

**New SAGE design for the Bronze to Silver Pathway:  
Consolidated Questions and Answers from briefing webinars held on 2 – 5 June 2020**

**Scope of SAGE**

1. Will SAGE extend beyond STEMM? When will the scope of SAGE Athena SWAN awards be broadened beyond STEMM?
  - a. As advised in the recent SAGE communication “Transition from Pilot Study to National Roll Out”, SAGE Ltd is enabling a flexible and **whole-of-institution** approach. The SAGE design for Bronze to Silver Awards reiterates this and provides institutions with the flexibility to address holistic, large-scale, and priority strategic actions. These may include non-STEMM disciplines. In addition, intersectional approaches are embedded into the design to support this.
  - b. The flexibility of the new SAGE design serves different types of institutions in terms of their size, complexity, structure and governance.
  - c. The SAGE Ltd Board will be further articulating the SAGE vision and mission once it is appointed and assumes its role (anticipated in August – September 2020).

**Timeframes to Bronze Renewals and Silver Awards**

2. What is the timeframe to apply for a Silver Award?
  - a. Applications for Silver Awards should be made by the **end of the five-year Bronze Award validity period**, which commences from the Bronze Award conferral date.  
  
For example, the first Bronze awardees received their awards on 5 December 2018. Allowing five years, applications for a Silver Award will be due in March 2024 (that is, the application round immediately following the end of the five years validity).
3. What if the institution is not ready to apply for a Silver Award at the end of the Bronze Award validity period?
  - a. The new pathway design prompts institutions to continuously assess their readiness through the completion of Progress and Impact Reports. SAGE will also continue to support members with their implementation work.
  - b. Where it is evident that readiness and/or progress and impact are insufficient, the process has in-built flexibilities such as **extending application timeframes, providing additional support, or offering a grace period** (at Bronze level) of up to 12 months.
4. Should a Silver Award not be achieved, how does this new process interact with maintaining Bronze accreditation? For example, is achieving Cygnet Awards in three out of five Key Priority Areas equal to maintaining Bronze? If organisations that were heavily impacted by

COVID-19 wish to postpone their application for a Silver Award, what is the process for maintaining Bronze, particularly for Cohort 1 organisations?

- a. Where it is evident that progress and impact are insufficient, the process has in-built flexibilities such as **extending application timeframes, providing additional support, or offering a grace period** (at Bronze level) of up to 12 months. In any case, Bronze Award renewal requires demonstration of progress, i.e. evidence of action implementation. Renewal is **not** the same as a ground zero application.
5. Is this design being implemented too late for Cohort 1 (and 2) institutions? Does their implementation work have to stop? Will the remaining award validity period be sufficient?
    - a. Institutions that have begun implementation are likely already acting on priority areas and will be monitoring and collecting data on these. As such, material may already be prepared for use in a Progress and Impact Report.
    - b. SAGE will roll out guidance and training for Silver Award applications around September 2020. We would welcome the opportunity to work with institutions that have been progressing their implementation to test the SAGE guidance and templates for Progress and Impact Reports.
    - c. By no longer pursuing departmental awards as in the UK, we have improved the utility of the validity period noting that this has also been extended to five years.
  6. Will SAGE have a phased call for Silver Awards that institutions apply for?
    - a. No. Institutional Bronze Awardees can apply for a Silver Award the moment they complete Progress and Impact Reports for all five Key Priority Areas and have achieved five SAGE Cygnet Awards. This can happen at any time within the five-year Bronze Award validity period.

### **Athena SWAN Departmental Awards and SAGE Cygnet Awards**

7. Will institutions be able to apply for Departmental Awards?
  - a. No. Departmental Awards will not be available as part of the new SAGE design. Instead, local area actions (in organisation sub-units, which may reflect the UK's Departmental structures) may be enacted as Key Priority Areas for Cygnet Awards.
  - b. The
8. Does a Cygnet count as a Departmental Award? Will members need a Departmental Award to be eligible to apply for Silver?
  - a. No, SAGE Cygnet Awards are **not** Departmental Awards. As noted in Q7 above, the new design **removes** Departmental applications and Awards; as such, and in contrast to the UK approach, Departmental Awards are **not an eligibility criterion** to apply for an Institutional Silver Award.

9. Does the new pathway design mean that individual faculties/schools do not have to go through the onerous data collection process required for a [UK-style] Departmental Award?
- The UK-style application process will be replaced with a less burdensome “assess as you go” process that centres on strategic priorities under action plans instead of departmental structures.
  - In the new SAGE design, Institutional Bronze Awardees will submit Progress and Impact Reports when sufficient impact can be demonstrated for the five Key Priority Areas defined in their Institutional Bronze Award application.
  - Data and evidence for impact will be collected on actions grouped within each of the five Key Priority Areas. Under this approach, organisational sub-units with specific challenges may be designated as Key Priority Areas. These sub-units may resemble a UK-style Department, but may also be defined differently based on the institution’s structure and needs.
10. Is the UK getting rid of Departmental Awards too?
- Advance HE is currently deciding how to act on the recommendations arising from the latest review of Athena SWAN. Their overarching response to the review’s recommendation can be viewed at [<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/charters/athena-swan-charter/advance-he-response-recommendations-independent-review-athena-swan>].
  - A number of the review’s recommendations propose reforms to the Departmental Awards in the UK, including removing the requirement for the majority of an institution’s departments to have achieved a Departmental Award before it can apply for an Institutional Silver Award.
11. Is there a risk that Advance HE will not endorse SAGE’s Silver pathway model? If they refuse to let SAGE associate the Athena SWAN brand with the proposed pathway, will SAGE separate from Advance HE and create its own brand for these awards?
- SAGE has briefed and shared the new design with Advance HE and has now formalised implementation of this approach in agreement with Advance HE. . It is worth noting that SAGE has introduced variations and improvements to the Athena SWAN process during the Pilot phase that were well supported by Advance HE.
  - The new SAGE design has been carefully developed to reduce administrative burden whilst maintaining and upholding the rigour and reputation of Athena SWAN.
  - In accordance with our licence agreement, SAGE will continue to work closely with Advance HE to support the objectives and international recognition of the Athena SWAN Charter.
  - In publishing their response to the Athena SWAN review recommendations, the CEO of Advance HE, Alison Johns confirmed that there is no compulsion for other nations that have adopted and adapted Athena SWAN to act on the review’s recommendations.

12. What is the difference between a Cygnet Award and a Departmental Award?

- a. The SAGE Cygnet Awards recognise institutional implementation of Action Plans evidenced by Progress and Impact Reports on Key Priority Areas defined from the Institutional Bronze Award Action Plans. As such, they build on and complement holistic, large-scale and priority strategic actions across the institution as well as local area priorities. The UK Departmental Awards must **only** relate to a specific department at the institution.
- b. By focusing on Progress and Impact Reports, the process for attaining a Cygnet Award is much **simpler and more flexible** than the application process for a UK-style Departmental Award, which essentially duplicates the application form and process for an Institutional Award. The Cygnet process preserves the rigour and credibility through demonstrated evidence and independent expert review.
- c. Cygnet Awards must link to an institution's strategic priorities and action plan, whereas there is no requirement for a Departmental Award to do so.

**Key Priority Areas**

13. What is a Key Priority Area?

- a. Key Priority Areas are the key structural, systemic and cultural areas identified as barriers to gender equity, diversity and inclusion in the Institution.

14. Can we choose a non-STEMM sub-unit as a Key Priority Area?

- a. Yes, if it is a strategic priority for your institution.

15. Do Key Priority Areas need to be pre-approved by SAGE?

- a. Key Priority Areas do not require pre-approval by SAGE. Institutions are best informed on their priorities and have sole discretion to decide what they should be.

16. Can SAGE review my Key Priority Areas before we begin implementing actions and/or preparing Progress and Impact Reports, so that we know they are sufficiently developed?

- a. SAGE will provide advice and guidance and will also identify "critical friends" to offer constructive feedback.

17. Will SAGE define what constitutes an organisational sub-unit, or is that up to members?

- a. Institutions have the flexibility to define their own sub-units for the purposes of a Key Priority Area. These could be akin to a department/faculty or school; a specific discipline within one of these structures; or groups of staff/students that may be

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particularly impacted by challenges and/or barriers to gender equity, diversity and inclusion. In some cases, these may also be areas of best practice in gender equity, diversity and inclusion.

- b. Institutions can seek advice from SAGE to inform their approach.
18. Do Key Priority Areas have to contain sub-sets of actions from the Bronze Action Plan, or could actions that were **not** part of the Bronze Action Plan (but emerged later) be included in a Progress and Impact Report?
- a. Actions that emerged after the Bronze Action Plan was submitted can be included in a Progress and Impact Report. A key principle of the new SAGE design is the opportunity to recognise:
    - i. critical evaluation and learning from actions that did not achieve desired outcomes; and
    - ii. developments beyond those described in the Action Plan that may arise from local innovation; are built on good practice in the sector; or were initiated locally due to changing circumstances (e.g. restructuring).
19. If I change an action or milestone in my Bronze Action Plan (e.g. if we found a more effective solution), do I have to provide a rationale for doing so, and where should I do this?
- a. Yes, institutions should provide a rationale for changing actions or milestones in their action plan (see Q16). Changes made to actions in the Key Priority Areas should be explained in the relevant Progress and Impact Report (as part of reporting on Progress).
  - b. For other actions, not in the scope of the Key Priority Areas, incorporating explanation to this effect is important in the context of assessing the current state of gender equity, diversity and inclusion. This can be made as part of the Silver application (Retrospective element 2, Part B of the SAGE new design).
20. How big does a Key Priority Area need to be? How many actions from the Bronze application should it cover? What should I do with the actions from my pre-Cygnets Bronze Action Plan that don't fall into any of my five Key Priority Areas?
- a. When shaping action plans into Key Priority Areas, institutions need to consider their strategic priorities and the timeframes they have set to achieve actions. They also need to consider how actions fit and interlink within a Priority Area.
  - b. It is understandable that not all actions may be addressed through the five Key Priority Areas and in the timeframe between Bronze and Silver Awards. The UK's Athena SWAN experience shows this to be the case under the UK process.
  - c. Actions from the Institutional Bronze Award Action Plan that do not get incorporated into any of the five Key Priority Areas can be addressed as part of the Silver Award application (Retrospective element 2, Part B of the new SAGE design). In their application, institutions will reflect on the progress made in gender equity, diversity

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and inclusion (through the Cygnet Awards) and decide if any remaining actions on the Bronze Action Plan are still relevant to their current context.

- d. The Silver Award application will contain guidance to assist with this.

21. Can a Key Priority Area comprise a single action?

- a. Yes, but you must be able to justify and provide compelling evidence as to why this single action alone is sufficient to address a Key Priority Area.
- b. There may be a few or a large number of actions that fit under one Key Priority Area. You may have already identified overarching themes when your action plan was developed, or you may refine this now as part of identifying your Key Priority Areas. The key approach is to consider what they are, how they interlink, etc. Again, SAGE will guide and advise on the approach.

22. Will the Self-Assessment Team (SAT) be a core part of the Silver Award application pathway again, like it was for Bronze?

- a. The Silver Award will require institutions to demonstrate that the self-assessment and application preparation process was inclusive, representative, well-governed, adequately resourced, and aligned with the Institution's strategic priorities and objectives. Institutions will have the flexibility to interpret these guidelines to suit their own institutional structures.
- b. SAGE is aware that the skills and expertise required to undertake the self-assessment and application preparation process differ markedly from those associated with implementing actions and driving organizational change. There is thus an understanding that different groups and individuals are likely to be involved at different stages of the process.
- c. During the Pilot period, and through the feedback provided by members, insights have been gathered on SAT composition and the self-assessment processes. These will be used to inform the guidance provided for the revised Bronze and Silver Awards.

23. How will the new application form integrate sections such as Intersectionality and Indigenous staff/students to create a smoother narrative?

- a. SAGE materials are being refined in consultation with SAGE members to address these critical elements. The feedback received when we initially drafted the proposed Departmental Awards material (now superseded) has informed the new application form.

24. How do I assess my institution's current state of gender equity, diversity and inclusion?

- a. The Bronze and Silver Award application forms will be fairly similar. In both forms, institutions are guided by a series of questions and/or data sets to be reported on.
- b. When applying for the Silver Award, some of these questions will have already been

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addressed in your Progress and Impact Reports. If so, you can simply cite the report(s) without repeating the information. You may wish to provide an overarching summary of highlights from your Progress and Impact Reports, or include further updates if it is some time since the Progress and Impact Report was submitted and further progress and impact has been achieved.

- c. For other questions, you will need to analyse your data (as for Bronze) to identify if this is now a Key Priority Area for your institution.

25. How will the Silver Award pathway intersect with the pathway to a Gold Award?

- a. The new SAGE design has been developed to apply to both - the pathway to Silver and the pathway to Gold Award. By focusing on Key Priority Areas, the approach continues to support holistic, large-scale, strategic actions, and to prioritise progress and impact.
- b. It also supports a focus on sustainable, and sustained, transformational change as required for a Gold Award.
- c. A key requirement for the Gold Award (in the UK) is “Beacon” status. The SAGE design enables and promotes Beacon activity, and innovation in practice, through collaboration between institutions.

### **Progress and Impact Reports for SAGE Cygnet Awards**

26. What is sufficient Progress and Impact for a Cygnet Award?

- a. Institutions should demonstrate progress in implementing the actions proposed in the Bronze Award Action Plan in their Key Priority Areas, and the impact these actions have had on the baselines established in the creation of the Bronze Award Action Plan.
- b. SAGE recognises that organisational change is a dynamic process that may call for the refinement and/or redesign of actions, or indeed a shift in priorities to respond to emerging issues and insights, to drive continuous improvement. For this reason, where limited progress has been made, or where changes to or redesign of actions were required, Institutions should provide commentary on the work undertaken, initiatives attempted, and reasons for the lack of progress.
- c. In the context of an Athena SWAN award, impact refers to a measurable effect on gender equity, diversity and inclusion that can either be attributable to, or correlated with, a specific action or group of actions. This may include, but is not limited to, changes in the gender balance at particular stages in the career pipeline. Impact may also be demonstrated in terms of, for example, increased engagement, interest or uptake; improved satisfaction, trust, understanding or esteem; or enhanced collaboration, innovation or openness.
- d. For areas in which progress can be demonstrated, but where impact is not yet evident, this should be outlined, along with any additions or alterations to be made to the actions and initiatives to allow for future demonstration of impact.
- e. SAGE will be working closely with SAGE members to finalise the guidance and technical specifications that inform the development of the Progress and Impact Reports and

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their assessment by expert reviewers.

- f. The SAGE data framework will also be of relevance. It will require defined sets of metrics to inform the assessment of progress and impact nationally. However, it is important to remember that for Athena SWAN, and hence the new SAGE design, progress and impact are always assessed relative to the institution.

27. Do I have to pay for a Cygnet Award?

- a. No. The institutional subscription fee is all-inclusive.

28. Can a sub-unit initiate the SAGE Cygnet Award process?

- a. A sub-unit (e.g. department, faculty, or part thereof) can discuss its gender equity, diversity and inclusion challenges (or, in some cases, its achievements) with its parent institution and agree how to incorporate those as a Key Priority Area to be considered for a SAGE Cygnet award. However, only the subscribing institution is responsible for submitting the Progress and Impact Report for a Cygnet Award. SAGE will **not** accept applications for Cygnet Awards directly from organisational sub-units.

29. Do Cygnet Awards require a mix of whole-of-institution and sub-unit Key Priority Areas?

- a. Yes, institutions are required to have a minimum of **one organisation-wide** and **one sub-unit** Key Priority Area. However, they are free to choose any combination of organisation-wide and/or sub-unit issues for their other three Key Priority Areas.
- b. SAGE will consult closely with MRIs and PFRAs on the need to fine-tune this approach for sub-units within their respective organisational structures.

30. When do we submit our Progress and Impact Reports report for Cygnet Awards? Is it up to the institutions when they submit these reports, or will SAGE issue guidelines for this?

- a. Progress and Impact Reports can be submitted anytime during the Bronze Award validity period. These reports may be submitted individually or together. It is important that these reports demonstrate sufficient evidence of progress and impact when they are submitted.
- b. Institutions are free to determine when to do so, and they will be able to seek advice from SAGE to guide their decision.

31. Is there a mandatory waiting period between receiving a Bronze Award and submitting the first Progress and Impact Report?

- a. There is no mandatory waiting period to submit a Progress and Impact Report. Preparation and submission of these reports will be informed by demonstration of sufficient evidence for each Key Priority Area.

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32. How will we ensure that these reports reflect sustained impact, and not one-off or short-term improvements in gender equity, diversity and inclusion?
- Sustained impact is an important aspect of these reports. As suggested by members, change management principles regarding sustaining impact will be included in the guidance and technical specifications to be developed for these reports.
33. Can I submit all five Progress and Impact Reports at the same time as my Silver Award application?
- No. Progress and Impact Reports must be submitted, and Cygnet Awards conferred, before the application for a Silver Award is submitted. Therefore, the timing of submission for Progress and Impact Reports should consider the amount of time an institution requires to prepare its Silver Award application.
34. What happens if I fail to meet the requirements for one or more Cygnet Awards? Can I resubmit Progress and Impact Reports and is there a limit to the number of resubmissions?
- Much like peer review process for research journals, for Cygnet Awards, SAGE-appointed expert reviewers will provide feedback to guide Institutions to successfully improve their Progress and Impact reports. SAGE will support applicants to incorporate the feedback provided.
  - SAGE will work to assure efficiency in the process and to avoid iterative re-submissions of Progress and Impact Reports.
35. Will there be a conferral ceremony for Cygnet Awards?
- No, but SAGE will publish the Progress and Impact Reports and promote each institution's achievements via the SAGE website and social media channels.
36. Will Progress and Impact Reports be published?
- Yes. SAGE will publish these on its website and will promote them nationally, to departments like DISER and to the Government, and internationally. We will collaborate with your institution's communications team on this.
37. Can institutions collaborate on Progress and Impact Reports?
- Not in the form of reports to be submitted jointly. SAGE will encourage and support collaborations to create and build the evidence base for effective practices. However, it is critical that institutions provide context-specific evidence, and measure progress against their own Action Plan and impact against their own baseline data, in their Progress and Impact Reports.

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38. Will there be examples of what a successful Progress and Impact Report should look like? Will that be part of the training?

- a. Yes. In consultation with SAGE members, SAGE will develop guidance and technical specifications and use these to create exemplar reports. These exemplars will be shared with the sector for training purposes and to inform the expert review process.

39. Will the new Silver Award guidance be specific to different institution types, e.g. PFRAs and MRIs?

- a. Yes. The new design is developed with the view to enable flexibility to suit the different types of institutions. SAGE will continue to consult closely with SAGE members on the development of the guidance and technical specifications to support effective implementation of the new design.

### **Expert and Peer Reviews**

40. Will peer review be required for all Cygnets Awards?

- a. Yes, all Progress and Impact Reports will be reviewed by independent expert reviewers for the SAGE certification of Cygnet Awards.

41. How will SAGE manage the organisation and timing of peer review for Cygnet Awards? Will this be onerous for the sector? Who will be on the expert panel?

- a. It is anticipated that expert reviewers will be selected based on subject area and will be trained in the review process, which will resemble the peer review process for research journals.
- b. The process will be designed to be efficient for the sector and SAGE. SAGE will consult the sector on this process. Insights gained from the evaluation of the SAGE peer review process (currently in progress) will also be taken into consideration.

### **General Questions**

42. Has there been any work done to look at the interaction between SAGE Athena SWAN Awards and the Victorian GEA audit and requirements?

- a. Yes. SAGE has held discussions and briefings with the Victorian Government and has shared materials on the SAGE approach and developments.
- b. SAGE will continue to engage with Federal and State/Territory governments to explore opportunities to reduce burden and leverage collaboration across initiatives aimed to advance gender equity, diversity and inclusion.

43. What is SAGE's advice for institutions who are struggling to maintain jobs (and thus meet

gender targets) in the face of the pandemic?

- a. SAGE encourages institutions to stay the course and continue to apply a gender lens in their approaches to assessing and responding to the impacts of COVID-19, and as they progress in implementing actions from their Bronze Action Plans.
- b. The new SAGE design provides flexibility to enable institutions to reprioritise, where necessary, any of their actions to focus on new priorities and to capture learnings and apply innovations in their approach to responding to COVID-19. The approach facilitates and supports collaboration so that institutions are able to work more closely on sharing novel solutions to the challenges posed by COVID-19.

44. How can institutions set out the context for other impacts from COVID-19 that (unlike number of staff) are beyond their direct control, e.g. changes to childcare responsibilities due to school closures?

- a. As noted in the answer to Q42, SAGE will continue to engage with Federal and State/Territory Governments to support gender equity, diversity and inclusion. SAGE has continued to attract the support of the Federal Government, and can act as a conduit to raise issues that could impact national outcomes. This advocacy role will continue via the SAGE Ltd Board. SAGE members and the sector are encouraged to bring forth such matters to SAGE, so that they can be progressed for further consideration by respective Governments and national peak bodies.

45. To whom do we send additional questions?

- a. Please email any questions and/comments on the new SAGE design for the Bronze to Silver Award pathway to Dr Wafa El-Adhami, SAGE Executive Director ([wafa.el-adhami@science.org.au](mailto:wafa.el-adhami@science.org.au)).

46. What has the gender balance of attendees at the Silver pathway briefings been like?

- a. The SAGE briefings on the new design for Bronze to Silver pathway have been well-attended by SAGE member institutions, with a total of 63 participants including Heads of Institutions. More women than men attended these webinars, reflecting attendee profiles at previous SAGE events and also information reported in Athena SWAN applications.