Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) Limited

Pathway from Athena SWAN Bronze to Silver Award: Design Elements

As SAGE transitions from the Pilot phase to the national roll out, the learnings from the SAGE Pilot of Athena SWAN in Australia are being used to reform and reframe SAGE processes. Australia's Higher Education and Research (HER) sector has achieved an accelerated trajectory for change by building on the experiences of UK institutions, while using the SAGE framework tailored for the sector. The Pilot experience has greatly increased our understanding of the challenges associated with leveraging swift, significant change in complex systems such as HER Institutions, and the need to further respond to our unique context.

In refining the post-Pilot SAGE approach, it is paramount to maintain the rigour that the internationally-recognised Athena SWAN framework instils in our efforts to address Gender Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (GEDI). It is equally important that we provide an approach that is flexible to reflect Australia's unique context and that is designed to be consistent with the benchmarked Athena SWAN Charter and Award system.

Rationale for the SAGE Athena SWAN Bronze to Silver Award Pathway

Athena SWAN Awards provide a staged progression framework that consists of retrospective and prospective elements at each Award level. For example:

Bronze Award
i)   Retrospective: Where are we with regards to GEDI? And why are we there?
ii) Prospective: Where do we want to be? And how are we going to get there?

Silver Award
i)   Retrospective: Having implemented our Bronze Action Plan, where are we now? And why are we there? What progress and impact have we made?
ii) Prospective: Where do we want to be? Are we there yet? What more needs to be done to get there?

In this approach, progress is measured against the stated action plan rather than the data; impact against baseline data; and importantly, the process also recognises (a) critical evaluation and learning from actions that did not achieve the desired outcome and (b) developments beyond those described in the action plan that arose through local innovation, recognised and built on good practice in the sector or that were initiated locally due to changing circumstances, for example restructuring.

The reframed SAGE Athena SWAN Bronze to Silver Award Pathway retains these elements, while aiming to respond to the sector's feedback; in particular the need to:

- encourage focus on holistic, large-scale and priority strategic actions;
- flexibly accommodate the scope and scale of the structural, systemic, and cultural context and change needed to advance GEDI for all staff and students in Australian HER institutions;
- prioritise outcome and impact and promote innovation in practice through collaboration between institutions; and
- reduce burden and maintain the rigour of the internationally recognised Athena SWAN self-assessment and accreditation processes.

Importantly, the new SAGE framework **removes the requirement for institutions to apply for the stand-alone Departmental Awards**. Instead, each Bronze Awardee can customise their own journey to a Silver Award through both organisation-wide and local area action to drive transformational change.

New Bronze to Silver Pathway

The new SAGE Athena SWAN Bronze to Silver Award is a Two-Part Process (A & B).

NEW: SAGE Athena SWAN Bronze to Silver Award		
PART A	i.	Institutions shape their Bronze Action Plans into 5 Key Priority Areas.
	ii.	A Progress and Impact Report on each of the 5 Key Priority Areas is submitted for assessment.
	iii.	New SAGE Cygnet Awards are conferred as each Progress and Impact Report is certified by SAGE.
	On completion of PART A go to PART B	
PART B		SAGE Athena SWAN Silver Award Application is submitted

The Details

Part Ai: Institutions shape their Action Plans into 5 Key Priority Areas
Current Bronze Award holders will review their Bronze Award Action Plan and identify their five (5) Key Priority Areas for action[1]. These Key Priority Areas should include:

(1) Institution-wide barriers to GEDI (AT LEAST ONE)

Actions in these Key Priority Areas aim to drive holistic structural, systemic, and/or cultural change across the whole institution (i.e. horizontal actions). Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Recruitment
- Pathways to advancement (including promotion)
- Flexibility in work practices
- Supporting specific underrepresented groups
- Bullying, harassment, and discrimination prevention

AND

(2) Institutional sub-units with specific challenges to GEDI (AT LEAST ONE)

Actions in these Key Priority Areas aim to drive local change (i.e. vertical actions).

Institutional sub-units may be considered as reflecting the 'Departments' of the UK Athena SWAN system but may also be defined differently based on the institution's structure and needs. Institutions should prioritise those sub-units in which their data identify that specific challenges to GEDI exist.

To choose a sub-unit, it is suggested that institutions first consider how each of their sub-units scores on key GEDI metrics (as assessed for the Bronze Award application). Those sub-units that have the lowest overall scores on key GEDI metrics are presumably in greatest need of targeted action, and thus should be identified as Key Priority Areas. This process is summarised in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Summary of selection process for sub-units

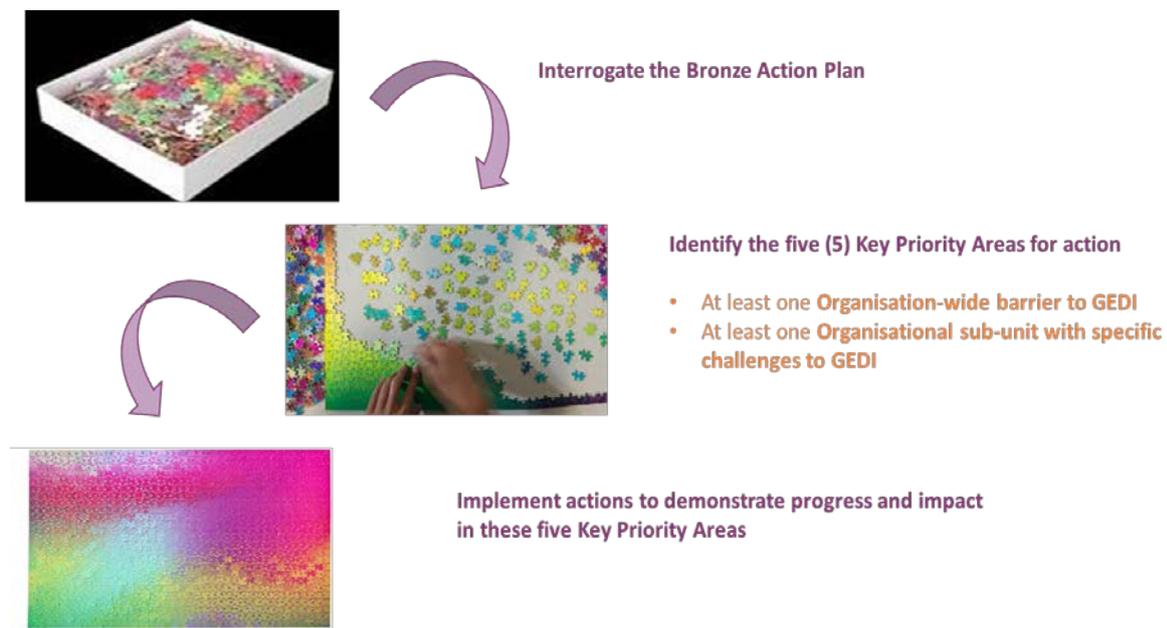| Work out what your institution's sub-units are | → | Compare the performance of sub-units in GEDI | → | Select weakest performing sub-unit(s) as Key Priority Areas | → | Design SMART actions to improve the sub-unit's GEDI scores or performance |

---

[1] Some SAGE institutions have indeed identified key priority areas as part of their Bronze application.

Additionally, institutions should include at least one 'Enabling Factor' within one or more Key Priority Area. Enabling factors do not, in themselves, lead to progress and impact, but rather support the demonstration of progress and impact in a Key Priority Area. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Improving data collection and monitoring systems
- Improving communication on GEDI
- Engaging middle managers
- Taking an intersectional approach

Overall, this new SAGE approach (illustrated in Figure 2) supports institutions to drive the necessary holistic structural, systemic, and cultural change required to address barriers to GEDI in the institution, as well as to undertake the 'deep dive' work needed to effect change in specific local areas. Importantly, this design allows institutions the freedom to set GEDI action timeframes consistent with their overarching strategic priorities.

Figure 2. The "Key Priority Areas" approach for the demonstration of progress and impact

Interrogate the Bronze Action Plan

Identify the five (5) Key Priority Areas for action

- At least one **Organisation-wide barrier** to GEDI
- At least one **Organisational sub-unit with specific challenges** to GEDI

Implement actions to demonstrate progress and impact in these five Key Priority Areas

PART A ii: A Progress and Impact Report on each Key Priority Area is submitted for assessment

The institution will submit a Progress and Impact Report for each Key Priority Area once sufficient evidence of this can be demonstrated. These Reports may be submitted individually or together, at any time throughout the Bronze Award validity period. A total of five Progress and Impact Reports (one per Key Priority Area) will be submitted over the Bronze Award validity period. SAGE Guidance for Progress and Impact Reports will be available.

PART A iii: New SAGE Cygnet Awards are conferred as each Progress and Impact Report is certified by SAGE

SAGE will recognise demonstrated progress and impact in each of the five key Priority Areas (assessed by independent expert reviewers) with a new SAGE Cygnet Award.

Five SAGE Cygnet Awards are required before an institution may submit its SAGE Athena SWAN Silver Award Application.

ONCE PART A IS COMPLETED PART B IS UNDERTAKEN.

PART B: SAGE Athena SWAN Silver Award Application is submitted

The application for an Athena SWAN Silver Award is summarised in Table 1 Below.

The SAGE Cygnet Awards collectively will constitute the demonstration of progress and impact required for an Athena SWAN Silver Award. These **data will NOT need to be duplicated** in a Silver Award Application, but rather the certified Progress and Impact Reports are available as references; a brief narrative overview highlighting a summary and any further impact achieved in the 5 Key Priority Areas can be included in the application as part of the assessment (see table 1 below).

The Silver Award Application will require the institution to **reassess its current state** in terms of GEDI (including providing data as specified via the SAGE data framework) and from its Cygnet outcomes (in summary, as appropriate); **identify its next 5 Key Priority Areas**; and **propose a new SMART Action Plan** to address these over the Silver Award validity period. A new Silver Award Application Form and Handbook detailing these requirements will be issued by SAGE.

Table 1. Overview of the reporting requirements for a SAGE Athena SWAN Silver Award

	Information submitted for a Silver Athena SWAN Award
Retrospective element #1 Evidence of progress and impact in the 5 Key Priority Areas identified in Bronze Award Action Plan	• 5 Cygnet awards *Note: The full 5x Progress and Impact Report certified as SAGE Cygnet Award level do not have to be resubmitted (these are already held by SAGE as reference material for the Award Application).*
Retrospective element #2	• Assessment of current state of GEDI - Includes highlight/ overarching narrative of the Progress and Impact relative to current state of GEDI (You can reference Cygnet's in this part – ie. no need to re-write).
Prospective element Setting of GEDI priorities and goals for the future	• Identify new 5 Key Priority Areas[2] going forward • Develop a SMART Action Plan to cover the 5 Key Priority Areas identified.

---

[2] These may be the same as those identified in the Bronze Award Action Plan if these remain the key barriers to GEDI in the institution.

Benefits

The benefits of this new SAGE design for the Australian HER sector are outlined in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Benefits of the reframed SAGE Bronze to Silver pathway

Flexible	• Institutions have freedom to define and focus on their own Key Priority Areas for action. • Institutions can submit Progress and Impact Reports at any time during the Bronze Award validity period.
Reduced burden	• Progress and Impact Reports staggered across the 5 years with action timelines aligned to institutional strategic prioirties. • No longer require Departmental Bronze applications for 50% of an institution's Departments. • Cygnet process, certification and SAGE support covered by institutional subscription fees.
Maintains rigour	• Data-driven self-assessment against defined institutional endpoints and independent peer review are still core to accreditation.
Institutional AND local action	• SAGE Cygnet Awards ensure that organisation-wide AND targeted local area change is made and, importantly recognised nationally.
Get to Silver Award sooner	• Progress and impact are assessed as you go (via SAGE Cygnet Awards) • Silver Award Applications focus on assessing the current state of GEDI and planning your next steps.