



Scientific Women's Academic Network and the SWAN charter for women

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Women remain severely and persistently under-represented in science, engineering, maths and related fields in the UK higher education sector. The lack of women in senior positions cannot be explained simply by a corresponding lack of women at undergraduate level. Women are 'lost' at each stage of the career path (referred to as the 'leaky pipeline' effect). Consequently, UK science, engineering, maths and technology is losing out of a substantial pool of wasted talent — and is failing women in terms of equality issues. These patterns are replicated across Europe- and whilst the UK does not have the worst rates, it is certainly not leading the way either.

The Athena SWAN Charter is a recognition scheme for UK universities and their science departments. Membership of the Charter scheme, with its bronze, silver and gold SWAN recognition awards, will enable universities to identify themselves as employers of choice, not only to their staff but to their students, their funders, the research councils and industry. There is no charge for Charter membership. However, to remain in membership, universities, their science departments and faculties will be expected to produce action plans, and to measure and report their progress.

The scheme is open to all UK universities who are committed to working towards the achievement of Athena's aims, objectives and targets. Athena's aims are to advance and promote the careers of women in science, engineering and technology (SET) in higher education and research and to achieve a significant increase in the number of women recruited to top posts.

Universities who sign the Charter accept its six principles:

1. To address gender inequalities requires commitment and action from everyone, at all levels in the organisation
2. To tackle the unequal representation of women in science requires changing cultures and attitudes within the organisation
3. The high loss rate of women in science is an urgent concern which the organisation will address
4. The use of short-term contracts has particularly negative consequences for the retention and progression of women in science
5. The transition from PhD into a sustainable academic career in science can be particularly difficult for women and as such requires active consideration by the organisation
6. The absence of diversity at management and policy-making levels has broad implications which the organisation will examine.

Signatories pledge themselves to action at organisational, and departmental levels and to: monitor their progress towards an organisational culture where all can thrive, are equally valued and experience equality of opportunity for career progression provide an annual account of their work and their future plans for improvement

Since 1999 the Athena Project has worked in partnership with a wide range of universities to develop and disseminate good practice in SET employment. The Charter draws together and builds on the successes of this work, specifically Athena good practice checklists, the key performance indicators proposed for departments, and Athena's ASSET surveys of 6,500 plus male and female scientists in higher education and research.

The SWAN Charter won the Institute of Physics prize in the 2003 Royal Society Athena Awards. Further information will be available in April 2005 when Athena will invite its partner universities to become Charter members, interested Universities should email athena@royalsoc.ac.uk The Athena Project, The Royal Society, 6 Carlton House Terrace, London SW1Y 5AG www.athenaproject.org.uk

The development of the Charter is supported by the UK Resource Centre for Women in SET. Athena is based at and supported by The Royal Society, its other main supporters include BP, Equality Challenge Unit, Institute of Physics, Pfizer, Royal Academy of Engineering, Royal Society of Chemistry and The Wellcome Trust.

UKRC

The UK Resource Centre for Women in Science Engineering Technology (UKRC) and the built environment is based in Bradford and is being developed by the JIVE consortium of Bradford College, Sheffield Hallam, Open and Cambridge Universities.

The mission of UKRC is to establish a dynamic central hub that provides accessible, high quality information and advisory services to employers (including academia and the research councils), professional bodies, sector skills councils, careers professionals and higher and further education to promote best practice in the recruitment, retention and progression of women in SET and the built environment. UKRC will map, coordinate and build on the range of good practice initiatives that have already been developed in this field by providing a strategic focus for driving forward the UK women and SET agenda.

In supporting the Athena SWAN Charter, UKRC will address a number of its core objectives in raising the profile of women in SET and recognising good employment practice in this area.

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or [Lindsay Melling](#) regarding the launch

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