

Student engagement in Gender Action Plans (GAPs)

This checklist provides a starting point for your Students' Association to get involved in the creation and delivery of a Gender Action Plan at your institution.

The Scottish Funding Council's [Gender Action Plan \(GAP\)](#) states that by 2030 no subject at college or university should have an extreme gender imbalance of 75:25 and sets a target to reduce the gap between male and female participation in undergraduate study to 5%. These are ambitious targets for our institutions to meet, and we must make sure that the student voice is heard throughout the process of creating the Gender Action Plans. To do this, we must have a seat at the table to ensure that plans are being delivered with the interests of students and future students in mind.

This year institutions are at the start of laying out what measures they will be taking forward in order to reach these targets. Students' Associations need to be involved in these decisions to ensure that these targets will be met and that the needs of students are considered throughout the process.

My vision for student involvement in the Gender Action Plans is that they are key stakeholders in the process, that we are pushing our institutions to be bold and ambitious in their approaches to tackling gender imbalance, and that Students' Associations are adequately funded to be able to participate in these plans. I want to see our colleges and universities being trailblazers in tackling gender imbalances and not being afraid to try something new.

Colleges and universities exist for social good, and are creating the teachers, architects, engineers and childcare providers of tomorrow. I want our colleges and universities to play a key role in shaping a more equal society, where your gender isn't the main factor in your subject choice.



Angela Alexander
NUS Scotland Women's Officer

Introduction to Gender Action Plans

In August 2016 the Scottish Funding Council published their [Gender Action Plan \(GAP\)](#) setting out targets for Scotland's colleges and universities to address the gender imbalance in access to education and at subject levels. You can find out more about the Gender Action Plan in this [video](#).

The Scottish Funding Council has asked all institutions to develop their own Gender Action Plans with the first round of GAPs expected to be released in July 2017. This provides a unique opportunity for Students' Associations to be involved at the start of the process, in pushing their institution to be ambitious with their targets and in making sure that the needs of students, current and future, are considered throughout the process.

NUS Scotland has long recognised the importance of addressing gender imbalance in areas where subjects are male or female dominated. From apprenticeships where women have been told that a mechanic's garage isn't an appropriate place for them, to teaching courses where the number of men in the class can be counted on one hand, gender imbalances exist across a wide range of subjects. NUS Scotland also recognises that gender is non-binary and that support for trans students needs to be addressed through institutions' Gender Action Plans.

The targets set out by the Scottish Funding Council are ambitious and colleges and universities are going to have to take action in a range of different levels to ensure that they are on track to meeting these targets. The first stage in this will be identifying the subjects that currently have a gender imbalance and setting out targets and measures to address this.

Approaches to tackling gender imbalance

The Scottish Funding Council have mapped out five different areas in which activity to address the gender imbalance can be categorised, institutions should have in their plans activities that cover each of the five areas.

Infrastructure

- Systems: incorporating into policies, processes, strategies, leadership and current reporting mechanisms
- Humans: embedding in staff Continuous Professional Development (CPD), and reward and recognition processes
- Resources: research and understanding, time, finance and physical support
- Relationships: internal and external networks for collaboration

Influencing the influencers

- Educators and careers advisors: training, CPD and resource creation
- Parents: awareness raising and support
- Current students: embedding in the curriculum and co-curricular activities; awareness raising and training

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Raising awareness and aspirations

- Outreach: workshops, taster programmes, clubs, talks, bespoke programmes, competitions, school visits et al aiming to raise awareness and understanding of and interest in subjects and careers so as to influence the educational and career choice process. Use of role models, single-sex activities, thematic foci and media campaigns.

Encouraging applications

- Recruitment: ensuring equitable admissions, supporting the recruitment process and tackling attainment disparities
- Marketing: embedding gender equality and counter stereotyping within prospectuses, websites and open day activities
- Course packaging: designing courses to attract non-traditional students and utilising access programmes

Supporting success

- Creating gender inclusive environments: auditing for and tackling environmental and structural barriers and developing gender inclusive environments
- Enhancing the student experience: student mentoring, student networks, awareness raising and support for progression into counter stereotypical careers

Case study - Girls in Energy

Girls in Energy is a programme that Shell runs in conjunction with Fife College and North East Scotland College. This year-long course of hands-on engineering experiences inspires young women to pursue a career in energy.

In partnership with North East Scotland College the Girls in Energy programme is a one-year course that is designed to open young women's eyes to the energy industry's wealth of career opportunities. The programme delivers weekly lessons, workshops and field visits for young women aged 14–16 in secondary education.

Prior to starting the programme many of the pupils thought that a job in the industry meant working on a platform in the middle of the North Sea. The course helped young women to rethink these preconceptions and show them the huge range of different careers available both offshore and onshore all over the world.

Since it launched in 2010 the number of pupils involved in the Shell-sponsored programme has expanded to reach over 100 young women each year, with further expansion plans in progress.

Each year the pupils are given the opportunity to undergo an interview and selection process to secure one of up to 20 places on a two-week industry experience placement that Shell offers at their offices in Aberdeen. The pupils get to meet over one hundred people from the oil and gas sector, where they can hear first-hand about the various roles and challenges in support of our exploration, development and production activities.

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A similar programme runs in partnership between Fife College and Shell and included a special event held to mark the girls' achievements in the region and completion of the course with where they gained a National 5 Energy: Skills for Work qualification. At the event, the girls gave talks on how much they had benefitted from the programme and how it has encouraged them to now consider careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects.

Alisha Brown, 17 from Glenrothes said:

"I enjoyed Science and Maths subjects at school and was keen to find out more about what the oil and gas industry is like and learn about other energy types. I enjoyed going up to Aberdeen for the visit to Shell with the girls from all over Scotland. We had to put a lot of work into it but I didn't mind as it gave me an insight into the different career paths available and has helped my personal statement for applying to university. I plan to go on to university after the summer to study Chemistry and after that I'd love to forge a career in Energy. I would definitely recommend this experience to other girls."



Top tip: Work with your college or university's marketing department to **make sure that marketing for courses isn't reinforcing gender stereotypes.**

Gender Action Plan at your institution

Process

Institutions will already have some measures in place to address gender equality but the Gender Action Plan will provide a clear focus for coordinated measures and increased activity based around improving outcomes around gender imbalance at an institutional level.

The creation of the Gender Action Plan will go through a different process at each institution. However, it's likely that the Gender Action Plan will be discussed at an existing meeting such as your institution's Equality and Diversity Committee, perhaps during discussion around outcome agreements.

The actions required for the Gender Action Plan may also be discussed at a subject level or at your institution's governing body and we need to ensure student representation at every level of the institution. Your institution may not create a standalone document as their GAP but they will need to report back to the Scottish Funding Council about what they are specifically doing to address gender imbalances.

You should find out who in your institution is leading on the Gender Action Plan and make sure that they know that you'd like to be involved and to discuss how students can be involved in the process. A good place to start is by asking your Outcome Agreement Manager (college) or your Athena SWAN lead (universities). If you're struggling to find out who that is then please get in touch using the contact details at the end.

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Top tip: Think strategically, make sure that any initiatives that you think should be taken forward can be linked into other work. **Increasing the number of women professors in STEM subjects** might help to address the gendered nature of the subjects therefore linking this with the Athena SWAN initiative or into your institution’s strategic plan could ensure this is delivered.

Subjects with a gender imbalance

Every institution will have to conduct an analysis of the gender imbalance of the subjects that they offer to consider which subjects need to be addressed at their institution. The SFC’s Gender Action Plan highlights ‘super classes’ which are subject areas with severe gender imbalances (greater than 75% of one gender) in the sector. These are detailed in the table below. It’s important for you to find out the gender imbalance of subjects at your institution so that you know which subjects your institution will be focusing on addressing.

Colleges	Universities
Female under-representation	
Construction (general)	Architecture, Building and Planning
Building/Construction Operations	Engineering
Building Services	Technologies
Engineering/Technology (general)	Computer Sciences
Mechanical Engineering	
Electrical Engineering	
IT: Computer Science/Programming/Systems	
Vehicle Maintenance/Repair	
Male under-representation	
Child Care Services	Social Studies
Hair/Personal Care Services	Nursing
	Training teachers
	Psychology



Top tip: You could encourage your institution to start **collecting data on students dropping out of courses where there is gender imbalance**. Often we don’t know the reasons for dropping out and whether gender imbalance is a factor.

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Case study – women and men only courses

City of Glasgow College offer women only courses in both Engineering and Construction and Edinburgh College, New Lanarkshire College and City of Glasgow College all offer men only courses in Childcare.

The [Women into Engineering HNC](#) offers women the opportunity to gain the skills, knowledge and understanding needed for the career in a women only environment. The course leads work with Equate to offer a mentor throughout the course. Women require a NC in Mechanical Engineering or two Highers (Maths and another preferably Physics) and will prepare students for a career as an Engineering Technician. Graduates can then go on to an HND at the College or year two of the B Eng Mechanical Power Plant Systems at Glasgow Caledonian University.

The [Women in Construction course](#) is SCQF level 3 and has no formal entry requirements and offers women a chance to learn practical skills such as bricklaying, carpentry and joinery, plastering and wall and floor tiling in a women only environment. The course is designed for women then to go and study a degree course in a related area or to enter at SCQF level 4 in a specific trade in the construction industry.

[Men in Childcare](#) is a course offered by Edinburgh College, City of Glasgow College and New Lanarkshire College to increase the number of men working in Early Years with Children. The course is a 16 week evening class, held on one evening each week. The course consists of two half modules leading to a Fast Track course (three modules) and then an HNC Childcare course. All courses are free of charge and certified.

Ensuring students' voices are heard

Making the argument for student representation in the Gender Action Plan

We know that colleges and universities set more aspiring targets when students are involved in the process. The role of students in the creation and delivery of Gender Action Plans is crucial and you can play a key role in pushing your institution to be more ambitious, to cover all of the areas to be addressed and to be bold in developing new activity and ideas.

Both the Scottish Funding Council's Gender Action Plan and the Higher Education Academy's [Whose job is it anyway?](#) report highlight the value of student involvement in the process. You should be able to be involved in discussing all aspects of the Gender Action Plan as after all, it is students of the future that you're discussing!



Top tip: When discussing measures such as the introduction of unconscious bias training for staff make sure that you **focus on the positive impact this will have on students** and the overall benefits to the college or university rather than focusing on any negative reasons that you think this might be necessary.

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Case study – University of Aberdeen’s Attracting Diversity project

In 2014/15, ECU worked with Scottish HEIs piloting an action learning approach to increase student diversity across a range of equality characteristics. The University of Aberdeen wanted to develop an increased understanding of the University’s student population, any equality and diversity issues in its recruitment processes and the experiences of current students.

Working across the University, the project’s activities have also been noted by various committees and working groups, including the working group on widening participation, the admissions working group, the equality and diversity advisory group and the university management group. Furthermore, the university admissions selectors’ involvement in the project means they are more informed about the project’s progress. As perhaps the most important decision makers in the admissions process it was essential to have them on board, and gain their insights.

The University also worked together with Aberdeen University Students’ Association (AUSA) to conduct qualitative research with students regarding recruitment and the nine protected characteristics. An agreement was reached with AUSA on how this research would be conducted and draft documentation was drawn up. Three focus groups were held with representatives of the AUSA Liberation Forums - Women’s Forum, LGBTQ+ Forum and Mature Student Forum. It has been agreed to hold yearly focus groups and feedback sessions for the Student Recruitment and Admissions Service (and more specifically the Widening Participation team) with the Liberation Forums.

The project has given the University increased knowledge and understanding of the diverse make up of the student population, for example a better understanding of the gender split in each of the undergraduate degree subjects. By comparing the most recent data with historical records the project team has been able to identify potential patterns of inequality in student recruitment.

In the evaluation of the first stage of the project the University of Aberdeen noted that it would have been difficult to achieve the outcomes of the project without AUSA’s input and noted:

“It is of paramount importance to work with student unions, associations and the wider student body when looking at equality and diversity in student recruitment. Numbers and data can show where there are gaps and inequality, but won’t identify barriers to entry for specific groups. Working with the students association and speaking to students directly about their experiences is absolutely essential – especially so when trying to gather qualitative data and information that can be used in planning to help applicants overcome these barriers.”

Student representation at every level

Whilst the Gender Action Plan will probably be discussed at your institution’s governing body or through your institution’s Equality and Diversity Committee, discussions about how to take forward the Gender Action Plan may also be discussed at a subject or school level. This means that you should ensure that course representatives/school representatives in the affected subjects need to know about the GAP too.

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Top tip: Use your **course representatives** to help you demand quality teaching and a focus on equality. Use our [Liberation and Learning campaign pack](#) as a starter for ideas on how to ensure that your course material isn't dominated by one gender.

Involving student groups

There are lots of student groups on campus that might be interested in shaping and delivery your institution's Gender Action Plan. For example course related societies for those courses with a gender imbalance might want to get involved, if you have an Interconnect Society or women's group they might also want to get involved in lobbying your institution to take forward their GAP obligations.



Top tip: Why not try setting up **subject related networks** or **mentoring schemes** for students who are under-represented. [Interconnect](#) is a network for women studying in science, engineering, technology and construction in Scotland and has student societies at colleges and universities.

Case study – Royal Conservatoire's Human Library

The Gender Equality Group at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland Students' Association set up a Human Library of 2015, which encouraged the breaking of stereotypes through its thematic focus on gender and sexuality.

Consulting with students

You should also ensure that your institution is consulting with students who are currently studying these subjects to look at their experience and what barriers might be in place, this should have particular emphasis on the experiences of those currently under-represented on the course. This could be through focus groups, a survey or you could host a roundtable inviting students and staff along to find out about their experiences.



Top tip: Your Students' Association could hold a **roundtable of students and staff** where staff can hear first-hand from students studying subjects their gender is under-represented in. This will help them to understand the issues students are facing.

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Ensuring continuity in the process

Your Students' Association's involvement in the Gender Action Plan depends largely on the capacity you have and so it's important to plan your involvement in the process and be realistic about what is achievable for your Students' Association. In this planning you should consider how you will ensure progress and student engagement in the Gender Action Plan alongside how you will ensure student involvement and understanding of the Gender Action Plan in subsequent years. You could do this by involving a staff member at the Students' Association or involving student groups in the process.

Student-delivered initiatives

Student representation in forming the Gender Action Plans is crucial, but if you'd like to do more work on the Gender Action Plan then your Students' Association can develop student-led, student and staff co-created and student delivered initiatives. You could consider building progress on the Gender Action Plan into your Student Partnership Agreement with your institution.



Top tip: If you have a **Student Ambassadors programme**, or are thinking of developing one, **talking to school pupils about STEM subjects** and areas in which genders are under-represented is a great way to break down stereotypes and let them know no subject is off-limits to them.

Case study - #ThisAyrshireGirlCan

Ayrshire College Students' Association was concerned at the under-representation of women in STEM subjects, particularly the subjects of aeronautical engineering, motor mechanics, construction, and multiple computer related subjects at Ayrshire College. The Students' Association knew that this was a national issue but wanted to do something to encourage more women to study STEM subjects and progress to careers in this field. They witnessed the cycle of under-representation, where women were being lost at every stage of the pipeline: if girls don't see women in a career, they're less likely to enter that field, so there's less women in that career, so girls see less women in that career, and so on.

The Students' Association decided to launch a campaign called This Ayrshire Girl Can featuring case studies of women at Ayrshire College studying STEM subjects. The campaign had a strong presence on social media using #ThisAyrshireGirlCan and had local organisations such as East Ayrshire Women's Aid and even the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, joining the conversation on Twitter.

The Students' Association also wanted to address some of the barriers to women entering STEM-related employment, particularly around the misconceptions of 'jobs for men' and 'jobs for women' that society and employers often held. Women from these courses were invited by the College to give presentations about the campaign and they also attended employer's network events and career fairs to talk about their experiences.

Working with the College the Students' Association created a [campaign video](#), featuring women studying STEM courses at Ayrshire College including modern apprentices at some

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of the country's leading STEM employers talking about why they wanted to study STEM, what they enjoyed about their subjects, and why they'd encourage other young women to follow their career path. This was launched at an event for women at the college and girls from local schools, where the First Minister attended and did a Q&A with the audience. This was written about in the local press which helped to raise the profile of the campaign in the local community.

Ayrshire College Students' Association has since won the [Herald Diversity Award](#) for this ground-breaking campaign and was commended in the Scottish Parliament.



Top tip: You could **approach your institution to ask them for funding** to support any activities that you're delivering to support the college or university's Gender Action Plan. This could be done through building the activity into your **Student Partnership Agreement** through one off project funding.

NUS Scotland's role in Gender Action Plans

NUS Scotland is working with the Scottish Funding Council as well as other organisations such as Equate Scotland, Equality Challenge Unit and HEA Scotland to support Students' Associations to ensure student engagement in their institution's Gender Action Plans. We'll support Students' Associations to share best practice and to highlight the benefits of student engagement in the Gender Action Plans.

NUS Scotland also has two places on the Gender Governance Group that the Scottish Funding Council has set up to ensure the delivery of the Gender Action Plan. This follows NUS Scotland playing a crucial role in the Gender Steering Group which oversaw the development of the Scottish Funding Council's Gender Action Plan.

NUS Scotland has also put out a call for case studies as part of our **#InspireHerFuture** campaign looking to share the experiences of women currently studying or working in subjects/areas where women are under-represented. Find out more here: www.bit.ly/inspireherfuture.

Resources and ongoing projects

Below we've provided a number of useful resources where you can find additional information that might be useful when working with your institution's Gender Action Plan.

- [Gender Action Plan](#), Scottish Funding Council (SFC)
- [Whose job is it anyway?](#), Higher Education Academy (HEA)
- [Rising to the challenge: How Scotland can recruit, retain and support women in STEM](#), Equate Scotland
- [The Bairn Necessities: Student parents' experiences of education at college and university in Scotland](#), NUS Scotland
- [Liberation and Learning](#), NUS Scotland

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You will also find further useful information on the following websites:

- [NUS Scotland](#)
- [Equate Scotland](#)
- [Higher Education Academy](#)
- [Scottish Funding Council](#)
- [Equality Challenge Unit](#)

Ongoing projects

There are also a number of ongoing projects to support the Gender Action Plan and to provide more insight and evidence into successful approaches to tackling gender imbalance in subjects. These include:

- The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) is working with 10 colleges and 13 universities to increase the participation of under-represented equality groups within HE and FE through the project *Attracting Diversity* focused on widening participation, student recruitment and admissions. Find out more [here](#).
- Robert Gordon University are doing a pilot project to tackle gender imbalance and the University of Stirling are running another pilot project called 'So you want to be in the Professions?'
- The University of Strathclyde are creating a self-assessment toolkit for colleges and universities to look at how they support trans students which is set to be produced in 2017. Find out more [here](#).
- The University of Strathclyde are developing an institutional approach to tackling violence against women and to develop a toolkit for rollout across the university sector with work to develop this for the college sector following.

We'll continue to build on these examples and share best practice as we anticipate a lot of new ideas and activity to be generated over the next few years.

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Checklist: Student engagement in the Gender Action Plans

- 1. Do your research.** To play an active role in developing your institution's Gender Action Plan you need to be well informed, make sure that you have read the Scottish Funding Council's Gender Action Plan and that you've found out about the gender imbalance of subjects at your institution. You can find more background reading in our resources section.
- 2. Get in the right rooms.** To have maximum impact, you need to ensure that you have influence at the right levels. This means involving student representatives at all levels including your course or school representatives, your executive committee and your sabbatical officers.
- 3. Find your allies.** Find out who your allies are in the institution and in the student body and make sure that you're working together to lobby your institution on taking forward their Gender Action Plan obligations.
- 4.** Make sure that **students are consulted** on the Gender Action Plan and that their experiences are taken into consideration when building activities to tackle gender imbalance.
- 5.** Push your institution to **gather better data on why students drop out** from courses in which their gender is under-represented.
- 6.** Encourage your institution to deliver equality and diversity training for all academics and staff **including unconscious bias training**.
- 7.** Use your institution's Gender Action Plan to **help you achieve your campaigning aims** for example adequate childcare provision on campus or demanding that your course materials aren't dominated by one gender.
- 8. Influence the next generation.** Get involved in a student ambassadors programme talking to school pupils about their aspirations as well as our **#InspireHerFuture** campaign to help us find and share examples of inspiring women in under-represented subjects.
- 9.** Push your institution to be **bold and ambitious in developing new approaches** to tackling gender imbalance and make sure that you highlight your involvement in the Gender Action Plans.
- 10.** Consider if there are any elements of the Gender Action Plan that **your Students' Association can help to deliver**.

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