University appoints equality champion

Dr Julie Scanlon has been appointed the University’s new Athena SWAN Manager.

Dr Scanlon, who previously lectured in contemporary literature before starting her own consultancy business, is keen to build on the University’s success, and sees the Athena SWAN Charter Mark as essential to the institution’s continued development.

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Dr Scanlon says: “The University of Sunderland was a very early adopter of Athena SWAN, but since it was introduced in 2005 it has changed significantly.

“When it was originally launched the Charter Mark focused on women working in STEMM (science, technology, engineering, medicine and mathematics) subjects, but now arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law are all included – so now the entire University will benefit from being part of this scheme.

“The focus of Athena SWAN is on gender, in the past there was the idea that gender equals women, and while that remains important now the focus also includes transgender people and gender as a whole. If there were not many men, for example, in particular professional services roles, that would be a focus of attention. The Charter mark also looks at intersections with other equality strands, such as ethnicity.”

The University of Sunderland was one of the first universities in the UK to be awarded Bronze Award status, and remains committed to the principles of Athena SWAN.

Dr Scanlon continues: “The ambition now is to retain the Bronze Award, and beyond that to create an aspirational plan to take things forward. My role is to manage that process, meet with colleagues, and help the University create a good submission, but it’s not just ticking a box, it’s also about what we can do to improve our policies and practices as a university and improve the environment for staff, students and everyone who comes into contact with the University.

“Retaining Bronze is very impressive, it has national recognition, and shows that the University has a strong commitment to taking action around gender equality issues, and that the University’s senior leadership team are behind that. It’s not easy to get a Bronze Award and it’s a testament to the work that the University is doing that we have an Athena Swan Award. We should continue to grow in this direction and aspire to Silver.

“I’m really excited to take on this role. I moved out of teaching to set up my own consultancy business because of my own belief and values around social justice and LGBT and gender equality. Working for the University of Sunderland to achieve this Charter Mark compliments what I’m trying to do in my business, and it’s an opportunity to work on a project that I really believe in.

“I look forward to meeting with staff over the coming months and I’d warmly welcome staff getting in touch with me if they have any issues to discuss related to Athena Swan.”

Launched in June 2005, the Athena SWAN Charter is a scheme which recognises and celebrates good employment practice for women working in science, technology, engineering, medicine and mathematics (STEMM) in higher education and research. In May 2015 the charter was expanded to recognise work undertaken in arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law (AHSSBL), and in professional and support roles, and for trans staff and students. The charter now recognises work undertaken to address gender equality more broadly, and not just barriers to progression that affect women.