

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY REPORT 2021
5.3 ADVANCING EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY
Included in this section:

Athena Swan, Stonewall Workplace Equality Index, British Sign Language, Gaelic Language Plan, Mental Health and Wellbeing, Project SEARCH, Staff Survey, Research Excellence Framework, Digital Accessibility

5.3.1 CHARTER MARKS
5.3.2 ATHENA SWAN

The University continues to progress its long-standing commitment to the Athena Swan Charter to drive understanding of barriers to gender equality and the actions required to address them. Of note since the last report in 2019 is that the University secured its first departmental Silver award, with the School of Psychology achieving this in April 2020. The University's institutional award remains at Bronze and a submission to retain this will be made in April 2021. Table 4 shows the status of School awards.

Table 4: status of Athena SWAN awards across the University's Schools

Institution/School	Institute	Area	Level of award	Submission round	After being granted 1 year extension
Aberdeen University	N/A		Bronze	Nov-16	Apr-21
School of Medicine, Medical Science and Nutrition	Applied Health Sciences	STEMM	Bronze	Nov-16	Nov-21
	Education in Medical and Dental Sciences		Bronze	Apr-17	Apr-22
	Rowett Institute		Bronze	Nov-16	Nov-21
	Medical Sciences		Bronze	Apr-18	Apr-23
	Dentistry		Bronze	Nov-18	Nov-23
School of Psychology	N/A		Silver	Apr-20	Apr-25
School of Biological Sciences			Bronze	Apr-17	Apr-22
School of Natural and Computing Sciences			Bronze	Apr-16	Nov-21
School of Engineering			Bronze	Apr-18	Apr-23
School of Geosciences			Bronze	Apr-18	Apr-23
School of Education	N/A	AHSSBL	Bronze	Apr-17	Apr-22
School of Divinity, History and Philosophy			Bronze	Nov-16	Nov-21
School of Language, Literature, Music, Visual Culture			Bronze	Nov-18	Nov-23
School of Law			Bronze	Nov-16	Nov-21
School of Social Sciences			Bronze	Apr-17	Apr-22
The Business School			Bronze	Nov-16	Nov-21

5.3.3 Six Schools (Law, Divinity, History and Philosophy, Natural and Computing Sciences, Social Science, Education and Biological Sciences) have stated their commitment to apply for a Silver accreditation between November 2021 and April 2022, whilst the Business School, the Institute of Applied Health Sciences, the Rowett Institute and the Institute of Education of Medical and Dental Sciences will apply to retain their Bronze award.

5.3.4 An Information pack for Schools aiming to apply for a Silver award has been developed and it includes enhanced guidance on data analysis, assessment of impact and the compilation of a Silver application.

5.3.5 Key actions which have been taken since 2019 to support the Athena Swan principles include:

- 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. It is the convenor’s responsibility to ensure this is adhered to.
- 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.
- 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.
- In relation to promotions data, a range of work has been undertaken across the academic units to understand barriers to promotion and how these affect career progressions. Table 5 below shows that the success rate for female applicants in 2019 is statistically significantly higher than that for males. Work which is being undertaken in Schools shows that men are on average more likely to apply to Grade 8 and women more likely to apply to Gr 9. The application rate for part-time staff is low with an evident gender disparity in STEMM. In AHSSBL, while the average success rate for applications to Grade 8 is, like STEMM around 50%, the average success rate of applications to Grade 9 is higher (69%W and 55%M) than in STEMM (59%W and 42%M), and women are more successful than men. In the 2019 report it was noted that the University had introduced measures to tackle bias within the promotion process and going forward the impact of the pandemic will be taken into account in promotion applications.

Table 5: success rates for promotion applications by gender

Year	Applied			Successful			Success rates	
	Female	Male	% Female	Female	Male	% Female	Female	Male
2016/17	91	80	53	46	39	54	51	49
2017/18	60	78	44	30	45	40	50	58
2019	64	70	48	37	31	54	58	44

5.3.6 The Schools are working towards detailed specific action plans to support their ambitions with the Athena Swan Charter and at institutional level an extensive action plan is being prepared for the submission of the Institutional Bronze renewal in April 2021.

5.3.7 STONEWALL WORKPLACE EQUALITY INDEX

Stonewall is one of the UK's foremost charities for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Trans (LGBT+) community, founded in 1989 and gaining charity status in 2003. The University has been a member of the Stonewall Diversity Champion scheme since 2013.

- 5.3.8 In 2005, Stonewall launched the Workplace Equality Index (WEI), as a framework for UK employers to monitor and benchmark their progress on LGBT inclusion in the workplace. In January each year, Stonewall publishes their list of [Top 100](#) employers, which features a mix of public and private sector organisations.
- 5.3.9 In the January 2020 index the University was ranked 249th out of over 500 entrants and was placed 36/54 within the Education sector. The submission round in 2020 was paused due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 5.3.10 As part of Aberdeen 2040, the University has made a commitment to enhance LGBT+ equality. The University has set a target of achieving a Bronze Award in the Stonewall WEI and to be a Top 100 employer by 2025.
- 5.3.11 To support the monitoring of progress towards that goal, a mapping spreadsheet has been created to track an internal assessment of the current position against the criteria.
- 5.3.12 Action:

Achieve a Bronze award in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index by February 2022 (submission made in September 2021) (Action 1.4)

The actions which will require to be taken in advance of the submission and which are part of the University's Stonewall WEI Action Plan include:

- Review policies to ensure they avoid gendered language with the first group of policies being revised by September 2021
- Develop and launch guidance notes to support the Transgender Equality Policy by August 2021
- Ensure that Induction materials explicitly include statements on LGBT+ inclusion by September 2021

Longer term actions also included in the University's Stonewall WEI Action Plan include:

- Develop a programme of events and engagement for LGBT History Month in February 2022
- Continue engagement with external partners such as Grampian Pride
- Increase engagement with Senior Management on LGBT+ inclusiveness by September 2022
- Consider how best to allow people to record their gender identity whilst remaining compliant with HMRC & HESA return requirements by September 2022
- Review procurement processes to ensure they take EDI factors into account by June 2022
- Review and assess University front-line services for LGBT+ inclusion by September 2022

5.3.13 BRITISH SIGN LANGUAGE PLAN

The University continues to implement its [British Sign Language Plan](#) and in 2020 provided an [update](#) on progress to contribute to the Scottish Government's review of BSL Plans. Key areas of note are:

- [Aberdeen 2040](#) was fully translated into BSL and a BSL-accessible campus is a priority within the strategy
- All events for Inclusion Week in March 2019 and Black History Month in October 2020 were translated into BSL

- BSL interpreters were available on campus during the University's Open Days and Offer Holder Day in 2019. Translation was available on key talks – (Welcome, Finance, Applying to UCAS, Accommodation) and for subject talks for specific visitors. Any visitor who, when registering, identified as needing assistance was contacted by the University for further details about which talks they planned to attend. A schedule for the translator was then developed. If the University was alerted on the day to specific requirements, it did everything possible to arrange for the additional sessions to be translated. Talks which were to be interpreted were highlighted in the printed guide.
- All graduation events are signed by a BSL interpreter
- The School of Education has renewed its focus on the creation of a short-course professional learning offering for teachers. As a part of this initiative, it will seek to include BSL within Inclusive Practice professional learning/CPD course content
- The Digital Accessibility Working Group has a remit to look at all aspects of accessibility in the digital area and BSL is part of their work.

5.3.14 Action:

Review the BSL Plan to ensure it continues to support BSL-users in the staff and student community by September 2021 (Action 6.1)

5.3.15 GAELIC LANGUAGE PLAN

The University's [Gaelic Language Plan](#) 2019 – 2024 sets out how the University plans to raise awareness of Gaelic, increase the number of Gaelic speakers and embed Gaelic in the University's activities.

5.3.16 The University reported its progress to Bòrd na Gàidhlig in December 2020 noting:

- 26 members of staff reported being Gaelic speakers in the Staff Survey 2020 (up from 19 in 2018)
- Aberdeen 2040 was translated into Gaelic
- Promotional material for Aberdeen 2040 was translated into Gaelic
- The 'Cabaireachd an t-Samhraidh' project supported ten students to continue their use of Gaelic
- Undergraduate and Post Graduate degrees continue to be offered in the University
- The May Festival in 2019 includes a range of Gaelic events
- Corporate Parenting Plan being updated to support Gaelic speaking care-experienced students

5.3.17 MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Activities on mental health and wellbeing continue apace, with an ongoing strong commitment to tackle mental health stigma.

5.3.18 Following a rationalisation process in October 2019, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Working Group was established, resulting in an integrated, holistic approach to wellbeing, encouraging joint activities for staff and students. This has also facilitated the development of a new action plan which is discussed at each meeting of the Group and at wider forums where appropriate. The Group reports progress to EDIC and the Health and Safety Committee.

5.3.19 The University retained its Silver Healthy Working Lives award in February 2020 following a strong submission showcasing the BeWell program of events and campaigns.

5.3.20 The number, frequency and scope of the BeWell events programme has increased significantly since the end of 2019. Monthly themes keep the activities relevant and interesting and they have continued on an online basis during the Covid-19 pandemic.



5.3.21 Over 100 Mental Health Champions and First Aiders continue to meet regularly to discuss key issues and trends and this has been particularly important during the pandemic. They received updated training in January – March 2020 and, following a review of roles a Mental Health First Aid Charter was launched. Almost all of the Mental Health First Aiders have signed the Charter and have therefore agreed to be available to any staff member who wishes to discuss mental health concerns. Feedback on the Mental Health First Aiders service is anecdotal at present but there is a plan to introduce a formal feedback system.

5.3.22 A Suicide Prevention Policy and training plan has been drafted as has a revised Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy and Strategy. These documents will be approved shortly, with EDIC already having provided comments and it will have the opportunity to feed comments in again. The Wellbeing Team deliver an extensive programme of events annually. For example, over 2020, events included:

- Cancer awareness pop up advice stand
- Time to Talk Day – social media campaign to raise awareness of support mechanisms
- University Mental Health Day – student bloggers shared experiences of mental health issues
- Mental Health Awareness Week – Instagram stories and direct questions
- Men's Health Week – Men's MOT manual shared with staff
- BeWell Bingo – Almost 200 students participated
- Orientation Sessions - BeWell module was designed to equip students with top tips and practical strategies for maintaining mental, physical, emotional, and financial wellbeing while at university, almost 3000 students took part
- Suicide Prevention Day - 'Working together to prevent suicide'. The International Association for Suicide prevention short video was shared on various platforms. The video gave the opportunity to think about connections, to empower discussions & reduce stigma. 3000 responded on Instagram.
- Isolation Toolkit - A Self-isolation toolkit was created to offer a range of practical tools, resources and services to help students who are in self-isolation. Resources included isolation Bingo and access to free mindfulness sessions. Page was viewed 1612 times.
- Winter Wellbeing Toolkit - The Winter toolkit was the 4th most clicked link in the student December Newsletter. Currently the highest level of engagement is with Connecting with others which include support networks for menopause, men's mental health and LGBT+ community.

5.3.23 Action:

Agree updated version Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy and five-year Strategy (action 2.1)

Review Stress Management Policy and launch revised version (Action 2.2)

Review the training requirements relating to the HSE Management Standards (Action 2.3)

Maintain Healthy Working Lives Silver award accreditation and strive towards Gold standard (Action 2.4)

Deliver the annual calendar of activities and restart campus events when restrictions allow (Action 2.5)

Train new Mental Health First Aiders when the courses become available. Funding has been secured, a waiting list is held, and provisional dates are set for the second half of the calendar year (Action 2.6)

Fully implement reporting/monitoring procedure for Mental Health Champions and Mental Health First Aiders (Action 2.7)

Carry out an Evaluation of MHFA & MH Champions activities (Action 2.8)

Continue to roll out the Suicide Prevention Training Plan (Action 2.9)

5.3.24 PROJECT SEARCH

DFN (David Forbes Nixon) Project SEARCH is a one-year transition to work Internship programme, based on an international model which originated in the Cincinnati Children's Hospital in the USA, supporting young people with learning challenges to gain skills and experience to go on to employment. The programme, which is hosted on the University's King's College campus, launched in September 2013.

5.3.25 Project SEARCH has, like many initiatives, been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. A move to teaching at North East Scotland College was required, as was blended learning.

5.3.26 Partner organisations have worked together to establish 'virtual Internships' in the light of the pandemic with tasks being assigned and supervision being provided from supervisors via Microsoft Teams, providing the interns with experience of remote working.

5.3.27 The Scottish rates of employment for people with a learning disability are extremely low (4.1% are in employment, against national figures of Scottish employment which is at 74.3% (Scottish Commission for Learning Disability 2019)).

5.3.28 Based on the 11 interns who graduated in 2019, 100% achieved employment, with 64% of them meeting the DFN Project SEARCH criteria. Our overall average rate of success since our establishment is equivalent to the published DFN Project SEARCH national success rate (60%).

5.3.29 Funding streams for the continuation of Project SEARCH at the University have been far from certain over the previous year and work is currently underway to create a funding strategy to sustain the project beyond the timeframe offered by the Young Persons Guarantee funding.

5.3.30 The University is currently recruiting interns for 2021/22. Marketing strategies are being reviewed as traditional methods of reaching potential Interns will not be effective due to the closure of school and College campuses. An online graduation event will also be used as a marketing/promotional tool.

5.3.32 STAFF SURVEY 2020 RESULTS

5.3.33 The University invited staff to respond to a staff survey, operated by an external consultancy, in November 2020. The survey is conducted biennially and although some of the questions were slightly different to the 2018 survey, overall comparisons can be made. The completion rate was 60%, a significant improvement on the 2018 rate of 39%. Overall, the results are extremely positive, for example, 96% of respondents agreed that the University was a good place to work, 89% stated they felt valued at work and 92% of respondents indicated they believed SMT lead and manage the University effectively.

5.3.34 In respect of questions specifically linked to EDI, 97% of staff confirmed that they were aware of the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy – the top score within the survey. In addition to this, 91% of respondents believed that the University was committed to equality of opportunity for all its staff.

5.3.35 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.

5.3.36 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.

5.3.37 The top five reasons (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

5.3.38 A range of other questions related to EDI issues such as responses regarding workload and stress and all of these will be reviewed by EDIC at its next meeting with regular updates provided, with EDIC inputting to actions to be taken.

5.3.29 Action:

Undertake analysis of the results of the staff survey 2020 by protected characteristic and develop and implement actions with EDIC where issues are identified (Action 7.2)

5.3.30 RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK

The University has developed an institutional Code of Practice (CoP) on the Preparation of Submissions to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021, which was approved by the Scottish Funding Council. The CoP sets out how decisions regarding eligibility, association with specific units of assessment, and selection of outputs and impact case studies is managed by the University. It also stipulates the governance structures related to REF and includes a right of appeal by individual researchers against eligibility and selection decisions and explains how individual equality related personal circumstances will be considered in compiling submissions. It includes an EQIA, analysing the impact the processes are likely to have on members of staff with characteristics protected under the Equality Act 2010, and those additionally identified by REF (part time working and early career stage). The CoP includes a training plan which required all staff involved in REF decision-making to undertake specific training on the CoP and potential bias in making eligibility, review and selection decisions.

5.3.31 Information sessions on the CoP were held in early 2020 – these were open to all staff and accompanied by mailshots to all eligible staff. Training for staff involved in REF decision making, and online training to those who could not attend in person, was delivered. At the time of writing, all members of the REF Steering Group, all members of the REF Appeals panel, Heads of School, School Directors of Research/Unit of Assessment leads and School Administrative Officers, as well as members of the central REF team, have completed the training.

5.3.32 REF decision making is informed by the CoP and the EQIAs which accompany it. A detailed EQIA was undertaken February 2019, which was considered by the REF Steering Group, EDIC and SMT. We have undertaken further EQIAs as preparations progress, looking at eligibility and protected characteristics (May 2019), number/predicted quality of outputs (December 2019, February 2020) and around final selection of outputs (at unit of assessment level, November 2020 to February 2021). The assessment and the data was shared and discussed at EDIC, and will be further considered by the short term working group on research culture. In line with REF guidance, a final EQIA will be prepared for publication following submission to REF in July 2021.

5.3.33 Distribution of outputs across the finalised submissions shows that female researchers are more likely to be submitted with fewer than the required 2.5 submissions than male researchers (68% v 63%). This is consistent with an earlier EQIA considered by the REF Steering Group in December 2019 which stated that 29% of female researchers had, at that point, either no papers or one paper for submission, compared to 25% of male researchers.

5.3.34 The tables also show that early career researchers and researchers in HESA age band 34 or younger are more likely to be submitted with 1 or 2 papers. This is as expected.

5.3.35 Disability numbers are low and it is problematic to draw robust conclusion from them. In terms of ethnicity, researchers who have declared a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background are more likely to be submitted with 3 or more papers than their colleagues who have declared a White background.

5.3.36 The December 2019 EQIA suggested that, at that time, 34% of female researchers had at least one 4* paper compared to 38% of male researchers.

5.3.37 The December 2019 assessment showed that 27% of researchers with a declared Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background had at least one 4* paper compared to 38% of researchers with a White background.

5.3.38 Action:

Continue the equality monitoring of decision-making in the REF process and involve EDIC in the analysis of data (Action 12.1)

5.3.39 DIGITAL ACCESSIBILITY

Early in 2020 the University established a Digital Accessibility Project to plan and deliver digital accessibility in line with legislation and standards.

5.3.40 The initial intention was to audit University performance and embed good practice in meeting the requirements of the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No.2) Accessibility Regulations 2018 which 'aims to make websites and mobile applications of public sector bodies more accessible to users, particularly persons with disabilities'. However, the increased focus on digital delivery because of the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in the project remit being extended.

5.3.41 Every internet-facing service run by the University is required to meet approved accessibility standards. The regulations cover University websites and Virtual Learning Environment content, including web pages, documents (Word, PDF, PowerPoint), and lecture capture recordings. Additionally, the move to blended learning during this time because of Covid-19 meant that the use of digital materials increased exponentially. The role digital accessibility played in the staff and student experience increased significantly.

5.3.42 The project established six workstreams:

- the University website
- applications
- digital marketing
- teaching and learning
- libraries
- policy and governance

5.3.43 Key achievements of the work include:

- Accessibility levels have improved significantly. At the time of writing the University website is achieving a score of 93.4/100 compliance against a sector benchmark of 71.0
- The removal of numerous non-compliant websites and the application of responsive templates and other improvements to subsidiary University websites
- External suppliers contacted and asked to ensure and evidence digital accessibility
- Good practice guidance for staff engaged in marketing and social media activity, including video captioning and podcast work
- Work with marketing agencies to ensure campaign materials are fully accessible
- Training, documentation and captioning work for those involved in Teaching and Learning and close liaison throughout with the BLITFG
- The upgrade of all Library Guides and liaison with third party publishers to ensure standards are met for electronic materials



- The production of targeted training and documentation
- Ongoing work to create a Policy for Inclusion & Accessibility in Teaching & Learning and a complementary policy for all staff on Accessibility
- The University's Accessibility Statement details the institution's commitment to digital accessibility and provides detailed advice on specific services.

5.3.44 Continued focus on digital accessibility requirements and implementation will be overseen by the Digital Accessibility Working Group which will provide updates on progress to EDIC.