

REFLECTING ON CATALYSING GENDER EQUITY ONE YEAR ON



On 30 March 2021, 73 representatives gathered in an online forum hosted by the Australian Academy of Science to reflect on the [Catalysing Gender Equity 2020](#) (CGE) conference held in February 2020 and the two years since the launch of the [Women in STEM Decadal Plan](#) (the plan).

Event host, Anna-Maria Arabia, Chief Executive of the Academy, gave space for participants to:

- hear reflections from leaders in STEM on current equity issues
- reflect on why gender equity is important to their organisation, and the challenges of the past 12 months and ahead
- connect and talk about new ways of tackling barriers to progress
- build the network of support for the plan.

The emerging network of Women in STEM Decadal Plan Champion organisations were invited and encouraged to 'bring a friend', that is, a STEM organisation that they think would benefit from participating. Representatives of the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources (DISER) and Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) also attended.

Participants heard from leaders, including a keynote address by Professor Lisa Harvey-Smith, Women in STEM Ambassador, and a panel of current and emerging STEM leadership, convened by Dr Wafa El-Adhami, Chief Executive, SAGE.

The gathering then broke into small groups to consider gender equity – how the experience of 2020 will shape approaches in 2021, including identifying small-scale/big-impact ideas and ways the group could connect and collaborate going forward.

This report outlines what was captured in the discussions and provides an action agenda for next steps.

The Academy acknowledges the commitment to gender equity made by all champions and organisations in attendance.

Who are the Women in STEM Decadal Plan Champions?

In August 2019, the Australian Academy of Science provided an opportunity for STEM organisations to share their commitment to the Women in STEM Decadal Plan and align their gender equity journey with the plan by publishing a publicly available response.

The Academy continues to collate champions' responses – providing a source of ideas and inspiration for everyone who would like to support girls and women in STEM.

Today, 37 organisations have signed up and all organisations are welcome to join – if you would like to learn more, visit www.stemwomen.org.au/champions.



REFLECTIONS FROM LEADERS

Professor Lisa Harvey-Smith, Women in STEM Ambassador



A keynote address was delivered by **Women in STEM Ambassador, Professor Lisa Harvey-Smith** that focused on key actions by her Office and the Australian Government to address the six opportunity areas of the Plan, including through the [Advancing Women in STEM strategy](#) and the [2020 Action Plan](#).

Lisa reflected on what is now needed to advance the plan:

- Strong, vocal leadership on equity must be seen as business as usual by industry and organisational leaders. Progress towards the creation of inclusive and respectful workplaces should cut across all sectors, levels and places of employment.
- Gender auditing in organisations must be seen as a norm, with transparent reporting and action plans to address any gender pay or leadership imbalances.
- Sexual harassment and bullying must be met by clear, consistent and transparent processes in all organisations across the STEM sector. Staff should be consulted on policies and expectations made clear.
- Workplace leaders must support men to enjoy their family responsibilities and actively help women when they are at risk of attrition due to career interruptions.

“

The decadal plan is a living document. Two years on, it is highly relevant and contains so much to stimulate our thought, planning and action.

*Professor Lisa Harvey-Smith,
Women in STEM Ambassador.*

Progressing the decadal plan

Lisa outlined some of the ways the plan is being progressed, including:

- progressing **leadership and cohesion** through measures such as the rollout of the [SAGE](#) pilot and adopting learnings from proven equity measures, such as those developed by the Champions of Change Coalition, Chief Executive Women and the 30% Club
- building a culture of **evaluation**, including a [national evaluation guide](#) for programs that aim to support the participation of women and girls in STEM, with the next step to be a digital tool made available to organisations, and the development of the [STEM Equity Monitor](#) for annual reporting
- addressing poor **workplace culture** through the establishment of SAGE as a powerful instrument to reduce harmful cultures and practices in STEM organisations, and the delivery of the Australian Human Rights Commission's [Respect@Work](#) report recommendations to address sexual harassment. Lisa's team is also conducting a peer-reviewed trial of anonymised ranking in the assessment of research proposals, and the ARC and NHMRC are committed to increasing gender equity in research funding outcomes
- promoting the **visibility** of women in STEM through the '[Future You](#)' campaign for children aged 8-12 years, to increase understanding of STEM careers. This campaign has already reached 2.3 million children and their parents, as well as the Superstars of STEM program and the Girls in STEM Toolkit provided in high schools
- strengthening the **education** system, with Lisa working with more than 18,000 teachers over the past year programs to reskill women through the [Women in STEM Cadetships and Advanced Apprenticeships Program](#) retraining 600 women with STEM skills, as well as the [IncludeHer](#) movement
- supporting **industry** by providing small and medium enterprises with a toolkit for gender equity as being led by the Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering.

REFLECTIONS FROM LEADERS

Panel conversation

A panel was hosted by **Dr Wafa El-Adhami** (Chief Executive Officer of SAGE) with **Professor Renae Ryan** (Biochemical Pharmacology and Academic Director of SAGE, University of Sydney), **Dr David Kershaw** (Chief of Science Engagement and Impact Division, Defence Science and Technology Group), **Jo Bartley** (Principal, Culture and Change, ANSTO) and **Professor Drew Evans** (Future Industries Institute at the University of South Australia, and former member of the EMCR Forum Executive).



Reflections on **why gender equity remains important**:

- Diversity and inclusion (D&I) plus gender equity together are critical for success both in retaining and recruiting talented people, which is the business case that contributes to creating an inclusive work culture (Renae).
- Focusing on diversity allows an organisation to harness everyone's expertise, bringing forward different considerations and views, and leveraging partnerships and intelligence. ANSTO has had a D&I strategy for eight years now, and the 'why' is evolving and still important. Psychological safety is as important as other safety, particularly in current contexts (Jo).
- Top-down approaches are important, like SAGE, but for EMCRs it's important to personalise approaches – to understand what diversity and inclusion might mean for individuals. Improvements have created more support mechanisms and inclusive pathways but need to embrace every aspect of diversity (Drew).

Reflections on **how they have 'pivoted' in the last 12 months** in their approaches to D&I:

- Required to 'pivot' as part of building the response capability of the organisation but there was disparity in responses across locations in different states and territories. Unintended consequences resulted such as greater accessibility and inclusivity (David).
- Different challenges were presented for higher education and research (HER), with significant constraints to ensure D&I was retained as business as usual, not just nice to have. The joint sector [statement](#) to preserve gender equity as a HER priority was needed to ensure it remained so (Renae).
- While D&I was still on the agenda and talked about, there was tension with other strategic priorities (Jo).
- A deliberate effort was made by leadership to reenergise gender equity action (David).

Reflections on **the fluidity of STEM careers** between academia and industry:

- Having faced a transition from industry to academia, understanding how to make transitions, and inclusive networks across STEM sector where there are often no formal structures can be challenging, and SMEs are often underrepresented but are important. We need active research and ways to bring sectors together, and advice on how to move between sectors is also needed (Drew).

Other reflections:

- Is a decadal plan 2.0 needed, in light of the significant challenges? (Wafa).
- 'Natural' leaders in science like the academies have important role to ensure support for the plan is continued (Renae).

REFLECTIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

Participants reflected on the **biggest gender equity challenge** they faced in 2020.

Parenting duties during COVID and the expectation (and reality) that this would be mainly the work of women	Supporting staff through the balance of home schooling and working from home and enabling their ongoing participation	Our progress at senior leadership was at the expense of our mid career pipeline
Maintaining D&I as a priority	Fortunately did not have a gendered impact in 2020	Focusing on balance
The indirect discrimination and exclusion of part-time research staff	Sustaining momentum for women in STEM during COVID-19	Keeping it as a priority when money is tight
Supervising and supporting remote learning for my three children in VIC	Completing PhD – finding job opportunities.	How the evaluation of success is being done
Impact of COVID on family meant I (female) bore all career sacrifice	Not losing sight of our goals with everything else taking place	Families juggling work and online schooling for kids.
Primary care for children – homeschooling during lockdowns and unable to go to work	Keeping gender equity on the agenda and maintaining activities with reduced funding	Finding ways to help women with small children maintain their work while home schooling for much of the year
Securing the across-organisation and leadership commitment to Gender Equality as core business	Non-renewal of contract staff and expectations of those who remained to pick up the extra work	Negotiating new employment for staff. It was not a level playing field for all. And diversity and inclusion not front and centre of the planning
Becoming exhausted and burnt out trying to fight for change when the people in power/decision-makers do not seem to want to see change	Intersection of gender and additional challenges that women of colour face brought to attention with Black Lives Matter	Keeping the leadership attention on Gender Equity. At the lower level people were seeing the impact but not at the higher level
Balancing loads and demands on my female staff as they juggled the additional demands of being in lockdown. Related were the couple of cases where work not home was the safe environment for the staff member	Ensuring there were strategies to enhance opportunity to participate in discussions online. Raise your hand assisted people to have an opportunity to speak, but it took the group a while to get a system of practice embedded	Being a union with male-dominated professions including engineering and IT, it was a challenge to maintain the importance of a gender lens on the impact of COVID-19. There was very much a sense of that being almost inappropriate in crisis situation
1. Mature aged STEM researcher 2. STEM research didn't count as Australian work experience 3. No or poor Australian industry network as a new migrant	Probably the number of female researchers who found their research was impacted by the fact they were required to work from home, with childcare and other responsibilities	Maintaining engagement in my career goals, compared to simply wanting to hide away and focus on family, when everyday life was so shaken up
Impact on casual staff.	Impact on casual staff	Loss of casual staff
Team members juggling children and work due to COVID	Fewer senior staff participating in gender and inclusion meetings	Keeping leaders' attention on this area during the pandemic
Keeping SAGE and EDI alive and relevant	D&I having the potential to fall off the agenda	Keeping D&I on the agenda

REFLECTIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

On gender equity in STEM: 2020 and now

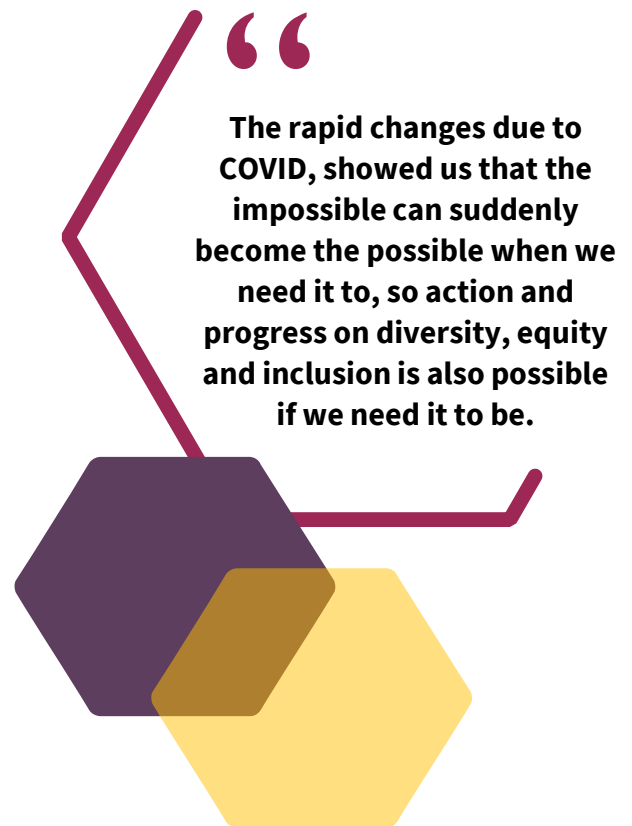
During the brainstorming sessions, participants reflected on **lessons from the past year for gender equity**. These have been ascribed against the six opportunity areas of the decadal plan.

LEADERSHIP AND COHESION

- The sands are shifting – we must reset our gender equity program.
- Retaining diversity and inclusion as a strategic aim.
- There were challenges around the cultural differences across international boundaries and the organisation is keen to address some of these issues around prioritising inclusion in 2021.
- Inclusive leaders with a wide set of lenses are needed.
- Activities and responses were approached with a gendered lens with a focus on women in STEM, but it was almost to the exclusion of people outside of this group, despite needed to represent everyone (all scientists and engineers in the organisation).

WORKPLACE CULTURE

- Importance of relationships – across the organisation – particularly in complex environments – keeps your work on the agenda – even if not a priority.
- Figured out who actually cares (in some cases, this was great when senior leaders cared).
- Highlighted the power of open consultation for individual situations.
- Learnt to tap people on shoulders.
- There was a difficulty in finding good listeners at senior management level.
- We can trust people to get work done at home.
- Conveying trust and empathy helped to improve wellbeing.
- Shift to online was more accessible for many people.
- Need to normalise men taking on more childcare and family duties etc, women bore the brunt of this during lockdowns.
- Applying and promoting an intersectional lens when approaching gender equity.
- Keep recruitment targets and collect data.
- Shaping applicant pools to encourage diversity, e.g. cadetships.
- Move our Inclusion in Action training from face-to-face to an online offering with behavioural nudges – easier accessibility – more impact and capturing data.



EVALUATION

- The demographics will be totally different particularly in the university sector. We should compare the data from 2019/20 to 2021.

VISIBILITY

- Visibility is important and drives equity, diversity and inclusion.

EDUCATION

- PhD students took an opportunity to travel around WA and to give talks to a number of school groups. The PhD students stepped up their commitment to delivering the message that there are STEM careers and that there are pathways for people of all socioeconomic backgrounds to participate.

INDUSTRY

- If equity action was well-embedded in an organisation e.g., through SAGE, it has survived but others have really struggled to maintain focus. Until embedded, equity work is vulnerable – COVID has really shown where the embedding is solid and woven into the fabric of the organisation.

REFLECTIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

Ideas for action

In small groups, participants also identified **small-scale/big-impact ideas for gender equity in STEM**. These have been ascribed against the six opportunity areas of the decadal plan.

LEADERSHIP AND COHESION

- Set a KPI for the delivery of diversity and inclusion work, so women are not left doing all the equity work.
- Have a brainstorming session within your institution – to make sure you are servicing actual needs – being consultative – can be informal or more structured.
- Are you listening and believing everyone equally? Have you asked for someone to qualify information and not asked others to do the same? Why not?
- Budget for Auslan interpreters and live captioning for events where possible – accessing guidance may be needed.
- Senior staff KPIs to include measurements of success of women (not just their hiring or promotion).
- The effort to make a stand at every meeting to ensure that that biases are challenged.

WORKPLACE CULTURE

- At unis, re-hiring response needs to be 50-50 men-women; even for casual staff.
- When promotions are being decided- impact of 2020 should be specifically assessed so women are given a fair chance.
- Women-only positions to achieve balance.
- Normalising flexible work – changing the presenteeism bias.
- More flexibility in arranging meeting times – organised to included people who work part time.
- Flexibility maintained – when AND where AND how.
- The report of sexual harassment has such a huge impact on individuals and on the organisations as a whole. More discussion and genuine action on combating this culture.
- Onboarding new staff – providing tips for how staff can support inclusion (and be aware of unconscious biases) e.g. in education/classes/teaching – to make things a community effort, not just a high-level goal.
- Do we need to develop an onboard guide?
- Every meeting is a reminder about gender equity, inclusion and bias.
- Increased mentoring and establishment of mentor programs.
- Creating opportunities for sponsors, rather than mentors.

EVALUATION

- Evaluate if your KPIs for gender equity are as strict as financial KPIs, or merely box-ticking.
- Country-wide analysis of current demographic data in STEM.
- Monitor gender profile of people who left during restructure – and don't lose track of data.
- Quarterly dashboards to leadership teams on gender equity in the organisation and breaking down where it is required – action must be data driven.

VISIBILITY

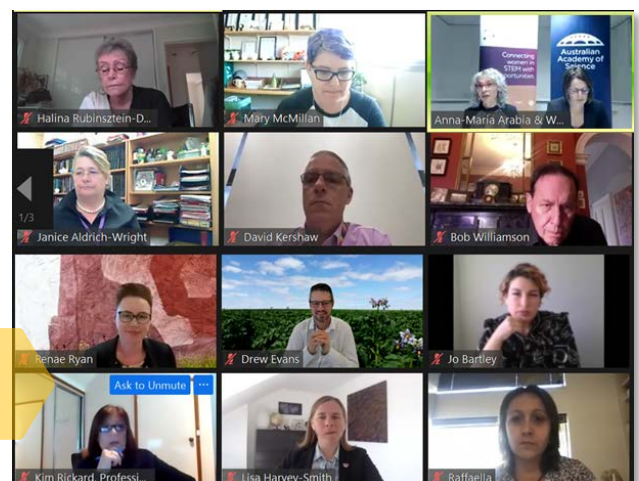
- Getting messages from Australia's future STEM people (young people) to the people who need to hear. And inspire them to continue for change.

EDUCATION

- Inviting school kids into the lab or workplace to see science being done and who it is done by!

INDUSTRY

- Including industry in the champions' conversations and opportunity.



NEXT STEPS

What can we do together?

In the final round of small group discussions, participants shared ideas on **how this emerging network could work together, and individually to advance the decadal plan**. All champions are invited to consider ways they can support these actions.

COMMUNICATION	Focused action
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social media – supporting each other- sharing posts and creating conversations, creating hashtags and lists on Twitter.• Written articles by sub-groups in various newsletters.• Public communication about champions opportunity and coordinate way for others to contact decadal plan champions as a group with ideas.	A SHARED CONTENT POOL

TOOLS & RESOURCES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Crowd sourced-collection of resources – shared Mendeley library or annotated bibliography	A SHARED TOOLSET

COLLABORATION / COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Investigate effective ways to convene collaboration between the champions, e.g. a community of practice to help each other and share experiences of what worked and key challenges.• We have got the STEM Women and Women in STEM platforms that we can log in to and correspond – if we had our own page?• LinkedIn or Teams group to share ideas, solutions, good practice and form working groups (we MUST include diverse voices in these).• Support each other to be sponsors and mentors.• Identifying common action in all the decadal plan champions’ responses – working together on 2-3 actions in 2021 across the sector – would be a great way to gather momentum and impact. Establish a working group to advance this?• Promote collaboration rather than competition between different women in STEM programs.	A HOSTED SPACE

MEET AND TALK	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hold a regular national conference like Catalysing Gender Equity (CGE2022) as a key moment to prioritise gender equity in STEM and progress change.• Host regular catch ups, online or in person to build closer relationships, with focus on sharing updates on progress.• Regular open invitation networking catch-up and knowledge share, where people need help/advice.	REGULAR GATHERINGS

CROSS-SECTORAL PARTICIPATION	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Participation of women in each industry – what ways we could support better participation.• Draw on expertise from outside of the STEM sector – learn from the sociologists and other experts from outside of STEM.• Move away from discussions based on organisations – this overcomes the general nature of policy frameworks.• Form ‘teams’ that are not isolated within organisations, but cross-sector.• Speak to industry friends that are not aware of the work being done through the decadal plan.• Supporting the Ambassador by helping the people at the coalface!	INDUSTRY OUTREACH

ACTION AGENDA

Immediate activities for 2021



A SHARED CONTENT POOL

The Academy will...

- develop a promotional kit for champions
- establish a space where social media, newsletter and other communication content can be developed and shared within the network
- support champions to prepare their annual updates and publish online.

Champions are encouraged to...

- use the promotional kit to raise awareness of their champion status and engage others
- update their champion response on an annual basis – [guidance](#) is available
- contribute to the shared content pool and publish in magazines/ communications/ newsletters/ social channels .

A SHARED TOOLSET

The Academy will...

- lead a project to crowdsource a toolset of resources to support Champions and others in their gender equity activities.

Champions are encouraged to...

- contribute examples of guides / checklists / policies to the shared toolset.

A HOSTED SPACE

The Academy will...

- investigate ways to lead collaboration across the network and support a community of practice
- host an online space for sharing.

Champions are encouraged to...

- actively participate in establishing a community of practice
- instigate and lead collaborative projects within the network.

REGULAR GATHERINGS

The Academy will...

- convene more regular gatherings of the champions network
- provide a more regular communication to network
- consider opportunity and capacity for a national gender equity in STEM conference, e.g. CGE 2022.

Champions are encouraged to...

- co-host and actively participate in network gatherings
- if progressed, participate in a working group to co-design and plan CGE 2022.

INDUSTRY OUTREACH

The Academy will...

- support industry organisations to become champions.

Champions are encouraged to...

- invite and support their industry networks to become champions
- identify opportunities to reach and engage with industry on these issues.

For more information

Diversity and Inclusion Team, Australian Academy of Science
womeninstem@science.org.au

