

## **Australian Women in Astronomy Workshop 2012 Report**

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Maintaining the full participation of women in science careers is a productivity issue – without achieving this we are not maximising our potential as a nation or as a scientific community. The second Astronomical Society of Australia (ASA) Women in Astronomy workshop was held on 10-11 October 2012 at Swinburne University. More than 100 people attended the meeting, including over 30 people participating online. The talks and audio recordings are available at <http://asawomeninastronomy.org/meetings/wia2012/>.

The workshop focused on how unconscious biases in our professional and personal lives can affect the participation of women in the workplace. Presentations and workshop sessions covered some of the obstacles that women face during their astronomy careers, and discussed strategies that both individuals and institutions can use to overcome them. We summarise here the outcomes from this workshop according to whether they are applicable to individuals or institutions.

### **Institutions**

- Openly positive, supportive leadership trickles down to create positive, productive environments for all staff. This enlightened pragmatism works, but it is also important to think through unintended consequences of changes to staff policies.
- General staff meetings can easily be held within school hours, thereby capturing the majority of staff.
- Video conferencing is increasingly important and may offer a way to mitigate the heavy travel loads of researchers, which adversely affects those with carer responsibilities.
- Actively nominating staff for opportunities will grow their career and their confidence as well as an institution's profile.
- Yearly appraisals should involve mentoring.
- When hiring staff it is important for the selection panel to discuss the issues of unconscious bias at the start of the process, and review the process at the end, before decisions are made on candidates.
- In assessing current or potential staff, measure their achievements relative to opportunity. Someone working part time should be assessed differently to someone working full time.
- To champion and implement change at your institute: amass a broad range of sponsors who will support those changes; present a "win-win" case; be active and persistent.
- A collection of best current family-friendly practices are listed on the Chapter's website at <http://asawomeninastronomy.org/action/familyfriendly/>.

### **Individuals**

- It is important to ASK – and to nominate yourself!
- Mentoring is crucial, as is getting to know people: the more people you know the more chance you will have of finding a suitable mentor.
- From people's individual stories we saw that chance is important in everyone's lives and sometimes it is important to take risks.

- Determination and flexibility will keep you employed in astronomy research, but if it is not working for you there are many other interesting, fulfilling career paths out there.
- There is no need to put personal details like your date-of-birth, gender, nationality, or marital status etc. on your CV – these are irrelevant to the selection process.
- Try to renegotiate family responsibilities in your home life to assist you in your professional life.
- While part-time work can be necessary, it is still important to be thoughtful about the impacts of working fewer hours while currently achievements are not always measured relative to opportunity.
- Dr Krystal Evans discussed how contacting your local politician can make a difference.
- We all have internal unconscious biases – be aware of yours.
- Body language can help you ‘fake it til you make it’.

Meeting attendees suggested that the ASA Council look at a system like the Athena Swan<sup>1</sup> awards in the UK, giving recognition to institutions that make a difference to women’s careers in STEM fields.

It was recommended that the ASA Council add support to the Australian Academy of Science and Science & Technology Australia in broadening pilot scheme that enabled Dr Krystal Evans from Walter & Eliza Hall Institute to intern with a political office.

It was also recommended that the ASA Council should consider how, as a community, we can measure achievements relative to opportunity. This would allow us all to think in a similar way when ranking ARC proposals, and hiring and promoting people.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.athenaswan.org.uk/content/awards>