

# THE ATHENA SWAN INITIATIVE: AN ASSAULT ON MALE SCIENTISTS

(J4MB thanks Dr John Barry for providing us with information on this matter.)

It would surely require someone with neither a sense of humour, nor a sense of irony, to name a social engineering programme after the Greek goddess Athena. The Wikipedia entry on Athena includes the following:

In Greek religion and mythology, Athena is the goddess of wisdom, courage, inspiration, civilization, law and justice, just warfare, mathematics, strength, strategy, the arts, crafts, and skill.

This article is about social engineering programmes carried out under the auspices of innocent-sounding initiatives such as Athena SWAN. Their principal funding comes from the state, largely funded in turn by British men who pay 72% of the income tax collected in the UK (2012/13, HMRC). British men are being disadvantaged by these programmes while British women – who pay only 28% of the income tax – are advantaged.

Professional bodies often fund and resource these programmes, advantaging their female members over their male members, although in some fields (such as engineering and mathematics) women represent only a small minority of their members. *These professional bodies are assaulting the interests of the majority of their members.* We recently publicly challenged Nick Baveystock, director general of the Institution of Civil Engineers over this very issue (link below). He didn't respond.

<http://j4mb.wordpress.com/2013/09/04/our-public-challenge-to-nick-baveystock-director-general-of-the-institution-of-civil-engineers/>

At J4MB we work tirelessly to uncover and communicate information about the state's numerous assaults on men's and boys' human rights, but even we're sometimes astonished to discover the sheer scale of some of those assaults, and for how long they've been in existence with minimal exposure (if any) in the mainstream media. We were recently made aware by a scientific researcher of the 'Athena SWAN Charter' <http://athenaswan.org.uk>, an initiative launched in 2005. From the website:

## History and principles

The Athena SWAN Charter evolved from work between the Athena Project and the Scientific Women's Academic Network (SWAN), to advance the representation of women in science, engineering and technology (SET). The following principles were agreed:

- To address gender inequalities requires commitment and action from everyone, at all levels of the organisation
- To tackle the unequal representation of women in science requires changing cultures and attitudes across the organisation
- The absence of diversity at management and policy-making levels has broad implications which the organisation will examine
- The high loss rate of women in science is an urgent concern which the organisation will address
- The system of short-term contracts has particularly negative consequences for the retention and progression of women in science, which the organisation recognises
- There are both personal and structural obstacles to women making the transition from PhD into a sustainable academic career in science, which require the active consideration of the organisation

These six principles represent the cornerstone of Athena SWAN; to join the Charter, vice-chancellors or principals must indicate that their institution will take action to address these areas.

With the support of Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) and the UKRC, the Charter was officially launched at the Institute of Physics on 22 June 2005, with the first awards conferred in 2006.

The Charter has grown consistently from its inception; now over half of all higher education institutions that are active in STEMM subject areas are members. Athena SWAN awards have also gone from strength to strength. Following the April 2013 round of awards, there are 259 award holders.

Athena SWAN received a major boost in 2011, when the Chief Medical Officer announced that the National Institute for Health Research would only expect to shortlist medical schools for biomedical research centre and unit funding if the school holds a Silver Athena SWAN award...

The Charter is managed by ECU. It is funded by ECU, the Royal Society, the Biochemical Society and the Department of Health.

We've highlighted sections in yellow to emphasise the sheer scale of the impact of the Athena SWAN initiative, its multiple sources of funding, and to point out that a major funding body is only going to fund biomedical research in medical schools which undertake social engineering initiatives *deemed acceptable by taxpayer-funded feminist ideologues*. This is nothing short of a feminist assault on academic research in general, and male scientists in particular. The idea that gender

'inequalities' could *possibly* arise from men and women freely making choices is of course anathema to the people driving these initiatives.

Note that the above refers to "SET" careers, yet a short time later we are discussing 'STEMM' careers. Some people would call this a classic example of 'mission creep', where in a short space of time the Athena SWAN Charter has expanded its remit from science, engineering and technology (SET) to science, engineering, technology, mathematics and medicine (STEMM). At this rate they will have to resort to very unwieldy acronyms and then to short phrases in order to encapsulate all of the areas that they seek to dominate.

In less than a decade, schemes like Athena SWAN have made incredible inroads in making their plans a reality. At the time of writing, a House of Commons select committee is conducting a special inquiry into 'Women in STEM careers'. They appealed for information for the inquiry and received almost unanimous support from universities for equality schemes, from men and women. Why would men support these schemes?

Although the saying about turkeys and Christmas comes to mind, the grim reality is that unless institutions adopt equality measures, they will no longer receive funding from major funding bodies, such as the NIHR. In other words, institutions have little choice but to accept these 'equality' measures.

Advocates of Athena SWAN like to suggest that increasing female representation in academia will lead to improved academic and business performance. Perhaps they should take 15 minutes to read Campaign for Merit in Britain's briefing paper on the impact of increasing female representation on corporate boards, which shows it leads to *declines* in corporate performance:

<http://c4mb.wordpress.com/improving-gender-diversity-on-boards-leads-to-a-decline-in-corporate-performance-the-evidence/>

Some people appear to believe that men and women can only be equal when they are exactly the same. Thus they believe that gender equality means that a given activity or career must be populated 50% by men and 50% by women, and anything short of this is discrimination. Thus they see discrimination in occupations in which men traditionally excel, for example, the sciences. Interesting, they don't see discrimination in *some* types of occupations in which men have traditionally predominated e.g. coalmining and bin collection. Nor do they see reasons other than sexism – such as women's personal choices or maternity leave – for women not occupying certain fields, or not having top jobs in certain fields. It goes without saying that no reference is ever made to Dr Catherine Hakim's Preference Theory (2000). Her research showed that while four in seven British men is 'work-centred', only one in seven women is.

In only a few years, feminists have made a great deal of progress towards forcing institutions to promote careers for women in fields traditionally populated by men, without anyone seeming to

have noticed. Most notably, careers in STEMM are set to become fields in which women will be promoted, and in which men will find themselves struggling. Schemes such as Athena SWAN and Project Juno, promoted by MPs, and likely to be supported by the major funding bodies in science, are very close to becoming programmes which will ensure that women have career advantages over men in ways never seen before.

Although positive discrimination is illegal, these changes are defined as ‘positive action’, thus flying under the radar of the law. Women will have special access to a variety of career-enhancing activities not available to men, such as women-only networks, women-only workshops and women-only mentoring. Men are allowed to participate in these activities as administrators or mentors, but not as attendees i.e. men won’t benefit from these schemes.

Under EU law men are entitled to some amount of paternity leave, but it is often the case that men in the UK - in contrast to Scandinavian countries - choose not to take this leave, or only take part of their entitlement.

Despite the huge implications for people and industry, ask anybody working in STEMM areas and you will find that almost nobody will be aware of these equality plans, nor what these plans really mean for men in these fields. These plans are not being carried out in secret, however they are being carried out under the guise of ‘equality’. Under this innocent guise, even of those who question what equality really means in this context, nobody appears willing to question these schemes openly. Thus these schemes can be said to be ‘hiding in plain sight’, a Trojan horse being welcomed by well-meaning people who do not realise the consequences of allowing such schemes to become enshrined in regulation in our institutions. The consequences will be with us for many years.

So what is the evidence that women are being unfairly treated when it comes to STEMM careers? A document, ‘The Chemistry PhD: the impact on women’s retention’ (RSC, 2008), has been widely circulated by supporters of this equality movement (for example, the University and College Union, UCU). This study supposedly demonstrates how women are held back from careers in chemistry, and was held up as an example of how women were held back in STEMM careers in general. I read the document and was surprised that anyone could come to any conclusion other than that the women interviewed in the study didn’t want a career in chemistry because it simply wasn’t the kind of career that held any appeal to them. Rather than supporting women’s choices, those supposedly promoting ‘equality’ for women in academia are oblivious to women’s actual choices. The focus is on promoting women in the workplace rather than respecting women’s rights to freely choose to have a proper family life.

The author of the study concluded that female PhD students more than male PhD students had “formed the impression the doctoral research process is an ordeal filled with frustration, pressure and stress, which a career in research would only prolong” (RSC 2008, p.7). The main reasons seemed to revolve around the theme that a career in chemistry was solitary, entailed long hours,

stress, a competitive (“macho”) culture and was not conducive “with other aspects of their life, particularly relationships and family” (RSC 2008, p.7). Other research has found similar opinions amongst women regarding STEMM careers (e.g. O’Driscoll and Anderson, 1994), yet these papers are presented as evidence that it is some kind of gender-based discriminated that holds these women back. Rather than supporting women’s choices, there are those in academia who appear oblivious to women’s choices. Lesley Yellowlees is the first female president of the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC). She is a supporter of the Athena SWAN Charter, and said in an interview: “I’m not an advocate of positive discrimination.... I want women to feel like they achieved what they’ve achieved on their own merit” (ACS, 2013). This raises the question of how the ‘leaky pipeline’ might be repaired without resorting to positive discrimination.

In government too there is concern that women’s life choices are holding them back in the workplace. For example, MP Lynn Featherstone says: “I think that it [having a baby] is a bit of a setback to women because it gives an opportunity – whether it’s in commerce, politics or wherever you work – to men to climb the ladder faster. There is a period of a woman’s life – where she may need to take a break or work at a different rate. I have seen many mediocre men on the boards of directors... they get there because they had no [career] break along the way. And some get to the top because of who they knew.” (*Daily Telegraph*, 2012). Again, the focus appears to be on promoting women in the workplace rather than respecting women’s rights to a family life. Although the evidence for women being disadvantaged with respect to STEMM opportunities is limited, the evidence that children are disadvantaged by being left in inadequate daycare is much clearer (Todd et al, 2001).

So what’s the difference between ‘positive discrimination’ and ‘positive action’? To the uninitiated, apparently very little, yet positive discrimination in the workplace is illegal in the UK, while ‘positive action’ is perfectly legal. It seems that the latter is deemed acceptable based on the proportionality principle: how serious the inequality is, and how important the need is. However, proportionate action depends on the perception of the employer, which in turn depends on the evidence available to the employer. My concerns are that (1) many employers will make poor decisions about employment practices based on weak evidence, such as the RSC (2008) paper cited above, or based upon “discussion with employees or their representatives”, rather than sound evidence, as suggested in the government’s Equality Action note (Jarrett 2011, p.8), and (2) this will create a barrier to men to progress in the STEMM workplace. Unlike Lynn Featherstone, I do not presume that many of the men in top jobs are ‘mediocre’, but people who have worked hard and who should not be systematically disadvantaged because of their sex.

There are cases where there is a reasonable argument for women having priority over men in filling certain jobs. This might be seen around issues of religion (e.g. where a woman prefers not to be seen by a male doctor) or sensitivity (e.g. personal care of elderly women). The same reasoning applies to corresponding jobs for men. However there is no reasonable argument for giving women preferential access to jobs or career development opportunities in cases where a

man might just as easily do the job. The reality of the job market is that it is a zero-sum game: giving advantage to one person is to disadvantage another, and does not lead to equality.

Reasonable people would surely agree that 'positive action' schemes such as Athena SWAN should be suspended until such time as it's proven that they're improving the workplace and the lives of the people in the workplace, or at least until there's been an open debate on the subject. At this point, however, there's compelling evidence from industry that 'equality' quotas don't make good business sense. If, however, the government insists on pressing ahead with equality programmes, then schemes such as Athena SWAN should be expanded to promote women into all areas where they are 'under-represented' e.g. waste disposal, active military service, coalmining etc. I doubt that's what most women will choose, any more than they're currently choosing jobs in chemistry and other areas that they don't find appealing.

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