention of women within STEMM. With such success, the Pilot has now been launched in Australia by the Science Academic Gender Equity (SAGE) initiative which addresses gender equality in the STEMM sector.

Athena SWAN in Australia

The Australian Academy of Science (of which SAGE is part) tells us that in universities and research institutes, women comprise more than half of science PhD graduates and early career researchers, but just 17% of senior academics. This significant loss of women scientists in senior levels is referred to as the 'leaky pipeline'. ECU's Athena SWAN Charter Committee², and its Chair, Professor Cobie Rudd (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Strategic Partnerships) place extreme importance on how this will impact Australia's future inventors and innovators.

ECU has been named as one of just 32 organisations in Australia to participate in the SAGE Pilot of the Athena SWAN Charter with the official launch having taken place on 16 September 2015, attended by Professor Cobie Rudd and Dean, School of Science, Associate Professor Andrew Woodward. ECU will examine the practices that impact the journey of women in their professional and academic journeys.

Athena SWAN principles

The Athena SWAN Charter is based on ten key principles. ECU will adopt these within its policies, practices, plans and culture. As the foundation for our Agreement to participate in the Australian Pilot, these principles have been endorsed by Vice-Chancellor, Professor Steven Chapman who strongly champions this cause:

1. We acknowledge that academia cannot reach its full potential unless it can benefit from the talents of all.
2. We commit to advancing gender equality in academia, in particular addressing the loss of women across the career pipeline and the absence of women from senior academic, professional and support roles.

¹ Sheffield Hallam University, About us: *What is Athena SWAN?*

<https://www.shu.ac.uk/university/overview/diversity/athena-swan/>

Accessed 18 January 2016

² Professor Cobie Rudd, Ms Jenny Roberston, Professor Colleen Hayward, Professor Margaret Jones, Ms Lyn Farrell, Professor Daryoush Habibi, Associate Professor Andrew Woodward, Dr Matthew Byrne, Professor Rob Newton/or Professor Daniel Galvao, Professor Joe Luca, Ms Christine Gunson, Dr Mick Adams and Associate Professor Mark Lund.

3. We commit to addressing unequal gender representation across academic disciplines and professional and support functions. In this we recognise disciplinary differences including:
 - the particularly high loss rate of women in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine (STEMM).
4. We commit to tackling the gender pay gap.
5. We commit to removing the obstacles faced by women, in particular, at major points of career development and progression including the transition from PhD into a sustainable academic career.
6. We commit to addressing the negative consequences of using short-term contracts for the retention and progression of staff in academia, particularly women.
7. We commit to tackling the discriminatory treatment often experienced by transgender people.
8. We acknowledge that advancing gender equality demands commitment and action from all levels of the organisation and in particular active leadership from those in senior roles.
9. We commit to making and mainstreaming sustainable structural and cultural changes to advance gender equality, recognising that initiatives and actions that support individuals alone will not sufficiently advance equality.
10. All individuals have identities shaped by several different factors. We commit to considering the intersection of gender and other factors wherever possible.

Equity and Equality at ECU

The generic definition of 'equality' relates to everyone being treated the same however ECU recognises that for that to occur everyone would need to start from the same place, needing the same support. Rather, by having a focus on 'equity' which aims to provide everyone with what they need to be successful, this works as a strategy that strives to achieve equality while being aware of individual needs – in summary, equality is the goal and equity is the strategy to reach that goal.³

ECU aims to provide an environment where staff and students feel that they are treated fairly within a supportive environment that caters to a wide range of individual needs and factors including socio economic needs, gender inclusivity and other broader notions of diversity. Embracing diversity through respecting individual difference is one of ECU's key values and by taking part in the SAGE Pilot of the Athena SWAN Charter, the University will examine our existing practices and how it can improve gender equity moving forward in order to enhance greater innovation and creative collaboration opportunities for staff and students who are enthusiastic and willing to grow.

The Bronze Institutional Award for the Athena SWAN Charter

ECU is applying for the Bronze level Institutional Award. As referenced in the SAGE Handbook (2015) this requires demonstration of a solid foundation for eliminating gender bias and developing an inclusive culture that values all staff, evidencing:

- An assessment of gender equality in ECU, including quantitative (staff data) and qualitative (policies, practices, systems and arrangements) evidence and identifying both challenges and opportunities;
- A four-year plan that builds on this assessment, information on activities that are already in place and what has been learned from these;
- The development of an organisational structure, including a Self-Assessment Team (SAT), to carry proposed actions forward.⁴

³ Adapted from the SGBA e-Learning Resource: Rising to the Challenge, *Distinguish between Equity and Equality*, developed by the Atlantic, Prairie and British Columbia Centres of Excellence for Women's Health

<http://sgba-resource.ca/en/concepts/equity/distinguish-between-equity-and-equality/>

Accessed 16 December 2015

⁴ Adapted from Science Australia Gender Equity (SAGE), *SAGE Athena SWAN Charter Bronze Institutional Award Handbook*, 2015, Australia.

A Focus Group model for feedback

As part of the Bronze Award's assessment criteria, it is important to identify how well plans for gender equality are communicated to staff through:

1. Self-reflection and honesty: Are challenges and mistakes recognised openly together with the steps taken to address them?
2. Engagement: Are staff at every level involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of policies and initiatives?⁵

Focus Groups will be led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Strategic Partnerships) and facilitated by ECU Athena SWAN Charter Committee members in April 2016. Staff are encouraged to participate so that opportunities for improvement and growth at ECU can be identified.

Focus questions

To instigate initial dialogue which will feed into the arrangement of Focus Group themes, staff feedback on a set of provided focus survey questions is encouraged (responses are anonymous unless you wish to provide your details). Please click on this [survey link](#).

Contact

- You can send an email to athenaswanaustralia@ecu.edu.au; and/or
- Attend and contribute at one of the Focus Workshops that will be held throughout April 2016. Details of available sessions, covering all ECU campuses will be released in the next month.

For further information on this initiative please visit the ECU Athena SWAN Charter [website](#).

⁵ Science Australia Gender Equity (SAGE), *SAGE Athena SWAN Charter Bronze Institutional Award Handbook*, 2015, Australia.