



## **Athena SWAN Research Institute pilot case study: Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute**

We were delighted to have the opportunity to take part in the Athena SWAN pilot for Research Institutes. The Wellcome Trust Sanger Institute was keen to explore the scheme, which is clearly a paradigm for reviewing performance and enacting improvement. The status of Athena SWAN helped us to gain senior buy-in. Our participation has helped our existing Sex in Science team to further raise awareness of the issues and challenges facing women in science and to push reforms to recruitment and benefits.

Our application was greatly helped by attending the Athena SWAN workshops, run by the Equality Challenge Unit, which clarified the process and enabled networking with others who were making applications.

We found the process of baselining data and collecting information from diverse areas of the Institute a hugely beneficial exercise in itself and highlighted a number of areas for improvement. The application was compiled by the Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Team and the HR team who made an in-depth assessment of where the Institute stood at the time and made appropriate plans in order to improve; we felt that our application illustrated this so we were genuinely surprised that the original review indicated we did not reach the standards required to reach Bronze Award.

The feedback and guidance we received from the Assessment Panel highlighted that we had not clearly demonstrated senior buy-in for the scheme. We also needed to clarify the differences in organisational and career structures at the Institute compared to the more typical university structures. To address the concerns raised we recruited the Institute's Director and Head of Computational Genomics to the Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Team, both of whom were already staunch supporters of our Sex in Science programme and the Athena SWAN application, and had been speakers at our on-campus events on the topic of women in science. We also clearly delineated the lines of reporting to senior management. Resubmitting our application meant a significant reworking of our original application document, highlighting more clearly the activities and initiatives we had already put in place. We decided to resubmit the application in the October following the initial judgement in September in order to maintain momentum and to be able to move forward as soon as possible.

We are delighted by the news of the award. It clearly supports the efforts we are making both at the Sanger Institute and with our neighbours at the EMBL-European Bioinformatics Institute. It gives focus and gravitas to the rest of the work we are doing on campus to improve the representation and progression of women and it has been received extremely well.

We hope our experience will help to improve the approach taken with research institutes by the Athena SWAN Assessment Panels, making the procedure more appropriate to work practices in those institutes. Overall the experience of Athena SWAN so far has been a positive one and it has been enjoyable to work as a diverse team towards a common goal. We can take this boost and use it to spur all our staff on to supporting actions to achieve a Silver Award and more importantly, we can use this to change behaviours.