

Athena SWAN Regional Networks

Introduction

Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) recognises the importance of partnership working in furthering our aim of advancing equality and diversity for staff and students in higher education and the research community.

The Athena SWAN Regional Networks were established to ensure that signatories have a recognised, geographically co-located peer group with whom they can collectively consider gender equality challenges and priorities. Network members inform and support each other's efforts to overcome challenges. They are fora for the sharing of effective practice from different institutions.

The networks provide signatories with access to ECU staff members who can provide advice on best practice and guidance on procedure, with whom queries can be discussed and via whom recommendations from the group to ECU can be made. The networks will therefore also provide an opportunity to inform ECU's equality charters work, thereby ensuring that the needs of signatories are well embedded in the charters.

ECU will endeavour to ensure that outputs from individual regional networks are shared at a national level where useful and appropriate.

Terms of reference

From 2016, there will be nine Athena SWAN Regional networks, with the possibility to expand in line with any increases in the number of signatories. The purpose of networks are to:

- = facilitate knowledge and information sharing and learning between institutional signatories of the Athena SWAN Charter (who are also subscribers to ECU, where applicable to their nation's funding arrangements) and ECU
- = develop appropriate approaches to tackle gender equality challenges
- = provide opportunities to update others on planned and on-going work to advance gender equality
- = provide a non-judgemental and non-prejudicial environment in which to network with other staff undertaking work related to the Athena SWAN Charter
- = where possible, agree joint approaches to tackling challenges, and where relevant, inform and steer ECU's programme of work.

Attendees

Athena SWAN Regional Networks will be attended by individuals whom signatory institutions deem appropriate to attend these fora, as well as staff from the equality charters team at ECU, who will not be fixed. Institutional membership of the networks will be determined by ECU, primarily on a geographical basis (exceptions will be considered in collaboration with individual institutions, for example, where an institution in question would be the only research institute in their natural network). The numbers of representatives that attend each meeting will not be fixed and will depend upon the agenda and capacity of the meeting host, but would normally be between one and three members from each institution.

Membership will be on an organisational rather than individual basis, although consistent representation is encouraged where possible.

ECU will manage communications of network business via the named institutional key contact and nominated deputy for each signatory. These individuals will be responsible for sharing information and invitations within their institution, across STEM and AHSSBL¹ areas, as appropriate.

Meeting frequency

It is intended that each Athena SWAN Regional Network will meet will meet two or three times per year, with a preference for the latter.

Standing authority of the networks

The networks do not seek to replace the functions of other regional equality networks and liaison groups that are already operational across the UK. The key function of the regional networks is to facilitate peer-to-peer support and further discussion of approaches to gender equality in the context of the Athena SWAN Charter. This will be reflected in the staff who attend from ECU, whose primary expertise is specific to the charter.

For a meeting to take place, a quorum of 40% of the network's member institutions must be able to attend.

As appropriate, the network may invite people from other organisations, such as sector or equality bodies, to attend. For example, this may be as an observer, to provide a masterclass presentation or to facilitate a training or development session. They may also invite people from other education or research institutions, to support the sharing of information between networks.

ECU will manage registration, finalise the agenda and support arrangements for group activities at or linked to the network. Members will be invited to provide agenda items in advance of the meeting.

ECU will record key outcomes and actions arising from discussions, in consultation with the chair (and host where appropriate).

Usually the network will be chaired by an elected member of staff from a charter signatory. By mutual agreement between the membership of the network and ECU, the network may be chaired by ECU, although this is not the default option. This would be reviewed annually. An elected chair would usually hold the role for a two year term and could be elected for no more than two consecutive terms. The network may elect a deputy chair to assist the chair. ECU will provide other administrative and operational support, in discussion with the chair and/or deputy chair. The chair will seek mutual agreement with ECU on operational matters and proposed activities.

Members of the network will take it in turns to host and fund the meeting at their institution. This may be reviewed in future.

¹ STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, Medicine. AHSSBL: Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Business, Law.