**University of Aberdeen**

**Gender Equality in Research**

**September 2021**

*Gender Equality is integral to our University’s foundational purpose of being ‘open to all’.*

*I am delighted that our ongoing commitment and action to achieve gender equality have been recognised through an Institutional Athena Swan Bronze award and that eleven of our twelve Schools have achieved Bronze awards and one has been awarded a Silver level award.  This demonstrates consistent progress and provides solid foundations for bold future action.*

*I recognise that many challenges remain, not least the potential negative impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has posed for gender equality.*

*Our Institutional Gender Equality Action Plan, which has the Athena Swan Principles at its heart, has been designed to effectively target these challenges, including those pertinent to our researchers and their critical work, and we will lead it with passion and commitment and through engagement with our colleagues and students.*

Professor George Boyne

Principal and Vice-Chancellor

University of Aberdeen

**Commitment to Gender Equality**

**The University has a long-standing commitment to gender equality across all its functions. This commitment is fundamental to the progress, reputation and effectiveness of the organisation. In February 2020, the University launched Aberdeen 2040, its 20-year strategic plan. This ambitious plan has placed** Inclusion is at its core https://www.abdn.ac.uk/2040/. Within the strategy we demonstrate commitment to:

* *securing the highest standards of equality, diversity and inclusion*
* *eliminating the gender pay gap and*
* *ensuring parity across genders in all aspects*

The strategy is implemented through a set of twenty commitments, a quarter of which relate to the Inclusion theme.

Gender equality is championed at a strategic level by the University Principal and Senior Vice-Principal who is the senior lead for the University’s commitment to the Athena Swan Charter.

**Robust Governance Structures**

Gender equality is within the remit of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDIC), chaired by the Senior Vice-Principal. EDIC is a strategic committee of Court and is responsible for all policy and strategy related to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). EDIC is also the Self-Assessment Team (SAT) for institutional Athena Swan applications. It takes account of intersectional approaches. EDIC’s full remit can be seen here: https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/governance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-committee-9357.php

From September 2021, each of the University’s academic Schools are required to establish School EDICs. These will act as key focus points for all School EDI issues, however they will also have oversight of School Athena Swan submissions (previously led by dedicated School Self-Assessment Teams), meaning they will be responsible for collecting and analysing key data trends in their areas, including the gender profile of the research-active staff. They will establish actions to address under-representation where it exists and address other related issues such as funding or publication disparities between the genders.

**Action to Support Gender Equality**

**Athena Swan**

The University signed up to the principles of the [Advance HE Athena Swan Charter](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan-charter) in 2011. The Charter supports progress in the Higher Education sector in gender equality and encourages action to address barriers, whether systemic or overt, to gender equality.

Sustained effort and dedicated resources to this activity (e.g., the appointment of two permanent Athena Swan (Institutional and School) Officers in 2014/15; the establishment of dedicated Self-Assessment Teams in each School) has resulted in significant progress. All academic Schools hold a Bronze level award (achieved between 2016 and 2018), with the School of Psychology achieving Silver level in 2020.The University is striving to achieve an institutional Silver award by 2025. All Schools will be supported to apply for a Silver award by 2025.

The University has built up a consistent and effective data collection and analysis systems which support Athena Swan applications and action planning. Data on staff and students in relation to gender can be disaggregated by a range of metrics and is presented as part of the University’s Public Sector Equality Duty biennial reporting.

The University’s commitment to Athena Swan has led to a shift in attitude towards EDI issues and has specifically provided a basis for the following areas of progress since 2019:

* The Parents’ Guidebook provides guidance on the support available on return to work from leave, the locations of the two dedicated nursing rooms (Old Aberdeen and Foresterhill Campuses), other rooms available for breastfeeding and how to request a personal fridge for storage of milk. Breastfeeding is welcomed in all social areas (pre-Covid) and posters have been designed to highlight this.
* In November 2020, five members of the Parents and Carers Network, were trained as ‘parental mentors’ to support staff returning from parental leave.
* A ‘Meeting Etiquette’ document was developed in 2019 to provide recommended guidelines on effective meetings.
* Events and meetings have been delivered virtually where possible during the pandemic to support the ongoing business of the University. Meetings and events have also been recorded where appropriate so that colleagues who are unable to attend can keep up to date, supporting parents and carers.
* A policy of shortening meetings where possible has been introduced, recognising the impact of back-to-back Teams meetings. Meetings are to be avoided at lunchtimes and Fridays.
* Schools have processes in place to monitor the gender profile of seminar speakers and take action to redress imbalances where appropriate.
* As well as the ongoing biannual meetings between the Athena Swan leads, the Principal and the Senior Vice-Principal, the University has established an Athena Swan Forum which provides space for discussion of gender equality challenges and priorities. The Forum members can share experiences and knowledge and develop and agree joint approaches to progressing gender equality.
* Female professor numbers have steadily increased between 2015/16 to 2018/19 from 22% to 28% in STEMM areas and 20% to 24% in AHSSBL areas.
* A higher proportion of applications for Professorial roles are from women (up from 13% in 2015/16 to 22% in 2018/19).
* Recruitment processes improved with vacancies now advertised with clear links to EDI and flexible working opportunities.
* The Equality and Diversity Adviser and the Athena Swan Coordinator delivered a joint presentation with the University of East Anglia at the University of Grenoble in May 2019 as part of the University’s participation in the Aurora European Universities Network. The presentation was focussed on approaches to gender equality and the Athena Swan framework was shared as an example of good practice and an action for the other participating universities to consider their own gender data with a view to developing a common framework for gender equality progress. relation to promotions, a range of work has been undertaken across the academic units to understand barriers to promotion and how these affect career progressions. In addition, since 2016, we have: a) improved transparency of the promotion process through introduction of an Unconscious Bias Observer Scheme; b) improved consistency, with promotion being introduced as ‘element for discussion’ in the Annual Review Checklist; c) raised awareness of unconscious bias through voluntary *in-house* sessions; and d) increased informal discussion about promotions. Going forward the impact of the pandemic will be taken into account in promotion applications.

The University has approved an ambitious gender action plan based on the Athena Swan action plan. The plan covers actions related to part-time and flexible working, retention, recruitment, induction, promotions, career development, policies and culture and trans people awareness. This document will be published on the University’s Gender Equality webpages.

**Networks**

The University’s Staff Equality Networks play a key and central role in the development of EDI policies, practices and initiatives. The chairs of all the networks are members of EDIC, positioning them at the heart of EDI decision-making. The Women’s Development Network and the Parents and Carers Network have specific remits which link to promoting gender equality:

Women’s Development Network (WDN)

* Established with a remit to act as a forum for development, debate and networking for anyone who identifies as a woman at all grades, career paths and ethnic groups; share ideas, experiences, knowledge and opportunities; promote equality of opportunity for women; provide a source of information and support relating to development processes and mechanisms.
* Facilitated the University’s membership with WHEN (Women in Higher Education Network) and secured 50 free memberships for the University
* Events have been held on a range of topics such as Imposter Phenomenon, Leadership and career development.

Parents and Carers Network (PCN)

* The Network now has two chairs – one focussing on parents and one on carers
* The Network is mainly based on Facebook and its membership has grown significantly since the start of the pandemic, with almost 200 members registered
* Significant support has been provided by the Network chairs during the pandemic and they have been proactive in feeding experiences back to senior management. This process has informed decisions and led to the development of a structured discussion template which managers and staff can use to discuss caring responsibilities during the pandemic.
* The Network worked jointly with the WDN to analyse the report *Sharing the Caring* (2020) published by WHEN and to raise recommendations at EDIC which were then actioned by the Senior Vice-Principal.

The University has a Race Equality Network, Staff and PG Student LGBT+ and a Staff Disability Network Group. Intersectional issues are also discussed across the Networks where appropriate.

**Research Excellence Framework(REF)**

In the UK Higher Education sector, female researchers are generally underrepresented at senior grades, and the University’s detailed Equality Impact Assessments ([Equality Impact Assessment](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/research/equality-impact-assessment-13629.php) (EQIA) on the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and research performance have indicated adverse impact in relation to part-time, early to mid-career women in research. Although there is no evidence that the processes we have employed in our recognition of research excellence to identify eligible researchers and outputs for REF2021 directly discriminate against women, the analysis emphasises the need for continued and corrective action to address this.

The EQIA also noted that the profile of the researchers included in REF submissions could be improved, noting that fundamental shifts in recruitment and retention strategies were ongoing and would seek to address underrepresentation across protected characteristics.

The analysis of REF2021 data made visible the gap in representation between female and male researchers among the eligible population and in terms of number of attributed outputs and predicted grades. Although there has been a slight increase in the proportion of eligible women since REF2014, women are less likely to be employed on eligible contracts than men. Women who are included are, on average, submitted with fewer outputs than their male colleagues

There is a higher number of female researchers at earlier career stages (Lecturer/Research fellow), but the differential in the average number of attributed papers persists at all career stages. We monitored the representation of female researchers and their contribution to the REF submission carefully throughout the process and offered support where needed.

We are developing dedicated resources/training on gender equality and unconscious gender biases for staff and decision makers within a research context.

**Gender-Based Violence**

The University has established a Gender-Based Violence Working Group chaired by the Acting Deputy Director of People and the HR Partnership and Policy Manager.

The Group has a plan of work and has already achieved progress in relation to training and external engagement and partnership.

The University’s Public Sector Equality Duty Report 2021 contains a set of Equality Outcomes, one of which is focussed on eradicating gender-based violence within the University community and raising awareness of support mechanisms and reporting options.

In 2018, a support system to tackle gender-based violence was launched: an online tool that enables staff and students to anonymously and confidentially report concerns and incidents of gender-based violence (and also all other forms of harassment) and access relevant support. This is a joint project between the University and Aberdeen University Student Association, and part of the Equally Safe in HE Campaign which aims to eradicate gender-based violence in higher education.

**Work-life Balance and Organisational Culture**

The University offers a wide range of flexible working opportunities and seeks to accommodate requests for flexible working where reasonable and practical given the duties of the role, service provision requirements and impact on wider teams. The Covid-19 pandemic and the requirement for homeworking has paved the way for hybrid working models and these are currently being explored across Schools and Directorates. Students have reported that they wish to be able to experience university life on campus and the University will seek to deliver this where possible and in line with Scottish Government guidance.

Organisational culture is primarily measured through the biennial staff survey – the last survey was undertaken in 2020 and results can be seen here:

<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/staff-survey-2020-12154.php>

The results have been discussed at EDIC and by individual teams across the University with team-specific action plans to address issues raised being developed and implemented. The survey results overall were extremely positive, with some key equality indicators below:

* 92% of staff indicated that they identified with the Aberdeen 2040 commitments
* 90% indicated that they believed the University is committed to equality
* 97% of staff confirmed that they were aware of the University’s Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

3% of staff indicated that they were currently being bullied or harassed at work. Although this was an

improvement on the figure of 5.7% reported in the 2018 survey and is less than the sector average benchmark of 5%, the University is committed to addressing this, starting with a detailed analysis of the data to ascertain where specific action is required to be taken.

11% of staff reported that they had experienced discrimination. This was an increase, when compared with the 7% reported in the 2018 survey, but in line with the benchmark figure of 11% for other HEI’s. Again, the University is not satisfied with this result and will be exploring further with the survey consultants what the nuances are in the data.

The top five reason’s (staff could choose more than one reason) given for being bullied, harassed or discriminated against were:

* Other: 2.64% of all survey respondents
* Gender: 1.47% of all survey respondents
* Age: 0.9% of all survey respondents
* Ethnicity: 0.8% of all survey respondents
* Disability: 0.3% of all survey respondents

Further work is being undertaken on the results of the survey and EDIC will be involved in this. In addition, the University established a Dignity at Work and Study Working Group in 2019 and the Group is finalising a new Dignity Toolkit.

A new Homeworking Policy has been launched in August 2021, providing guidance to staff and managers on how the University will accommodate requests for homeworking once the Scottish Government indicates that a return to campus should be considered.

The Dignity at Work and Study Group was established to revie the University’s policies and procedures related to dignity, harassment and discrimination. A Dignity Toolkit and training will be launched in 2021 and will include guidance on matters related to equality, diversity and inclusion.

**Trans People**

The University has a strong commitment to LGBT+ equality. Our progress can be evidenced through our improving score in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index and the work undertaken by the thriving Staff and PG Student LGBT Network.

In addition, the University approved a Transgender Equality Policy in 2020 and supporting guidance is due to be launched (October 2021). Online training is available to staff on trans issues and further training is planned to support the policy and guidance.

**Preparing gender equality statements for Research grant applications**

Commitment to gender equality is ‘mainstreamed’ into the 17 UN SDGs and is enforced in UK development actions through the International Development (Gender Equality) Act 2014. UKRI have developed 5 criteria that will help prepare gender equality statements for researchers to consider when planning new projects or grant applications:

**Criterion 1.** Ensuring equal and meaningful opportunities for people (researchers, participants and beneficiaries) of different genders to be involved throughout the project.

**Criterion 2**: Addressing the expected impact of the project (benefits and losses) on people of different genders.

**Criterion 3:** Addressing the impact on the relations between people of different genders

**Criterion 4:** Avoiding and developing strategies to mitigate and monitor risks and unintended consequences on gender.

**Criterion 5:** Measuring relevant outcomes and outputs, with data disaggregated by age and gender.

Consider the following **four steps to work out the relevance of gender to your project:**

1. Have you included gender in the conceptualisation of the research project?

2. Are there equal and meaningful opportunities for people of all genders to participate in the project?

3. Has gender been considered in the impact and dissemination sections?

4. How will you monitoring gender equality outcomes and risks?

**For more information and help with preparing your gender equality statements, please contact** [**europe-rg@abdn.ac.uk**](mailto:europe-rg@abdn.ac.uk)

**Resources**

[Sex and Gender dimension in frontier research | ERC: European Research Council (europa.eu)](https://erc.europa.eu/event/sex-and-gender-dimension-frontier-research)

[Sex and Gender Equity in Research: rationale for the SAGER guidelines and recommended use | Research Integrity and Peer Review | Full Text (biomedcentral.com)](https://researchintegrityjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s41073-016-0007-6)

[Gendered Innovations | Stanford University](http://genderedinnovations.stanford.edu/index.html)

[GENDERACTION](https://genderaction.eu/)

[Sex and gender analysis improves science and engineering | Nature](https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-019-1657-6)

[Step 3: Gender-sensitive analysis | European Institute for Gender Equality (europa.eu)](https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-impact-assessment/step-3-gender-sensitive-analysis)

EDINBURGH TOOLKIT (once its available)

[University of Aberdeen Public Sector Equality Duty Report](https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/working-here/public-sector-equality-duty-13390.php)

BEIS’s Gender Equality in Research and Innovation ODA [policy](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.publishing.service.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fuploads%2Fsystem%2Fuploads%2Fattachment_data%2Ffile%2F989934%2Fresearch-innovation-oda-gender-equality.pdf&data=04%7C01%7Ca.varghese%40abdn.ac.uk%7C7889206716454de4d08208d97f3cd84a%7C8c2b19ad5f9c49d490773ec3cfc52b3f%7C0%7C0%7C637680721565139268%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=twSt1oME6Y568m8PQ9HD1SyyuR3qcAslDtuCpgvGgiI%3D&reserved=0) (May 2021) - guidance for producing a Gender Equality Statement