



**S A G E**

SCIENCE IN AUSTRALIA  
GENDER EQUITY

**SCIENCE IN AUSTRALIA GENDER EQUITY LIMITED**  
**SUBMISSION**

**INDEPENDENT REVIEW INTO COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY  
WORKPLACES**

30 July 2021

## About SAGE Limited

Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) Limited is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee founded by the Australian Academy of Science and the Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering. It was incorporated in November 2019, following the success of the SAGE Pilot of Athena Swan (2015 – 2019).

The purpose of SAGE Ltd is:

- accredit and grant awards to higher education and research institutions for gender equity, diversity and inclusion programs including specifically accrediting and granting awards under the Athena Swan Charter;
- raise awareness of, and build capacity to improve, gender equity, diversity and inclusion in the Australian higher education and research sector and more broadly within the community; and
- collaborate with like-minded organisations to promote and support initiatives aimed at addressing the systemic barriers to the attraction, retention and progression of women, trans and gender diverse people in tertiary education and research.

## Relevance of the SAGE Limited Experience to the Review

SAGE Limited offers the collective learnings and experience gained from implementing its pilot of Athena Swan that saw 50% of Australia's higher education and research organisations (43 organisations<sup>1</sup>) achieve bronze (foundation level) accreditation for gender equity, diversity and inclusion. Following SAGE accreditation, Athena Swan Bronze Awardee institutions are now progressing implementation of institutional action plans to remove barriers to gender equity, diversity and inclusion within their respective institutions and across the sector. The prevention of and response to sexual harassment and bullying are key elements of these action plans.

In addition, SAGE is collaborating with SAGE accredited institutions and key stakeholders, including Australia's Sex Discrimination Commissioner, to [support implementation of key recommendations from the Commissioner's seminal report \*Respect@Work report \(2020\)\*](#) across the higher education and research sector.

## Inequities and sexual harassment in the workplace

The [National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces](#), led by Australia's Sex Discrimination Commissioner, found that sexual harassment is still rife in Australian workplaces, and the higher education and research sector is no exception.

Similar findings were documented in national and international reports, including specifically in higher education and research; examples include the [Women in STEM Decadal Plan](#) and the [Sexual Harassment of Women. Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine](#)<sup>2</sup>.

These reports identify the direct correlation between gender inequities and harassing behaviours in the workplace that adversely impact women's safety, security, wellbeing and consequently their careers.

They also go a step further, pinpointing solutions that work well in preventing and eliminating harassment. For example, the [Respect@Work report \(2020\)](#) highlighted that performance incentives,

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<sup>1</sup> Comprising 32 universities, one research institution, five publicly funded research agencies and six medical research institutions (<https://www.sciencegenderequity.org.au/athena-swan-bronze-awardees/>).

<sup>2</sup> Sexual Harassment of Women. Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2018. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, Medicine. <https://www.nationalacademies.org/our-work/sexual-harassment-in-academia>.

such as the SAGE Ltd accreditation program (including Athena Swan Awards), can help create a respectful workplace culture that discourages sexual harassment.

### **SAGE Accreditation: An adaptable approach for Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces**

The SAGE and Athena Swan approach is an evidence-led, data-driven and targeted-solutions approach that has proved effective in reversing gender inequities, and in turn achieving sustained cultural change at a national scale<sup>3</sup>; it is evidently a model framework that can be adapted to different settings and importantly localised to institutions of diverse types, structures and complexities.

Its effectiveness lies in its simple data-driven, systematic and system-wide examination of an institution facilitated by leadership and mobilised by an engaged and consultative approach. This approach allows an institution to identify the key barriers to gender equity and diversity, facilitates its understanding of why such barriers exist and the underlying issues that cause inequities and poor culture, and importantly helps it reverse entrenched inequities across its systems, structures and culture through collective action.

SAGE [experience](#) highlights three integral domains to driving transformative and sustainable change, at system level and organisational culture<sup>4</sup>:

- Recognition and acknowledgement that an institution’s systems, structures and culture pose serious barriers to gender equity, diversity and inclusion; as such, data and evidence must drive a process of honest and reflective examination to identify solutions aimed at fixing systems – not fixing women, minority genders and underrepresented groups;
    - *In this respect, **effective solutions** for improving gender equity, diversity and inclusion, and therefore preventing and eliminating sexual harassment in the workplace, need to be proactive, evidence-informed (and data-driven), systemic, and tailored to the specific institutional context – in this case, parliamentary workplaces.*
  - Commitment to action, systematically and at all levels, to drive change and transform an institution into an equitable, diverse, safe and inclusive workplace; action must be underpinned by active leadership, accountability and engagement;
    - *For this, **leadership and cohesion**, through collective effort across the sector (in the context of this Independent Review, across political parties and Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces), are critical to delivering impactful action and sustainable transformative change.*
- and,
- Investment in systemic measurement and transparent reporting on performance, complemented by accountability measures to sustain improvement.
    - To this end, ***evaluating success, measuring outcomes and impact and recognising performance*** are key to continue the drive for change.

<sup>3</sup> Women in STEM Decadal Plan (2019). Australian Academy of Science and Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering. <https://www.science.org.au/files/userfiles/support/reports-and-plans/2019/gender-diversity-stem/women-in-stem-decadal-plan-final.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Wafa El-Adhami, 2021. “SAGE Ltd: Continuing the journey to transform gender equity, diversity & inclusion in Australia’s Higher Education and Research Sector.” *Law in Context*, accepted for publication.

## Conclusion

Like Australia's pioneering adaptation of Athena Swan outside the UK and Ireland, this *Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces* offers a unique opportunity to co-design a SAGE-informed framework for Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces. The SAGE Cygnet Awards for progress and impact offer one such example.

A complementary approach that may be worth considering could be to devise a 'ten-year plan for Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces' that brings together the outcomes of completed and in-progress inquiries of relevance to this *Independent Review* and that commits to outcomes for change, akin to the [Women in STEM decadal Plan](#) and its [Champions](#).

The proposed approach could serve as a model framework that States and Territories, as well as local governments, may wish to consider adopting.

SAGE welcomes the opportunity to share its experiences with the *Independent Review* to assist in this respect.

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