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Gender Equality Project

Background to the Athena SWAN Charter



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The Athena Project

- The Athena Project was a UK-wide initiative which developed out of the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (CVCP) Commission on University Career Opportunities agenda to remove barriers to discrimination to women in Higher Education and research. It run from 1999 till 2007. It aimed to achieve a significant increase in the number of women in academic posts at all levels by 2007.
- Before Athena was set up in 1999 considerable energy had gone into identifying the issues and the problems of women's career progression in science. The Athena panel did not want research, it wanted actions. The Athena Project was set up by women in the academic science community, for women in the academic science community. Delivery of change had to be via that community, which had to own the changes that were necessary.



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- In 2002 Athena funded Bristol University to develop and run the first Athena's Surveys of Science, Technology and Engineering (ASSET) to explore:
 - Activities internally and externally that might influence career progression.
 - The equality of treatment of men and women in their department, and how their contributions were valued by their departments.
 - Experiences, perceptions and career development needs at key career transition points.
- The survey was repeated in 2004 and 2007. At the end of 2007 the Royal Society became the owner of ASSET. The most recent survey was ASSET 2010, funded by HEFCE with a grant to Imperial College London and the Royal Society.
- The work of the Athena Project is continued by the Athena Scientific Women's Academic Network (SWAN) launched in 2005 and the Athena Forum set up in 2008 with the support of the Royal Society.



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The Athena Scientific Women's Academic Network (SWAN)

- The Athena Scientific Women's Academic Network (SWAN) Charter is funded by the Equality Challenge Unit, the Royal Society, the Biochemical Society, and HEFCE. It was established in 2005 to encourage and recognise commitment to advancing the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM) employment in higher education and research.
- In May 2015 the Charter was expanded to recognise work undertaken in arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law (AHSSBL), and in professional and support roles, and for trans staff and students. The Charter now recognises work undertaken to address gender equality more broadly, and not just barriers to progression that affect women.
- Athena SWAN awards are available in Bronze, Silver and Gold at both University and departmental level. Universities must achieve at least a Bronze award before individual departments can apply for recognition at Bronze, Silver or Gold level in their own right.



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- **Bronze award** demonstrate awareness, identify particular challenges and have planned activities for the future.
This includes:
 - an assessment of gender equality in the institution, including quantitative (staff data) and qualitative (policies, practices, systems and arrangements) evidence and identifying both challenges and opportunities.
 - consultation with input from all research academic staff (men and women), particularly encouraging women's participation. (An honest appraisal is essential.)
 - 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, to carry proposed actions forward.



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- **Silver award** demonstrate a significant record of activity and achievement, detail the impact these implemented activities have made and have more planned activities to further demonstrate impact and achievement.
- **Gold award** demonstrate sustained progression and achievement of activity leading to beacons of achievement in gender equality resulting in champions of Athena SWAN and good practice.