

# School of Law Athena SWAN Newsletter

August 2020



## Introduction

This is the second Law School Athena Swan newsletter and it continues in the important process of highlighting the work that has been done by the School in promoting equality and diversity and reminding us of the ongoing efforts that are needed to make further progress.

Half a century on from the Equal Pay Act and 45 years on from the Sex Discrimination Act, it would be possible to imagine that the battle for equality was done and dusted. However, that is not the case. While overt discrimination has been outlawed, work still needs to be done. Progress has been made, but ongoing efforts are required to effect the cultural change necessary. Unconscious bias needs to be combatted and opportunities for development provided to all – both within the university and without. One of the most striking things for me, in reading this newsletter in draft, was to be reminded that in 2016 all of the external speakers invited to provide a research seminar at this Law School were male. While this example might not seem the most serious of the equality and diversity issues facing us and certainly did not arise as a result of a conscious decision to only invite men, it illustrates the need for continued vigilance and concerted effort to ensure equality of opportunity and was picked up specifically because Athena Swan requires us to engage in critical self-reflection.

Athena Swan makes an important contribution to Equality and Diversity, but it does not address all issues. The University has signed up to Advance HE's Race Equality Charter earlier this year and I anticipate that the work that is being done at institutional level in that regard and which will soon be rolled out to the School will soon make a further positive contribution in this area.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity provided by this introduction to offer my and the School's thanks to two of our leading female academics who are leaving the University of Aberdeen. Prof Tina Hunter, who led on our first Athena Swan Bronze application (and who offers some reflections on that experience in an article, below) is returning to her native Australia to take up a Chair at Macquarie University, Sydney. And Prof Margaret Ross is to be enjoying a well-earned retirement after 28 years of service to the University. Margaret was both the first female professor within the Law School and its first female Head of School before her promotion to Vice Principal, in which capacity she served as Head of the College of Arts and Social Sciences and VP (People). Although both will be retaining links to the University, the friendship and mentorship of both will be greatly missed. I thank them for all their hard work for the University in their time here, and in particular, for their leadership and example in the field of equality and diversity.

**Professor Greg Gordon**  
Head of School



Maggie Milne, *Professor Margaret Ross, 2016-17, Oil on Canvas, University of Aberdeen Collections*

## AS Top 10 in 2020

1. Detailed Induction handbook and induction programme launched
2. 30 law staff completed AS survey
3. PGR AS survey ready to launch Autumn
4. January Induction session for 6 new staff (support and academic)
5. First PGR AS meeting hosted on TEAMS by Jo and Stephanie
6. Working group to review female recruitment to PGR programme
7. TEAMS AS induction sessions for 4 new academic staff: April and July
8. First Law School research funding award to include childcare costs
9. AS news now integral to each school bulletin
10. 2017 Law School Bronze AS Award extended to November 2021.



## Research Funding Applications and Gender Balance

As we approach the end of the current Research Excellence Framework (REF) cycle, I have collected data about funding applications submitted to external funding bodies. Between 2014 and 2020, members of the Law School have submitted 96 applications (this number includes both research grants and consultancies) as Principal Investigator (PIs) or Co-investigator (Co-Is). It is important to note that these numbers do not reflect all our research activities. Many of us are involved in funded projects as participants and not as PIs or Co-Is, but this activity is not recorded centrally.

Of the 81 grant applications, 33 have been successful, 47 have been rejected and 1 application is pending. That means that the success rate of our applications is above 40%. The numbers indicate that females have been more active in submitting applications than males both in absolute and in relative terms. 54 of the 96 applications have been submitted

by females. Of the 55 staff members (22 females, 33 males) who are research active or were members of the School during the current REF cycle, 30 have submitted at least one application (16 females and 14 males) and 23 of them (12 females and 11 males) have been successful at least once.

The picture slightly changes if one focuses on the amount of money we have applied for or the amount awarded to our projects. Male colleagues have both requested more money for their projects (£11,305,543 as opposed to £7,359,657) and secured more funding £1,725,170 as opposed to £791,075) if we take into consideration the full amount of applications/awards whenever a staff member has been involved in a project either as a PI or a Co-I. This does not mean, however, that female staff members have been less successful than their male colleagues. Rather, the above numbers can be explained by the fact that male staff members have often participated in big interdisciplinary projects as Co-Is. If we

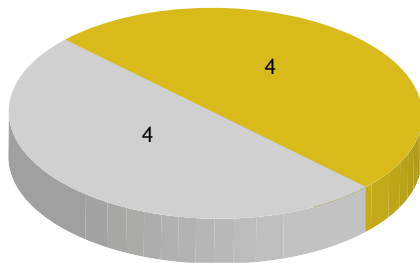
take into consideration only the projects in which a staff member has been a PI, female members of staff have applied for significantly more money (£2,815,979 as opposed to 1,186,159) and have also secured much more funding (£702,523 as opposed to £238,865).

**Tamas Gyorfí**, Law School Director of Research and AS SAT member

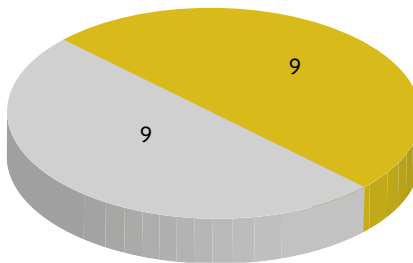


## Law School School of Law 25th July 2020 Staff Headcount by Gender

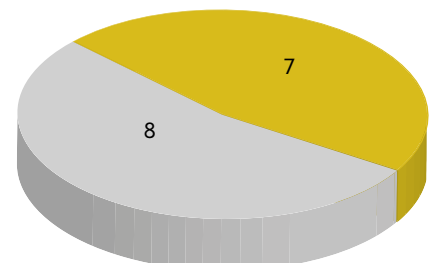
Research Centre Directorship: Total 8



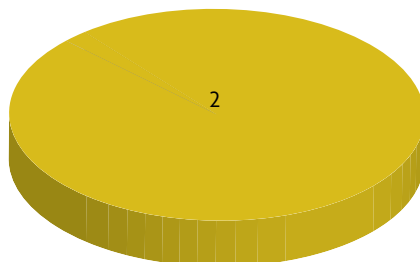
Lecturer : Total 18



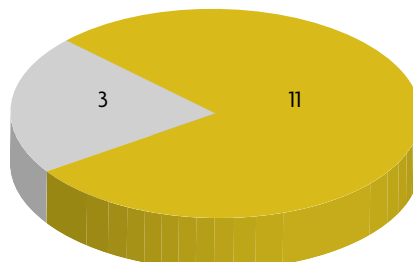
Senior Lecturer : Total 15



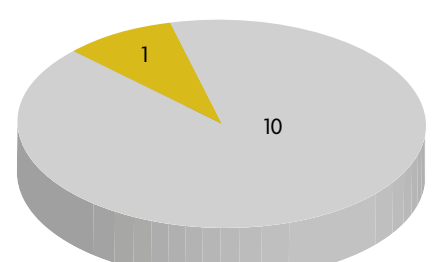
Reader: Total 2



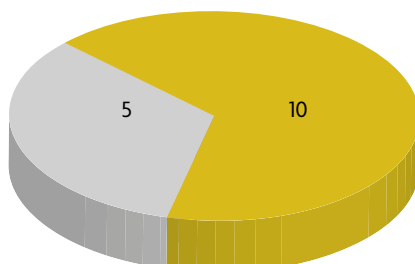
Professors: Total 14



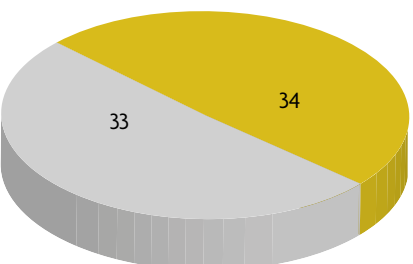
Admin Support: Total 11



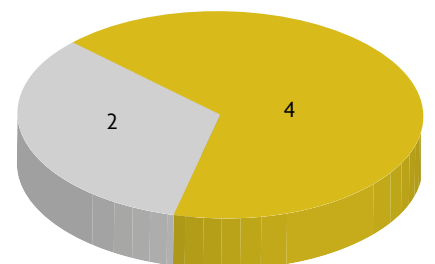
Committee Chair: Total 15



Committee Membership: Total 67



ALM: Total 6



M F



## Supporting Early Career Academics in the Law School

Starting an academic job is never easy – from navigating abbreviations like REF (Research Excellence Framework) and FHEA (Fellow of the Higher Education Academy) to frantically looking for the right room in the MacRobert Building. Being an early career academic comes with mounting pressures to perform well at the University while establishing yourself in your specialist research field. Some research funders recognise these pressures by offering funding opportunities for early career researchers. In the Law School as well, we do our best to support our early career staff through lighter workload, mentorship, and the Early Career Group (ECG). The ECG was reinstated in 2016/17 as a planned objective of the AS Action Plan submitted as part of the 2016 Bronze application. The School survey had indicated a desire for

more support at ECG level. As we work towards our Silver AS application, the ECG is now well established.

For the purposes of the group, unlike the research funders, we do not put strict limitations on who qualifies as 'early career'. The ECG, convened by Gloria Alvarez and Daria Shapovalova, meets twice a term with invitations open to lecturers, probationers, and anyone else who feels they would benefit from participation. At the meetings, we usually set aside time to discuss teaching, research, and administrative duties with a focus on specific challenges facing those who are in the first years of their academic jobs.

The ECG meetings provide a forum for lecturers to learn from each other's experiences and formulate a shared

vision of support needed for successful progression in the Law School. Every other meeting, we invite a senior member of staff to discuss issues important to early career academics. At our latest meeting in July, Abbe Brown kindly spoke to us about the REF process and gave some tips on how to write a four-star piece. In December, we organised a two-day Centre for Academic Development -mentored retreat for preparation of HEA applications, which facilitated at least three of our lecturers successfully completing their forms. Most importantly, the ECG meetings provide a safe space to share challenges and receive support and solidarity from colleagues, and we hope the group continues its important work through these uncertain times.

**Daria Shapovalova**  
Lecturer and SAT member

## Research seminar

The 2016 AS Action Plan required the School to address gender bias related to the Law School research seminars series. At that time 78% of speakers invited to deliver a seminar were male. Some progress has been made, but it fluctuates. 69% of speakers were male for the 2019-20

### Seminar series.

Equality was achieved in the second semester with a 3/3 split in the gender of speakers. Read our 2019/20 Research Seminar Series retrospect [here](#).



## Equality means more than Equal – *How Athena Swan changed my perspective*

As an undergraduate LLB student, my educational experience has benefited tremendously from the diverse team of lecturers, tutors, and support staff at Aberdeen Law School. Because of this it always appeared to me that Aberdeen University was doing a great job encouraging and supporting diversity. However, since joining Athena Swan SAT as the undergraduate student representative, my perspective on what it means to engender a diverse and supportive environment has changed. When the term 'gender equality' comes up in conversation with my fellow students, what tends to come to mind are invariably the gender pay gap or the under-representation of women in STEM subjects. Because of this, my initial impression of Athena Swan that the focus was going to be ensuring everyone was treated 'the same' in terms of these issues.

What I have since discovered is that, in addition to these factors, Athena Swan encourages identification of less obvious issues. Strictly 'equal' treatment can go a long way to prevent issues such as the gender pay gap, however it can create inequality by ignoring the fact that a diverse staff means a diverse set of obstacles which may get in the way of equal opportunities for success and career advancement.

By allowing the work environment to adapt to the needs of the staff, it shifts the focus of equality from just about "treating everyone the same." Rather a true equality means an environment in which everyone is afforded the opportunity to achieve the same. For example, a strict adherence to a 9-5, Monday-Friday work schedule can be biased against staff with particular family/personal commitments. Allowance

for flexible working hours or a restriction on work commitments too early or late in the workday can help eliminate these disadvantages.

When staff feel they have equal opportunity for success, they will be more likely to remain at the University and provide students with the benefit of their unique expertise and support. Therefore, the work of Athena Swan is of tremendous importance not only for staff but for the quality of education students receive. Most important, for me personally is that my changed perspective garnered from Athena Swan is something that I will carry forward into my career, allowing me to make a positive impact on my own future work environment.

### Jacob Voegelé

Undergraduate student representative  
AS SAT

## *Athena Swan* - Visibility on the School of Law Webpages

Recently we developed a subpage on the School of Law website specially dedicated to the Athena SWAN charter.

[www.abdn.ac.uk/law/about/equality-and-diversity-898.php](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/law/about/equality-and-diversity-898.php)

The purpose of the page is to showcase the School's work in promoting Equality and Diversity in Academia and to increase the visibility of our efforts to maximise the development opportunities available to our staff and students.

Currently, our Equality and Diversity web section includes several key links and documents that provide more information on the Charter and the school's individual aims and objectives. The documents included are the Bronze application, the Athena SWAN Action Plan as well as our first Athena SWAN newsletter from December 2019.

A number of updates to the existing webpage are currently being developed and will be added to the live pages in due course. The current information will still be available, and the updates will serve to further enhance the visibility of the work done by the school's self-assessment team.

A dedicated separate module will be made to host our newsletters and keep their publication consistent. We will also add a section explaining what the Charter is and its purpose. The final upgrade will aim to include the names of the appointed SAT members while the co-leads of the group will have a small profile each with a picture and some information about their role.

The aim is to not only provide enough data on the website about Athena SWAN and our efforts, but to also make it as visually appealing as possible for external and internal viewers.

### Georgi Chichkov

School Administration Assistant  
(Marketing, Events, and Research)

1493 UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN CELEBRATING 525 YEARS 1493-2020

Study About Research Alumni & Giving Business Quick Links Search

School of Law

About People Research Degree Programmes and Courses Student Activities News, Events and Seminars Blog

### Equality and Diversity

University Home / School of Law / About / Equality and Diversity

- < University Home
- < School of Law
- About
  - Equality and Diversity
  - School of Law UG FAQs
  - School of Law PGT FAQs

Aberdeen Law School comprises an international community working together to promote equality and diversity, maximising the development opportunities available to staff and students.

Embracing the University's support for the Athena SWAN Principles, the law school applied for Athena SWAN Bronze accreditation in November 2016, which was awarded April 2017. Our [application](#) and [Equality and Diversity Action Plan](#) are available for perusal

An important element for continued benchmarking of Athena SWAN Principles is through our annual survey. Information from previous surveys can be found on the resources page.

Take a look at some of the useful [resources](#) and [papers](#) we're using to think about equality.

Read our [Athena SWAN Newsletter](#).

ECU GENDER CHARTER Athena SWAN Bronze Award

# Q&A

with Professor  
Abbe E. L.  
Brown



Chair in Intellectual Property Law about the equality and diversity aspects of her roles as Law School Research Exercise Framework (REF) lead (July 2019) [www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/research/impact-ref-and-open-access.php](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/research/impact-ref-and-open-access.php) and the University Dean for Student Support (January 2020) <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/about/management/deans-110.php>

## Q. How does equality and diversity impact your new roles?

**A:** As Dean for Student Support I work with the specialist student support services and the widening participation team regarding particular student cohorts, including disabled students, veterans, refugees, care experienced, student parents and carers and those who have entered via the articulation pathway. My initial focus has been to draw together expertise from Estates to Research and Innovation to the Student Learning Services to School and academic colleagues - to co-ordinate support.

## Q. What have you learned from this exercise?

**A:** I must confess it made me view the University and life in general in a new way. It is one thing to have support available and policies in place, it is another for there to be an environment in which equality is seen as central.

I have also been reminded of the diversity of our students and staff

## Q. What else does the Dean for Student Support do?

**A:** I have been very involved in responses to COVID-19 and preparation for a blended orientation and provision of pastoral support and guidance (e.g. through personal tutoring) in the blended environment.

## Q. What has this meant with regard to inclusion and equality?

**A:** The approach has been to embed this into the online assessment for May 2020 and for delivery of blended teaching, learning and assessment for next year, including through an Equality Impact Assessment.

## Q. What does this mean in practical terms?

**A:** For example regarding assessment, this involved inclusive approaches to the timing for completion of assessments for all students, availability of assistive technology, and flexibility to students who are carers and parents (notably a gender issue) and also in the light of digital inequalities - students not having devices or reliable broadband which can have an impact on their being able to complete assessments.

## Q. Can you comment further on blended learning and gender issues?

**A:** The potential for gender inequality (as well as others) becomes increasingly evident as discussions develop regarding the timing of blended delivery, lack of and certainty regarding alternative child and other care and the ongoing uncertainty as to the opening of primary and secondary schools.

## Q. What about the REF role: what are the links with equality and diversity?

**A:** Regard must be had to equality and diversity in selecting outputs for submission for REF (submission now in March 2021). Equality and diversity is also a key part of the REF Environment Statement. Attending University training and preparing the draft REF statement have been clear reminders of the ongoing reality and importance of equality and diversity. Policies and goals do not (only) live in spreadsheets and in Sharepoint; they have an ongoing impact on people's careers and lives.

## Q. How does the REF process assist with inclusivity?

**A:** The REF is not perfect, but the stressing from the external REF leaders of the importance accorded to equality and diversity is a valuable nudge to embrace equality (including gender equality), complementing Athena Swan and the University's own commitments.

## AS submission

The 2016 AS submission identified that less than 40% of all Postgraduate Research (PGR) applications to the Postgraduate Research Programme to the School of Law were women. As the post-graduate representative for the Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team (SAT), I have been involved with the team for the last 3.5 years examining why proportionally fewer women applied for a PhD or Research LLM. During this time, I have been working with our Graduate Programs coordinator Jo Kunzlik (also a As SAT member) to address this issue. In 2018, we hosted a working group to get feedback from current Law PGRs on gender issues, recruitment materials and ideas around funding. In the next few months we are planning a focus group on the feasibility of a women's scholarship and funding centred around the promotion of women in academia. A recommendation will be written following this working group to be included in our 2021 AS submission.

**Stephanie Dropuljic**

## Concluding comments: Anne-Michelle Slater AS Lead and Newsletter editor

I hope you find this collection of news, information and articles related to gender equality in the School of Law interesting. It reflects the progress in implementing the Athena SWAN Action Plan, as well as highlighting areas where progress and interventions are required at Institutional and School level.

A snapshot of facts and figures can be a blunt instrument to convey our current position, but the main purpose of the Newsletter is to continue to raise and maintain awareness of gender equality. Regular updates are also provided at School meetings, via the School Bulletin and our webpages: <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/law/about/equality-and-diversity-898.php>

As the School of Law's Bronze Award has been extended for a year, I look forward to working with the excellent Law School Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Team, who will spearhead the submission of the Silver application in 2021.

