

Athena SWAN and the research funding links: case study — National Institute for Health Research (UK)

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Declaration of interests



- Senior Research Fellow and Member of Athena Swan Self-Assessment Team, Radcliffe Department of Medicine, University of Oxford
- Member, Athena Swan Governance Committee, Advance HE
- Member, Advisory Group on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Race Equality Public Action Group, National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)
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**1. National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)
Athena SWAN-linked funding incentives**

2. Increased adoption and spread of Athena SWAN

**3. Impact of Athena SWAN-linked funding
incentives**

**4. Key message: Linkage of gender equality plans
to funding provides a “reasonable attack”**

National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Biomedical Research Centres (BRCs)



- NIHR is the UK's largest funder of health research, with the budget of approximately £1.3bn per annum
- NIHR BRCs are collaborations between world-leading universities and National Health Service organisations that bring together academics and clinicians to translate lab-based scientific breakthroughs into potential new treatments, diagnostics and medical technologies.
- NIHR BRCs are funded through open competition and receive approximately £816m of research funding over five years



NIHR Athena SWAN-linked funding incentives announced in 2011



“One of the things the panel and I were very concerned about going forward, is how both the academic and NHS partners are supporting women in clinical academia so that they can develop into and be appointed to senior leadership positions.

I was embarrassed on behalf of our nation to hear some of the responses.

When we next run the competition for NIHR BRCs... we do not expect to short-list any NHS/University partnership where the academic partner has not achieved at least the **Silver Award of the Athena SWAN Charter for Women in Science.**”

NIHR BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH CENTRES

FULL APPLICATION GUIDANCE

Athena SWAN

The Department of Health has stated its requirement for the achievement of at least the Silver Award of the Athena SWAN Charter for Women in Science by the academic partner² (for example the Medical School/Faculty of Medicine) from the NHS/University partnership.

Where a NHS/University partnership proposes to subcontract an entire Research Theme or Cross-cutting Theme to a third party it will need to confirm the academic partner with which each subcontracted Theme Lead is associated (i.e. the academic partner where the Theme Lead has a substantive contract of employment) has achieved at least the Silver Award.

In addition, successfully designated and funded academic partners of the NIHR BRC will be expected to maintain at least the Silver Award of the Athena SWAN Charter for Women in Science for the duration of the award.

² An 'academic partner' might be, for example, a Faculty, College, School, Department, Division or Institute.

³ NHS Support costs –see <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-attributing-the-costs-of-health-and-social-care-research>

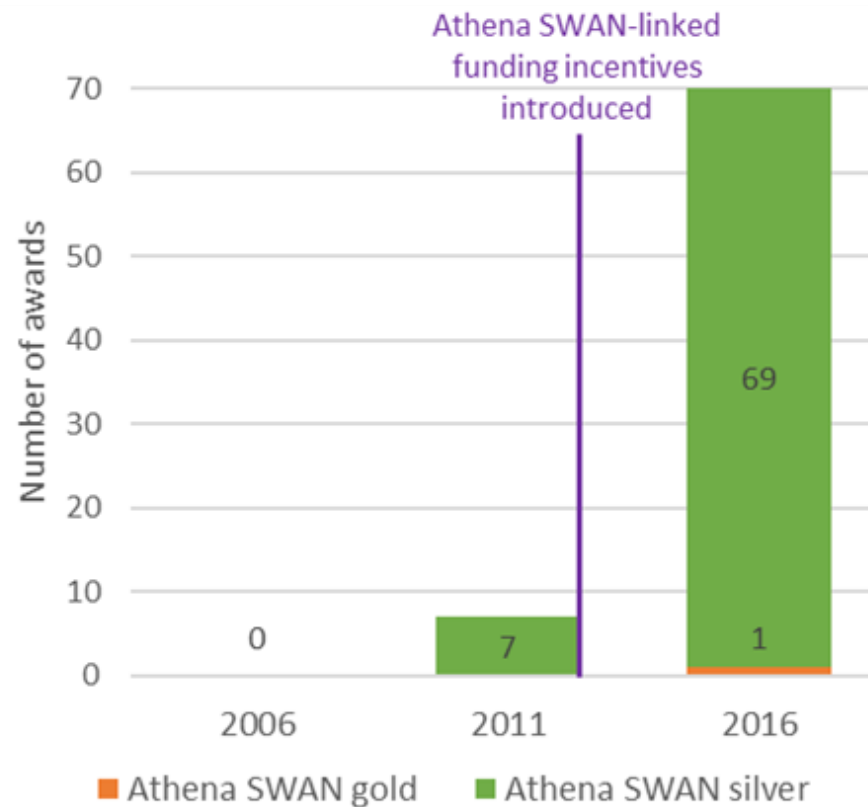
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Increased uptake of Athena SWAN in NIHR Biomedical Research Centres



NIHR's policy intervention provided sufficient incentives for universities to develop and implement gender equality action plans, leading to a tenfold increase in the number of medicine-related Athena SWAN silver or gold awards in 16 universities associated with the BRCs.

Ovseiko et al. Effect of Athena SWAN funding incentives on women's research leadership. *BMJ* 2020;371:m3975

<http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/bmj.m3975?ijkey=puv8BSO/1KmDc&keytype=ref&siteid=bmjjournals>

Global spread and adoption of Athena SWAN



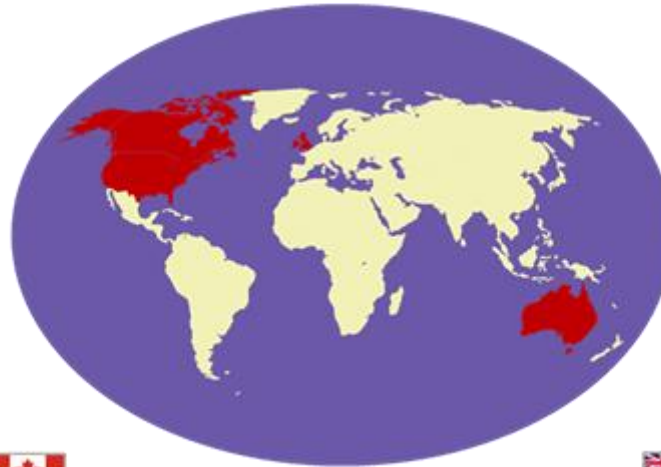
Athena SWAN UK

- launched in 2005 by Equality Challenge Unit
- funding incentives from National Institute for Health Research
- 142 institutions participate



Athena SWAN Ireland

- launched in 2015 by Higher Education Authority
- funding incentives from Science Foundation Ireland, Irish Research Council, and Health Research Board
- 26 institutions participate



SEA Change: STEM Equity Achievement

- launched in 2018 by American Association for the Advancement of Science
- 12 institutions participate



Dimensions

- launched in 2019 by Tri-Agency (Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council)
- 17 institutions in the pilot



SAGE: Science in Australia Gender Equity

- launched in 2015 by Australian Academy of Science and Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering
- 45 institutions participate

Irish Funding Bodies to Require Athena SWAN Gender Equality Accreditation for Higher Education Institutions to be Eligible for Research Funding

Science Foundation Ireland, the Irish Research Council and the Health Research Board will Require Higher Education Institutions to Have Athena SWAN Gender Equality Accreditation in Order to be Eligible for Research Funding.

The [Higher Education Authority \(HEA\)](#) today welcomed the move by three of Ireland's research funding agencies to make gender equality accreditation in higher education institutions a condition of funding by the end of 2019. In

Open Access Article

Multi-Level State Interventions and Gender Equality in Higher Education Institutions: The Irish Case

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Abstract

Much of the work on gender equality in higher educational institutions (HEIs) has concentrated on the organizational level. The original contribution of this article lies in its focus on state policy developments and interventions. We focus on Ireland as a specific national context, highlighting multi-level state interventions and looking at their impact on HEIs. Using secondary data analysis (including documentary analysis) and focusing particularly on the period since 2014, state initiatives to tackle the problem of gender inequality from various angles are outlined. They include the introduction of Athena SWAN; the Expert Group Review; the Gender Equality Taskforce; the Senior Academic Leadership Initiative; research funding agency initiatives and those around sexual harassment. In evaluating their impact, we look at the gender pay gap, the gender profile of the professoriate and senior management as well as other indicators of cultural change in HEIs. The article concludes that the best possibility of leveraging change arises when it is driven at the state (macro); the HEI (meso) and the situational (micro) level simultaneously, by gender competent leaders willing to tackle the historically male dominated, masculinist criteria, procedures, processes and micropolitical practices that are “normalized” in HEIs. [View Full-Text](#)

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NIHR funding incentives were key for mass adoption of Athena SWAN in Oxford



“To me, when it comes down to it, sure it would be great if everything happened because everyone just thought it was wonderful. But if it’s not going to happen that way and it’s something that’s going to benefit people then if it happens through a political instrument, great.” (WIS interview ID01, F)

“It is my view that much of the enthusiasm for achieving Athena SWAN silver status at Oxford University is economic (i.e. concern about not being able to get NIHR grants) rather than about the loss of opportunity for women in academic careers, and that the changes may not "stick" if the financial incentive is removed.” (CCS survey ID14, M)

NIHR funding incentives were key for the development of departmental gender equality plans benefiting all genders and staff categories



34 actions per action plan on average

88% of actions focus on all genders

48% of actions focus on all staff and students

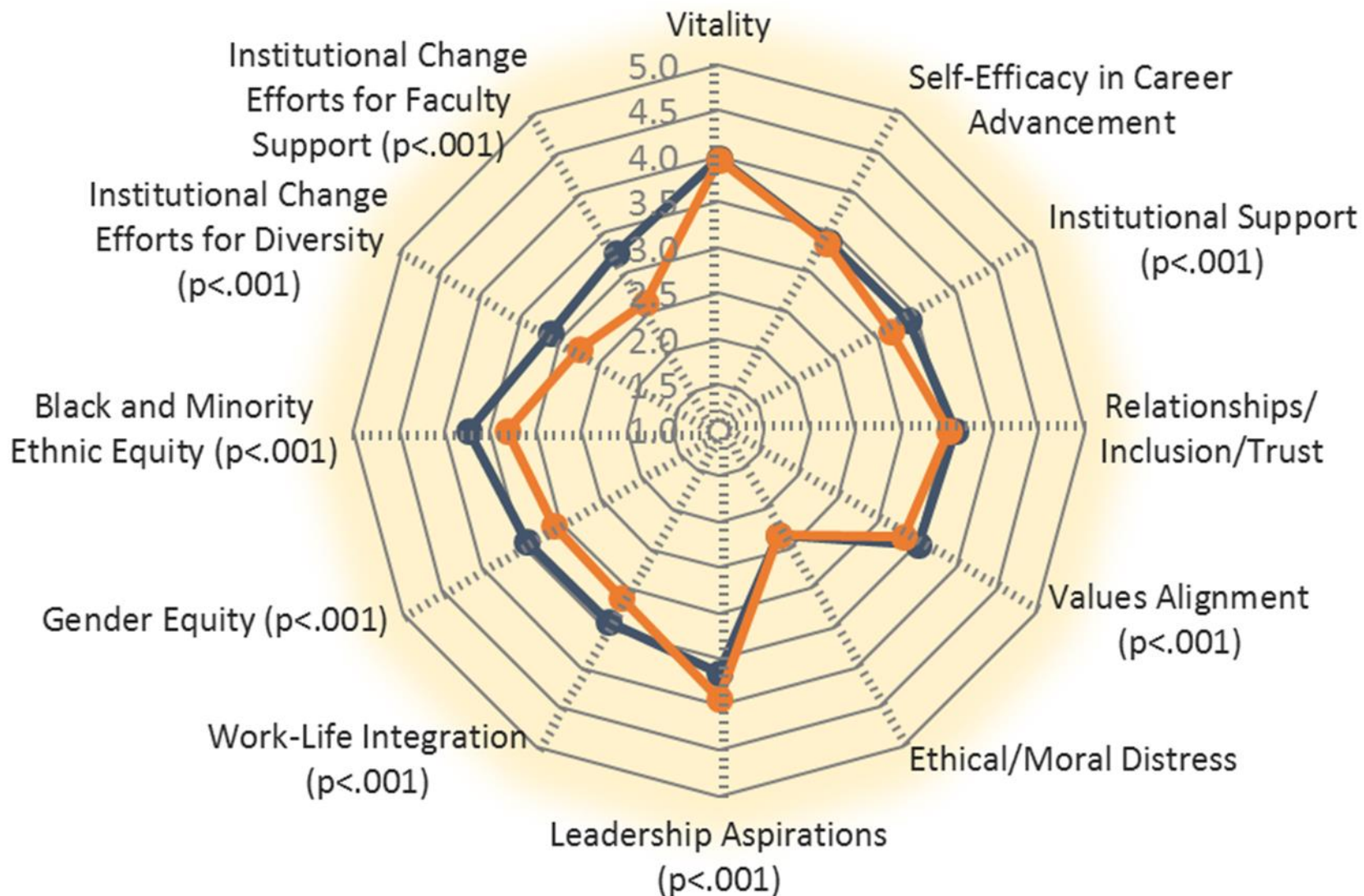
Single most comprehensive and systemic gender equality scheme in Europe



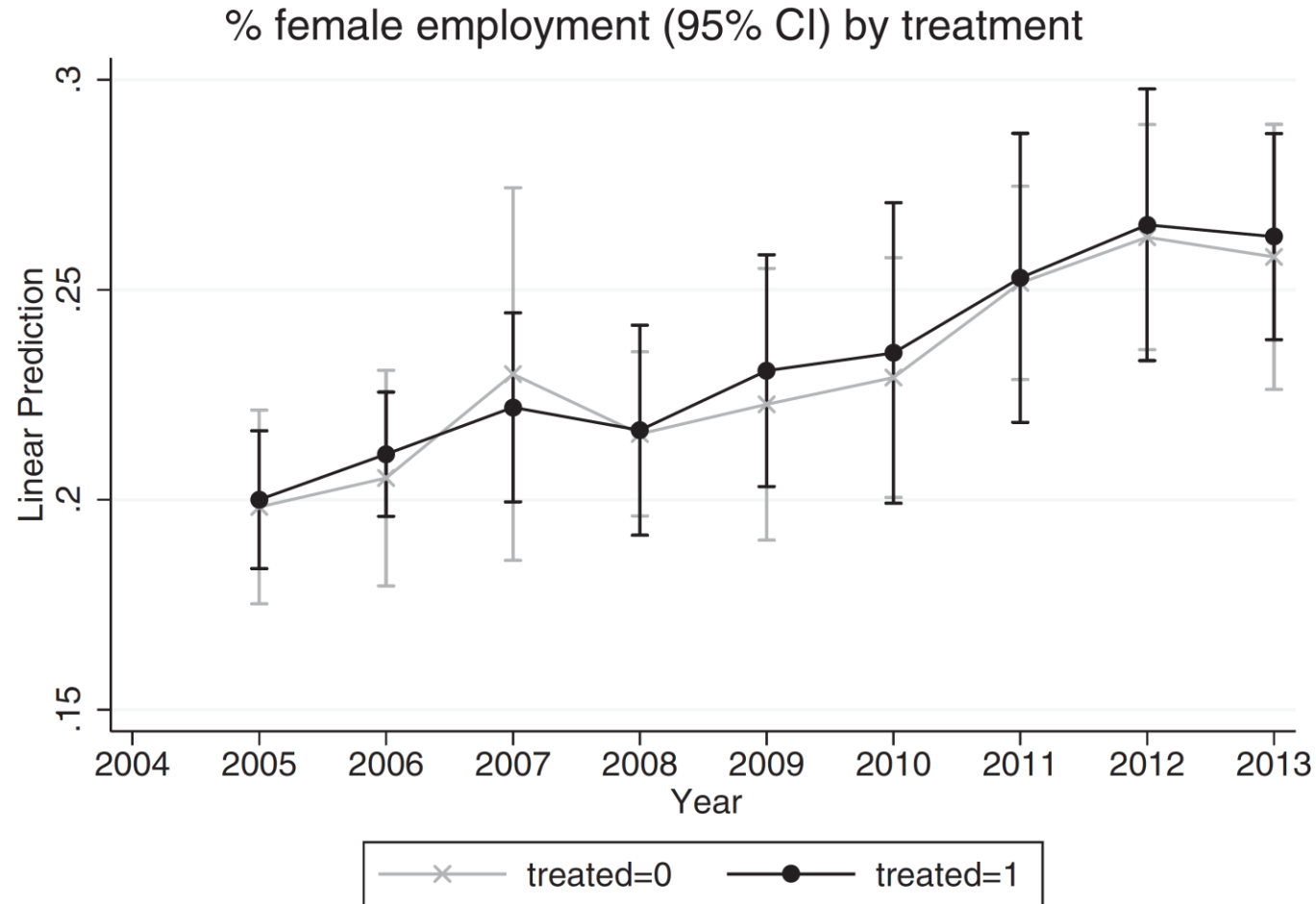
	Gender equality interventions distinctive to Athena SWAN	Gender equality interventions distinctive to EFFORTI
Organisational, structural and cultural actions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Institutionalised self-assessment teams 2. Revising timing of meetings and events 3. Workload allocation model 4. Mandatory training on unconscious bias and bullying and harassment 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Institution of quotas 2. Introduction of chairs and positions reserved for women 3. Special funding for women researchers
Career development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Career development interventions targeting professional and support staff 2. Career development interventions targeting students 1. Addressing a full continuum of key career transition points 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Support of mobility, including spouse relocation schemes
Assessment and monitoring	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Intersectional approaches to data collection and analysis 	
Integration of the gender dimension in research and education		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integration of the gender dimension and impact in research 2. Integrating the gender dimension in tertiary education 3. Revision of teaching curricula and texts 4. Introduction of single-sex degree and specialisation courses 5. Provision of gender and women's studies or modules

Culture change associated with implementation of Athena SWAN

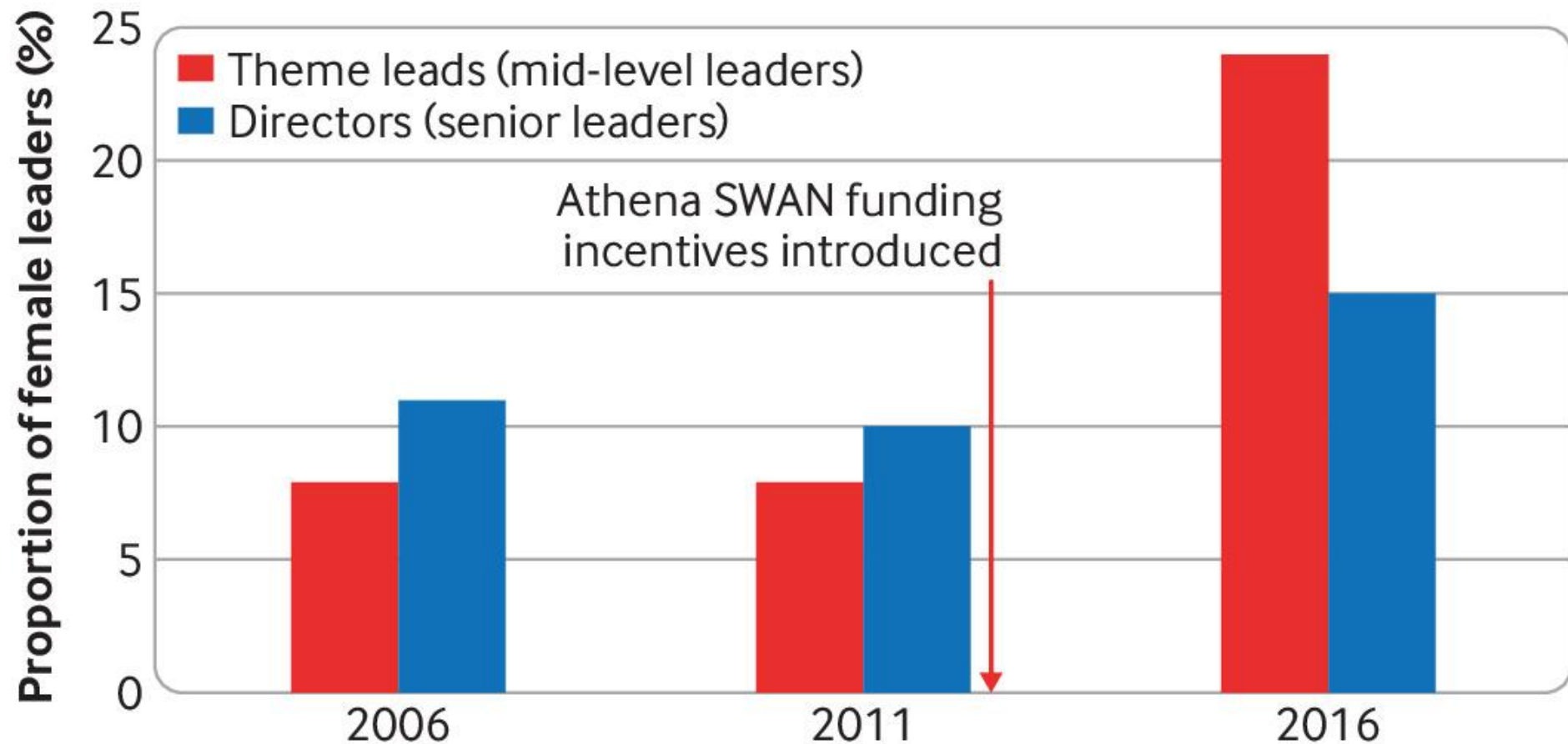
—●— Medical Sciences (with Athena SWAN) —●— Social Sciences (without Athena SWAN)



No significant changes in gender balance two years after the introduction of the Athena SWAN funding incentives



Significant changes in gender balance five years after the introduction of the Athena SWAN funding incentives



Percentages of female research leaders in NIHR Biomedical Research Centres

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Summary of key findings



- NIHR Athena SWAN-linked funding incentives provided a political commitment and resources (from grant overheads) to implement gender equality action plans at departmental level
- In the UK, departmental gender equality action plans are more impactful because departmental policies and practices influence recruitment, promotion, and organisational culture more than institutional policies and practices
- The quality of the implemented gender equality action plans is ensured through completion and peer-review
- Successful implementation of gender equality action plans requires time and resources

Linkage of gender equality plans to funding provides a “reasonable attack”

If you do not work on an important problem, it's unlikely you'll do important work. It's perfectly obvious...

The three outstanding problems in physics... were never worked on while I was at Bell Labs... (1) time travel, (2) teleportation, and (3) antigravity. They are not important problems because we do not have an attack.

It's not only the consequence that makes a problem important, it is that you have a reasonable attack.

Richard Hamming

Oscar Wilde: “We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars”

A panoramic view of Oxford, England, featuring the spire of Christ Church Cathedral on the left and the dome of St. Martin-in-the-Fields on the right. The scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue rectangle containing text. In the background, a pattern of yellow stars on a blue field, reminiscent of the European Union flag, is visible.

Thank you

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