

ATHENA SWAN SELF-ASSESSMENT AND ACTION PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – JUNE 2025



Foreword

At Northumbria University, our commitment to promoting and achieving gender equality is unwavering; we have worked diligently to embed this commitment, investing significant time and resources. This dedication is a testament to our determination to advance progress and strive for greater achievements. We achieved a Bronze Athena Swan Award in 2015, renewed in 2019, and we are delighted to have been successfully awarded the Silver Award in 2025 which recognises the progress we have made towards gender equality.

As a member of the University Executive, I recognise the importance of modelling the behaviours we wish to see throughout the University and challenging ourselves to adopt innovative practices. We have made significant efforts to make our processes more inclusive, specifically focusing on attracting and retaining women at all levels of the organisation while improving female representation at senior levels. Northumbria's Strategy 2030 commits to the elimination of median pay gaps for gender, ethnicity and disability.

Since our last Athena Swan application in 2019, we introduced a revised promotion process, which has resulted in women having a higher success rate in progression than men. Our female representation in senior academic roles has increased and the number of female Professors has increased. We also have a higher percentage of women in our University Executive and Board of Governors. These figures clearly illustrate the impact of our actions and evidence our commitment to gender equality.

Our proactive approach to researching gender-based violence distinguishes us in the sector. We have made significant investments in this area and will continue to do so, leveraging knowledge from our researchers to improve both our culture and that of others. Our work on the Race Equality Charter complements this, and we are committed to creating an environment where diversity flourishes. Our new University Strategy 2024-2030 reaffirms our commitment to fairness and a sense of belonging for all community members.

Our family-friendly policies have greatly improved, exceeding our 2019 Athena Swan commitments. We introduced a 'Day-One' right for maternity and adoption, by increasing full pay to 26 weeks and increasing paternity full pay to four weeks. We have consulted with staff to implement and embed hybrid working where possible and introduced a Carer Fund.

We have invested in the central EDI team, expanding from a team of two to a team of six. The appointment of a Director of EDI has ensured that EDI is embedded in the People Strategy and we have formalised EDI structures and roles within departments.

I had the pleasure of attending the inaugural EDI Conference in June 2024, where staff showcased the research and equality initiatives underway at Northumbria. In the summer, I hosted our annual SHINE Awards, celebrating the efforts of colleagues who go above and beyond to promote Northumbria's Values and Behaviours. We have two specific Inclusivity awards that recognise, value, and celebrate our diversity and collective expertise. I was delighted to see the Inclusivity Team Award go to the Research and Innovation Services D-SAT team for their work on our successful submission for a Professional, Technical and Operational (PTO) Athena Swan Bronze award.

Our Action Plan is not merely a document, it is a living commitment. We fully recognise the work ahead of us, as outlined in the six priorities we have set. The Action Plan will remain active, and the insight gained over the next five years will ensure we continue to address current and emerging gender priorities.

We will continue to hold ourselves accountable for progress against our core goal of making Northumbria a community where everyone feels they belong. This commitment is at the heart of our efforts and will guide us in the years to come.

Professor Andy Long, FEng
Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive

Introduction

Application for Silver Award

Northumbria University obtained an Athena Swan Bronze Award in 2015, which was renewed in 2019. In March 2025 we submitted an application for an Athena Swan Silver Award. Our Silver application included thorough self-assessment and required us to demonstrate progress against our 2019 action plan and priorities, including evidence of impact and success in addressing gender inequality.

Our self-assessment process was conducted by the Gender Equality Steering Group (GESG). Following this process, we produced a progressive and ambitious action plan, supported by data. The action plan included six key priorities for advancement, each accompanied by specific actions.

We were delighted to receive a Silver Award from Advance HE in June 2025, recognising that the university has a strong commitment to gender equality and for developing an inclusive culture for all staff and students.

Feedback on our submission commended:

- The inclusion of EDI leads on departmental promotion panels and Faculty appointment boards.
- The communication and engagement with staff, and the education of staff on EDI matters.
- The positive suite of policy changes related to work-life balance, particularly relating to the improved maternity and paternity benefits and annual leave entitlement.
- The intersectional analysis of survey data.
- The evidence-based recognition of the key issues facing the University and evidence of success in addressing gender inequalities – both quantitative and qualitative.

The panel feedback also recognised the strong evidence of commitment and leadership at a senior level.

Our aim is that gender equality is truly embedded within the practices, processes and actions of the University.

This executive summary provides an overview of Northumbria University's commitment to gender equality. It summarises the self-assessment process that we have undertaken with colleagues and students and highlights the key actions that have been developed to address challenges.

We are committed to the work ahead of us and we are dedicated to creating an inclusive environment for all members of our community.

A copy of the full action plan is available on our Gender Equality [webpage](#).

Self-Assessment

In line with the Athena Swan framework, the self-assessment was led by our Gender Equality Steering Group (GESG), for which a key responsibility is to serve as the University's Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team (U-SAT). The GESG was chaired by our Senior Sponsor for Gender at Northumbria and the self-assessment process was managed by our EDI Manager. The GESG members are diverse, including academic and professional support staff at different grades, the Women's Network Chairs, the Faculty Directors of EDI and three student representatives. We invited critical friend reviews of the submission and held a session with colleagues across the University, beyond the GESG.

The GESG created six working groups, involving staff from all areas of the University and three student representatives. These working groups focused on:

- Data
- Work-life balance
- Career development
- Talent pipeline
- Culture
- Intersectionality

As part of the process, they examined staff and student demographic data from our internal systems, academic promotions data, staff survey results, and feedback from 18 listening groups including both staff and students. Once we had drafted our application and action plan, multiple internal critical friends reviewed these, followed by wider consultation. We will now oversee the implementation of the agreed action plan. Our biennial staff survey includes three specific questions assessing awareness and commitment to gender equality work. We will continue to review these responses, as well as the outcomes of the NSS and internal student surveys.

Extracts from our self-assessment that led to development of our six key priorities

We developed our six key priorities through assessing our Bronze application, analysing University data, reviewing feedback from 18 Listening Groups, considering issues raised in our 2023 Staff Survey, considering work already underway and reviewing a survey on unacceptable behaviours.

Priority 1 - Embedding EDI throughout the University

While 69% of staff are aware of gender equality initiatives, we aim to increase opportunities to deepen colleagues' understanding of EDI. Academic women had the lowest positive responses on Staff Survey questions relating to the University's commitment to gender equality, their line manager's promotion of gender equality, and the University's ambition for gender equality. Only 53% of disabled women respondents felt clear about the University's ambition for gender equality. Our goal is to enhance the representation and inclusivity of decision-making committees.

Priority 2 - Building a work environment that supports the work-life balance of all colleagues

We have made significant progress in this area, evidenced in our improved Staff Survey results, but more work remains, particularly related to contract type and caregiving responsibilities. Caregivers were less likely to agree that they can meet the demands of their role without excessive hours. Academic staff expressed a lower satisfaction balancing work and home life compared to Professional Support Staff. Listening Groups also highlighted that there are inconsistencies in staff experiences. Our aim is to enhance support for individuals with caregiving responsibilities and those preparing to start families, while improving work-life balance for all.

Priority 3 - Changing the culture – Tackling unacceptable behaviours

Since introducing our anonymous 'Unacceptable Behaviours Reporting Tool' the use of this has increased – there were 103 reports in 2022/23. The number of anonymous reports remain unchanged but reports with contact details increased by 39%. Awareness of the Unacceptable Behaviours reporting mechanism is higher amongst women than men, but our data shows that women are less confident than men in raising concerns over bullying and discrimination. There is also uncertainty about what happens when a report is submitted. Our next steps are: to increase awareness and confidence in using the Unacceptable Behaviours Reporting Tool; to address underlying issues and reduce reports by establishing community standards for acceptable conduct and implementing interventions aligned with our 'Values and Behaviours'.

Priority 4 - Ensuring equality of opportunity for all colleagues through fair and transparent development and promotion opportunities

We offer extensive professional and career development opportunities for our staff. Our 2023 Staff Survey shows an improvement in women's positivity about progression, although at 38% there is much work to do. Despite using various methods to promote these opportunities, we

need to enhance engagement by building trust, confidence, and transparency in our processes. We also need to ensure that we support academic early career individuals to increase retention.

Priority 5 - Increasing the representation of women in the talent pipeline (attraction, retention and progression)

Improving women's representation in senior roles (Grades 8 and above) is a priority. Only 38% of staff feel optimistic about progression opportunities, making this one of the lowest-rated questions from our most recent Staff Survey, particularly among female academic staff. Only 53% of academic women respond positively that they receive constructive feedback on their performance, compared to 78% of Professional Support Staff women. We plan to strengthen our recruitment, Academic Development Review and HR processes to support colleagues in achieving goals. This will also help to address our Gender Pay Gap.

Priority 6 - Creating a vibrant and inclusive research culture to support and enable staff to deliver high-quality research

Overall submission rates to the REF2021 increased, but women's submission rates were seven percentage points lower than the average. It is our priority to understand the reasons behind this gap, so that we can identify and address barriers. We also need to develop our understanding of funding application and success rates.

Action Plan

Priority 1 - Embedding EDI throughout the University

- Support the University, academic Schools and faculties to advance their efforts in achieving gender equality
- Staff are represented in University decision-making structures
- Promote inclusive and equitable decision-making
- Increase EDI Awareness

Priority 2 - Building a work environment that supports the work-life balance of all colleagues

- Increase the support given to colleagues in relation to family commitments
- Ensure colleagues and line managers feel supported in navigating flexible working requests and facilitating part-time working
- Improve the transparency and fairness of the application of the Academic Workload Model
- Strengthen and increase awareness of the existing University processes/guidance supporting work-life balance

Priority 3 - Changing the culture – Tackling unacceptable behaviours

- Increase awareness and confidence in using the Unacceptable Behaviours Reporting Tool
- Visible commitment to tackling unacceptable behaviours
- Tackle misogyny and sexual harassment
- Raise awareness and establish a supportive environment for individuals experiencing domestic abuse

Priority 4 - Ensuring equality of opportunity for all colleagues through fair and transparent development and promotion opportunities

- Ensure participation in leadership programmes has an impact on promotion and progression
- Women who participate in leadership development activities have an opportunity to apply their learning and are supported to do so
- Leadership development is available for all colleagues who lead and manage others, and aspiring leaders and managers
- Improve support for Early Career Researchers and Academics and Postgraduate Research students

Priority 5 - Increasing the representation of women in the talent pipeline (attraction, retention and progression)

- Strengthen our recruitment processes to address gender imbalances
- Strengthen our Academic Development Review (ADR) Process
- Improve HR Processes to support colleagues in achieving goals
- Address the Gender Pay Gap

Priority 6 - Creating a vibrant and inclusive research culture to support and enable staff to deliver high-quality research

- Demonstrate equality and fairness in our approach to developing a REF2029 Code of Practice
- Support a distributed and empowered network of leaders for research
- Develop our understanding of funding application and success rates and acting on what we find
- Challenge inequalities in the research ecosystem, and grow a more vibrant, fair and inclusive research culture

Alt text: Six grey boxes represent our action plan priorities, each with four bullet points below detailing specific actions. A full copy of an alternative version of this is [here](#).

Monitoring Progress

All of our gender equality actions have a 'Responsible Owner' to drive forward progress. We will monitor action progress but please note that the action plan is designed to be dynamic, allowing for adjustments and additions based on new insights and emerging priorities.

Colleague and student views will inform progress measurement and continued action development.

Further Information

Read our full Athena Swan Action Plan on [our website](#).

Finding out more

For more information about the Athena Swan charter and Northumbria's gender equality activity, colleagues are encouraged to review the [Gender Equality](#) pages on the equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) intranet site and our [Athena Swan webpage](#).

Any questions?

If you have any questions about our Athena Swan charter submission, our action plan, or our ongoing gender equality activity, please [email the EDI team](#).