

## ● Notes from meeting for geography departments, 19 September 2016

The Society hosted a meeting for geography departments<sup>1</sup> on equality and diversity initiatives, including applications for the Athena SWAN Charter, on Monday 19 September 2016. There were representatives from more than 20 geography institutions present.

### **Background**

The Society is committed to supporting the higher education geographical community to advance equality and diversity in geographical teaching, research and learning. One route by which this is being addressed in institutions is through the Equality Challenge Unit's (ECU) *Athena SWAN* Charter Mark (for gender equality) and *Race Equality* Charter Mark. Further ways in which the Society is providing support equality and diversity in geography may be found on our website, at: [www.rgs.org/equalitydiversity](http://www.rgs.org/equalitydiversity)

ECU's Athena SWAN Charter addresses academic staff across all disciplines, professional, technical and support staff, and trans staff and students in relation to their equality, representation, progression into academia, journey through career milestones, and working environment.

### **Agenda for meeting**

The meeting included three presentations and concluded with short table discussions on a range of themes:

Departmental reflections on Athena SWAN journeys:

- Hester Parr, University of Glasgow
- Hilary Geoghegan, University of Reading

From data to SMART actions:

- Gabriella Caminotto and Ruth Gilligan, Equality Challenge Unit

Themed table discussions and feedback

Slides and other resources from these presentations are available for download at [www.rgs.org/equalitydiversity](http://www.rgs.org/equalitydiversity). Notes from discussion are in this document.

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<sup>1</sup> Where reference is made to 'department/s', it is intended to refer to any administrative unit below institutional level (e.g. school, faculty) that delivers geographical research and teaching.

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## Departmental reflections on Athena SWAN journeys

### *University of Glasgow*

Hester Parr (University of Glasgow) described the SWAN @ GES (Geography and Earth Sciences) journey, which has key goals of maintaining equality, supporting collegiality and work-life balance. You can find out more about their activities at <http://swanges.org.uk/>

Hester demonstrated how the School has progressed from 'introducing and educating', to 'embedding longer-term cultural change', and is working towards maintaining a 'watching brief' (but continuing to encourage more nuanced cultural change). She noted the importance of communicating change as a way of educating. Actioning gender equalities measures and engaging in gender equalities 'talk' can be troubling and difficult for some colleagues, but it is possible to encourage buy-in if everyone feels part of the process.

Hester also described how early institutional buy-in with a passionate introduction was balanced against limited resources and exemplars for departmental applications, which are now more widely available. GES used surveys, a dedicated website, and focus groups at various points, as well as watching how their data profile was changing over time. The school has hosted international visitors to speak on their experience of gender, diversity and equality matters, and lobbied for change at institutional level. All of these fed into decision making and action planning. Some examples of areas that have received attention include: gender and promotion (improving understanding of process/criteria by using workshops and PDRs to discuss criteria and set goals) and work/life balance (themed "pizza socials" help to build collegiality and open up discussions – with staff providing views on improving the workload model; tweaking fieldwork commitments for staff with caring roles; and having a new email policy).

Looking ahead to a possible Silver Athena SWAN application under the new scheme, the school is aspirant but realistic. The Silver application represents an opportunity for a greater vision for change, and areas for GES to focus on include: engaging and encouraging professional staff; more engagement with 'diverse diversities' and sensitive handling of different views about equality.

### *University of Reading*

Hilary Geoghegan (University of Reading) described the SAGES (School of Archaeology, Geography and Environmental Science) journey towards their successful Silver application in the November 2015 round. She encouraged departments to encourage each other and share good practice, rather than treating it as a competition. She described the institutional structure in place at Reading, which includes job-sharing Deans with responsibility for equality and diversity matters, a supportive HOD and Head of School, a school-level position for the Athena Swan coordinator (her role), and an institutional Equality Officer.

Hilary identified a number of ways to get people involved in the Athena SWAN process, such as: using data to identify what's important/relevant, recognising equality work in workload models, securing funds to deliver actions, avoiding 'women only' events and issues, and being persistent! As a result of these, SAGES has delivered cultural change in parental leave, mentoring and flexible working. Alongside this, SAGES used fieldwork as a common theme for all the disciplines which would engage both students and staff, through a one-year programme involving a website/blog, conference and YouTube videos.

In terms of preparing for an Athena SWAN application, Hilary encouraged departments to gather, understand, and use data, in action planning. She particularly highlighted the importance of using both qualitative and quantitative data, of gathering these consistently and regularly, and of exploring these in detail with the SAT.



- = Be referenced in the body of the application (e.g. “We found xyz, which is possibly exacerbated by abc. Action 123 will address this...”). *References to actions are not included in application word count.*
- = Be specific to institutional/departmental issues (don't just copy 'trendy' actions from other institutional plans if they don't fit your issues/needs)
- = Be ambitious, but realistic
- = Consider gender specificity
- = Be measurable (quantifiable/numerical?) via milestones and evaluation methods

For departments considering making an application for a Silver Athena SWAN award, Bronze action plans should be included in your application with annotations demonstrating progress; the Silver action plan can then build on this.

## **Themed table discussions and other feedback**

*Data informed narratives: What data do/ could you collect? How do/could you use data better? How could your data be presented?*

Participants in this discussion reflected on:

- The importance of moving from the subjective to the objective
- Who has data?
  - Finding out who in your institution has the data? Whose responsibility is it to collect it? Who in the department knows where to get it from?
  - Are there institutional data collections (e.g. surveys) that you could use? Are they differentiated by subject/department for analysis?
  - How data are collected (by ECU, by institution, by department) could matter if they are being compared, especially in terms of definitions of certain groups
- Surveys:
  - How questions are worded matters.
  - Should departmental surveys replicate questions at institutional level for comparison?
- Data collection/handling
  - What to do about very small numbers?
  - Numbers in and out of categories (but overall little change) can represent big shifts within a department
  - Data is part of the process, not the end-goal. Collection and analysis is iterative.
  - Importance of setting up continuous data (e.g. for year on year, or group by group comparisons)
  - Does collecting more data mean more questions? How do we know when to stop?
  - Benchmarking might mean translating between scales/data collection methods

*How can we (prepare to) demonstrate impact?*

Participants in this discussion considered:

- Planning for evaluation:
  - Uptake ('bums on seats')
  - Scale of 1 to 5 for all events, collect gender
  - Use measures before and after - who attended/participated, what they did next, what happened one year on (positive and negative)
  - In-depth feedback via focus groups
  - Use evaluation to develop new actions (next steps)
- Staff surveys (specific to Athena SWAN) – regular, consistent, comparable
- Setting quantifiable targets (e.g. # number of applications from promotion by YYYY)
- One-to-one interviews for more complex measures, e.g. adoption of department guidelines at university level; where and how they are used, and impact

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*How can we encourage a shared view of equality across a department/school? (or, can we juggle competing views and have success?)*

Participants in this topic discussed:

- The importance of managing expectations
  - Set the context
  - SATs could offer a “state of the department” statement, then survey views on that
- Use town halls to introduce the issues collectively
- Consider ways of challenging (male) privilege which avoid defensiveness
- Consider who is “selling it”
  - e.g. VC vs HoD.
  - Who are the champions? Male academics with strong reputations?
- Use external speakers/seminars to share a range of views and share benefits of greater equality/diversity
- Openly discuss what the department view/goal of equality is *before* moving to the actual application and actions.

*What action planning can we do with/for professional and support staff?*

Participants in this discussion reflected on:

- Enhancement and engagement events that are for all department staff
- Engaging everyone in the work of the university (teaching and research):
  - Ways for technical staff to gain buy-in for research projects
  - Recognise/acknowledge the contribution that professional and support staff make to key university processes / student experience / departmental life
- Training and development opportunities that prepare them for their next job, not enhance their current job (training above grade)
- Not presuming, as academics, that you know what the concerns of professional and support staff are

## **Other resources and advice**

Past applications, action plans, and advice for making applications:

- Via [www.ecu.ac.uk](http://www.ecu.ac.uk) and [www.rgs.org/equalitydiversity](http://www.rgs.org/equalitydiversity)

(Notes from all past Athena SWAN geography network meetings are also at that link.)

ECU: <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/>

RGS-IBG (for disciplinary questions): [rhed@rgs.org](mailto:rhed@rgs.org)

Email lists:

- Athena SWAN Charter members’ network: [athenaswan@jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:athenaswan@jiscmail.ac.uk)
- Athena SWAN geography: [geography-athena-swan@jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:geography-athena-swan@jiscmail.ac.uk)
- Equal Opportunities administrators: [ADMIN-EO@JISCMail.AC.UK](mailto:ADMIN-EO@JISCMail.AC.UK)

Become an ECU panellist: <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/get-involved/become-charter-mark-panellist/>