

Enhancing Participation and Overcoming Institutional ‘Happy Talk’: Developing and Applying a Participatory Visual Mapping Technique as part of Research Interviews with Athena SWAN Ireland Charter Team Members.

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The aim of this article is to describe the rationale for developing a bespoke visual mapping technique, which was then applied during research interviews, and to outline reflections based on its use. The interviews were conducted as part of a qualitative research study exploring the embedding of gender equality through the implementation of the Athena SWAN Ireland Charter in three purposively selected Irish universities. The technique was developed and used during research interviews with 26 participants, who were members of institutional Athena SWAN Ireland Charter self-assessment teams (SATs). The purpose of the development and application of a visual mapping technique, described in this article, was to foster more dialogue and enhance agency with research participants during interviews. The interviews were focused on actions being done by the participant as part of the institution-wide Athena SWAN Charter work being implemented in the university. The main findings highlight the usefulness of the technique in facilitating dialogue and enhancing agency with those who engaged with it, as a way to gather data on actions, and to alter power and conversational dynamics within the interview space. Main conclusions point to the usefulness of devising visual mapping methods as part of research interviews that are uniquely designed and aligned with the purpose of the study. The study indicates the relevance of such participatory techniques in advancing equality, diversity and inclusion agendas within higher education institutions, and in contributing to teaching, research and learning praxis.

Keywords: Athena SWAN Ireland Charter; Gender equality; Participatory methodology; Research interviews.

1. Introduction.

Enabling enhanced participant engagement in qualitative research studies has been a concern in the field of research method's scholarship over the years (Denzin 2017; Guba & Lincoln 1994; Braun & Clarke 2022). Within this article, reflections are shared on the process of developing and applying a participatory visual mapping technique in research interviews as part of a qualitative research study, with a view to contributing to research methodological development, as well as teaching and learning praxis.

The purpose of developing and applying the mapping technique was to enhance engagement of participants in research interviews, as well as counter potential leaning into narratives of institutional '*happy talk*' (Ahmed, 2012) or mission speak. This study explored the perceptions of critical actors as key institutional actors - members of Athena SWAN Ireland Charter self-assessment teams (SATs)- in three purposively selected universities in the country. A theoretical framework was developed using feminist institutionalism (Krook & Mackay, 2011) with institutional change theory (Mahoney and Thelen 2010a) for understanding how formal and informal rules and structures interact to undermine, or support, efforts at embedding institutional change for gender equality. The study examined this institutional change process from the perspective of critical actors (O'Mullane & Ní Laoire, 2025) who are tasked with designing and implementing institution-wide Athena SWAN action plans. The study sought to explore the perceptions around the type of institutional change brought into the university as a result of implementing the Athena SWAN Ireland Charter.

The Athena SWAN Ireland Charter is a gender equality programme that advocates for the promotion of women working in higher education in the Irish higher education sector since 2015 (AdvanceHE, 2022). In Ireland, higher education institutions are required to achieve and maintain Athena SWAN Charter accreditation, in order to be eligible for funding from Irish research agencies. SATs are tasked with working together to design and implement an action plan, as part of the Charter's accreditation process.

A novel participatory visual mapping technique was developed as part of the research study. In creating this technique, relevant creative and participatory methodologies were drawn upon to elicit participant subjective perceptions and insights. The rationale for developing and applying the mapping technique, how it was created and used, and findings generated on the use of the technique, will be explored in this article.

1.1 Background.

Undertaking research interviews that allow sufficient space for the participant to speak openly and freely (Heykoop et al., 2025; Godoy et al., 2025), and that allow for overcoming '*happy talk*' or mission speak, is an ongoing concern for qualitative researchers. This issue is pertinent and problematised in the space of diversity, inclusion and gender qualitative research, where the proliferation of mission speak or institutional '*happy talk*' (Ahmed, 2012) flourishes.

When embarking upon this study, two issues were immediately evident. Firstly, eliciting insight in the interview setting on subjective perceptions around Athena SWAN actions that reached beyond the question-and-answer format of traditional interviews was a priority. The intention was to foster a deeper level of dialogue, engagement and participant agency in the process. Secondly, the cohort of people who were to be involved in research interviews worked in a prestigious setting (O'Connor & White, 2021) – a university – speak regularly publicly on matters of the institution. Therefore, a participatory visual mapping technique was developed to capture reflections on Athena SWAN actions and foster enhanced dialogue, in the hope that it might also mediate or counter a drift towards institutional rhetoric or '*happy talk*' during the interview process.

Armed with the author's experience in co-developing reflective techniques for embedding gender equality in European universities (Archibong et al., 2016; Archibong et al., 2017), as well as knowledge of diversity practitioner's work in implementing equality practices (Ahmed 2012; Henderson and Bhopal 2021), a participatory visual mapping technique was designed for use in the interview setting.

1.2 Creating space for enhanced participatory involvement in qualitative research studies.

An important consideration when designing this research study was to create a mapping technique that would provide space for the participant to have an enhanced role within the research interviews (Ross, 2017; McNeilly, Macdonald & Kelly, 2022). Lessons from qualitative research studies have contributed to the development of this mapping technique. Notably, there is a tradition in research studies involving children as participants, that developing interactive and visual participatory methods has demonstrated the importance of providing space for children's voices in an age- and context-appropriate manner. Thomas and O'Kane (1998) and Loveridge et al. (2024) argue that participatory methods with children both enhances the

reliability and validity of the research whilst also giving children control through their involvement in the research process. Designing research methods to enhance the involvement and agency of the participant in the research process, such as research with children using comic-illustrated field notes shows (Tatham-Fashanu, 2023), can result in the participant both exerting greater control over the research process as well as facilitating more in-depth dialogue. This tradition of participatory research methods was drawn upon when designing, developing and applying the visual mapping technique.

1.3 Using creative methods and mapping techniques in qualitative research interviews.

In developing the mapping technique, learnings were sought from existing methodologies, with the goal of designing a technique specific to this research study. To be the best of the author's knowledge, there has been no visual mapping technique developed for a similar study to what will be described in this article.

Creative research methods, although often synonymous with art-based methods, also includes scope for their use and adaptation within traditional qualitative research methods, such as interviews and focus groups (Kara, 2015). In a study exploring the gap between policy and practice in widening participation to higher education across universities in England, Rainford (2020) found that using creative methods with university students, such as drawing tasks, encouraged deeper reflective discussions of everyday issues, increased levels of rapport and trust, and shared engagement in the interview process. The use of creative methods within the interview space stimulated discussion on policy ideas that were ubiquitous within the universities but were interpreted in different ways in different institutions.

Mapping tools have been used in research studies to both elicit information from the participant as well as enable a different form of dialogue and expression in an interactive and visual format (Huot & Laliberte Rudman, 2015).

Catney et al. (2019) used a form of participatory mapping to enable freedom of expression for participants in a study exploring resident's perspectives on defining their neighbourhoods. Messy map interviews (MMI) is an interview tool which enables participants to map relevant elements in a given situation or context (Clarke, Friese & Washburn, 2018). Nordtug (2022) makes some helpful observations based on their use of MMI within a qualitative research study. Firstly, employing mapping techniques in interviews can enhance communication, allowing

participants to '*show and tell*' their reflections in a different format compared to oral interviewing alone. Mapping elicits discussions, reflections and a deeper understanding of narratives (Dobbie, Reith & McConville, 2018), and is a way to complement interviewing methods (Carlos et al., 2019). Secondly, mapping allows for a collection of data that can increase understanding of nuances of the topic under study. Thirdly, the use of mapping in qualitative data collection can alter power dynamics between the participant and interviewer, such as being used to help participants focus on an aspect important to them (Lys et al., 2018) and for researchers to keep the analysis participant-focused (Forbes, 1999). Together the lessons from previous research studies indicates that a visual technique could enable participants to engage more fully and have the opportunity to '*show and tell*' their experience with a visual tool they are creating beyond what is being shared in the traditional question-and-answer research interview context. The development and use of such reflective practice in the current climate of participatory learning environments in higher education contributes the development of such research techniques (Boistrup & Selander, 2021).

Bringing forward this learning to create a bespoke technique, the following outlines the research study that was undertaken in Ireland (O'Mullane, 2021, 2023; O'Mullane & Ní Laoire, 2025), within which a participatory visual mapping technique was developed and employed.

1.4 Exploring the narratives engaged by key actors who are collectively designing and implementing the Athena SWAN Ireland Charter in three universities: A research study.

In 2018 a qualitative case-study research project commenced in Ireland, within a European Commission funded project (GendeResearchIreland) that employed new institutionalist (Mahoney & Thelen 2010b) and feminist institutionalist (Kenny, 2014; Krook & Mackay, 2011) theories to explore the perceptions and narratives of institutional change engaged by teams of individuals working together on the institutional-wide Athena SWAN self-assessment teams (SATs) in three purposively selected Irish universities. The goal of these institutional SATs is to apply for Athena SWAN Ireland Charter (Athena SWAN) accreditation in the form of bronze, silver or gold awards recognizing action on gender equality. After accreditation, the institutions are required to implement the approved Athena SWAN action plan. Following a recommendation of the Expert Group who carried out the National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEA, 2016), research funding from Irish funding bodies is attached to the attainment of Athena SWAN awards in Ireland. This move has opened the sector

up to critiques of gender washing as well as a driver for change (O'Connor, 2025).

The purpose of this research study was to qualitatively explore for the first time in Ireland, perceptions of institutional change instigated, or not, by Athena SWAN Charter work, by the teams of individuals involved in designing and implementing the institution-wide Athena SWAN actions plans, across three purposively selected Irish universities. These three universities comprise the three case studies.

2. Methodology.

The study involved semi-structured interviews with 26 individuals participating on Athena SWAN SATs in three selected Irish universities between 2019 and 2022. It was conducted in University College Cork, Ireland, and received ethics approval from the Social Research and Ethics Committee (SREC) in the university (Approval Number: 2019-048). Interview questions (Appendix 1) were emailed to participants in advance of the interview.

Anonymity and confidentiality were a high priority in this research study because the pool of people on Athena SWAN SATs in Irish universities is relatively small, compared to cohorts across other countries such as the UK and Australia. Participants were also keen that their positions would not be reported in correlation to cases (universities), which were coded as case study 1 (CS1), case study 2 (CS2) and case study 3 (CS3). The reason for this was an apprehension on the part of some participants of being identified in research outputs, with one participant fearful for her job in case these ethical considerations were not adhered to in the study. Therefore, whilst it can be reported that the aggregate participant group included a variety of people working in the cases as Athena SWAN Self-Assessment Team (SAT) members from across different positions and grades, including university officials such as HR officials, academic lecturers and researchers, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) practitioners, and university managers, more specific demographic -apart from gender- and professional data is not reported.

26 participants were included in the study across three universities (Table 1).

Table 1: Research participant data according to gender across the three university case studies

	Gender ratio of research participants	
	Males	Females
Case studies 1, 2 and 3	12	14

Applying the participatory visual mapping technique in the research interviews.

The topic guide for the interviews (Appendix 1) comprised of 14 questions across three main categories, as detailed in the following:

1. **Personal experience-** Questions were asked as to how the participant became a member of the SAT and which actions they were working on as part of the SAT. Often SATs divide work into main activities such as Working Groups on data collection and management, career progression and university culture.
2. **The ongoing process of Athena SWAN-** During this part of the interview, questions were posed by the author and interviewer about the Athena SWAN actions that the participant is working on, in their role on the SAT. Questions were about whether those actions were part of existing university processes, such as a minor extension of career leave policy, or were they entirely new actions brought in as a result of the Athena SWAN Charter, such as gender parity on all interview panels across the university, or a combination of both as adaptation of processes.

After asking these questions for two case studies' participants, a piece of white A4 paper, square cards, glue and a pen were pulled out by the author and interviewer, similar to what is indicated in Figure 1. The participant was asked to reflect once again on the actions they are working on specifically, as part of their role on the SAT, and to write those actions on the square cards – writing one action per square- and to stick the cards with glue somewhere of their choosing between the '*existing processes*' side and '*new processes*' side on the paper. Athena SWAN actions are often discussed in the policy discourse as bringing about change in the form of new processes, policies and actions to transform cultural norms, when experience shows that often Athena SWAN actions, as set out in the action plan, layer upon existing processes and policies (O'Mullane & Ní Laoire, 2025), which can result in incremental change over time, or are not

implemented at all (O'Connor, 2025). What was of interest in applying the interactive technique at this stage in the interview was to unpack further understanding about the participant's perception of the actions they were working on, and whether they perceived those actions as belonging more to existing processes or as new processes brought in under Athena SWAN. The mapping technique also introduced a change in the power dynamics in dialogue, beyond the question-and-answer format.

Once the Covid-19 pandemic hit in 2020 and in-person interviews were not possible, the technique was carried out during online interviews held over Microsoft Teams with participants in one case study, as in-person interviews were held for the other two case studies. Instead of pulling out the hard-copy materials for the mapping exercise, a Word document was displayed to the participant (as seen in Figure 2) that was sent to participants in advance. During the interview the document was opened (Figure 2) and the screen was shared with the participant. They then were in a position to discuss different types of actions and where they could be placed on the electronic sheet. Once the interview was over, the participant sent the completed sheet as a Word document by email. The online interview format did not lend itself as well as in person interviews to this interactive technique. However, the author and interviewer was not familiar at the time with software that could be used to facilitate greater online engagement, such as Miro boards. One interview was held over the phone during this case study, as it was the only format the participant could do at the time, and at the request of the participant, was not recorded. All other interviews were recorded with a dictaphone or Microsoft Teams and were transcribed for analysis.

Figure 1: Materials used for the mapping technique (during in-person interviewing).

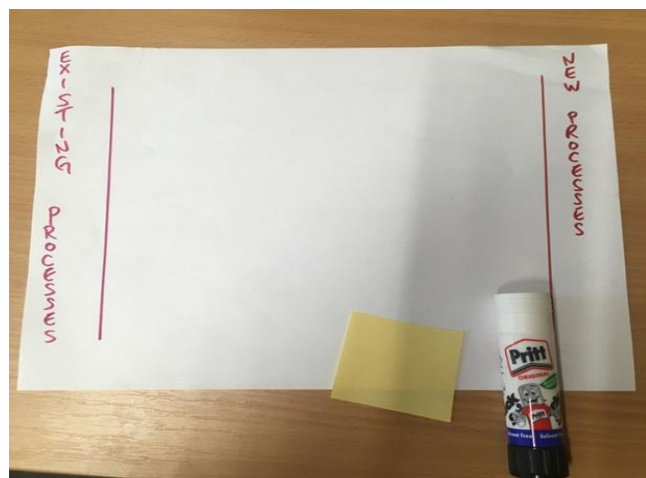
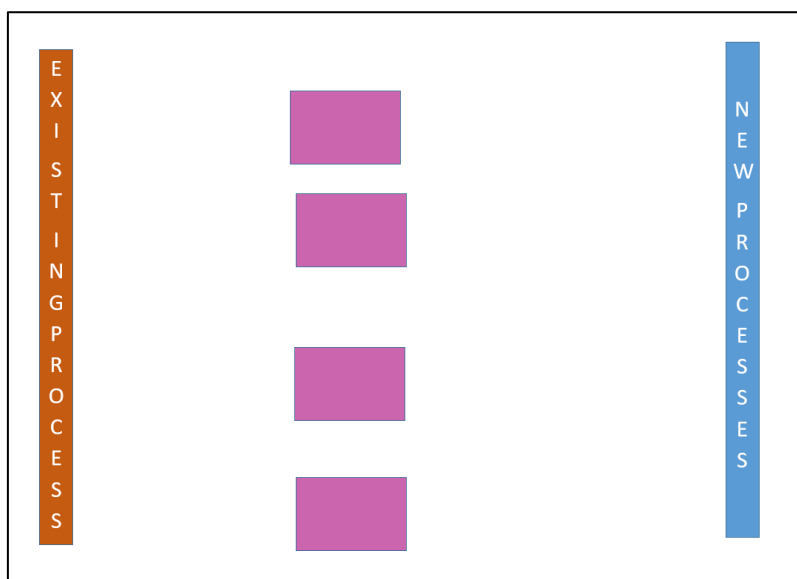


Figure 2: Document with sample square boxes created for carrying out the interactive visual mapping technique (during online interviewing).



3. **The role, position and perception of Athena SWAN-** During this part of the interview questions were asked about the role of senior management in operationalising Athena SWAN actions, whether the participant witnessed masculinist practices in the university, and about the ability of the Charter to disrupt the status quo in universities, or not.

The following describes the findings from the use of the technique in the interview space.

2.1 Findings on applying the visual mapping technique in research interviews.

A number of findings have been elicited on the application of the technique in interviews, as detailed in this section.

2.1.1 Visual mapping techniques can foster greater dialogue, enhanced agency and allow for a collection of data on subjective perceptions of institutional change.

The main finding that emerged from applying the technique during research interviews was that it facilitated further dialogue on the Athena SWAN programme and the actions being undertaken by each participant, with a focus on each individual's contribution and involvement, as opposed to the collective work of the SAT. The mapping technique application did initiate further dialogue and clarification on the types of actions being done, whether those actions have meant a

removal of practices or structures, an adaptation of existing ones, or an introduction of new practices or structures. While engaging with the technique, one participant from one case study reflected on the exercise:

“Yeah it [Athena SWAN Charter] is interesting actually that it’s involved the adding of other things or the amending of a lot of things and not the removal of anything” (A1).

Prior to engaging with the mapping technique, the participant had reflected that very little in terms of new processes had been brought in with Athena SWAN, whereas they placed their actions on the far right on the sheet, by the new processes. This finding highlights potentially some dissonance between understandings and perceptions of participants around the types of actions that Athena SWAN resulted in for the university, whether they are part of existing practices and structures, or are introducing new practices and structures, and the role the technique can play in enabling participants to reflect and clarify their sense-making in the interview.

Some participants recalled actions they are working on immediately and started the technique without haste, some needed more time to recall their actions, and some could not recall any actions from the institutional Athena SWAN action plan and at times asked the interviewer/author what those actions were in their institution’s action plan.

As an example of sense-making with the technique, when completing their mapping technique, one participant spent a great deal of time unpacking the nature of embedding the Athena SWAN actions in the university, pondering as to whether they were more aligned with existing processes, or were they entirely new? In the end, once the participant decided that Athena SWAN has not resulted in the removal of processes or structures, they placed them in the centre of the page to represent more an adaptation of existing and new processes as the following illustrates from the interview:

R I don’t think we ever had structures that absolutely needed removal.

I Yeah.

R But I do think that we had structures that ignored gendered issues, so it meant re-figuring or de-constructing and re-constructing existing processes to take into account issues that were identified in the course of our investigations for Athena SWAN.

I Right.

R So I think we have new additional practices attaching to existing procedures if that makes sense?

(A5)

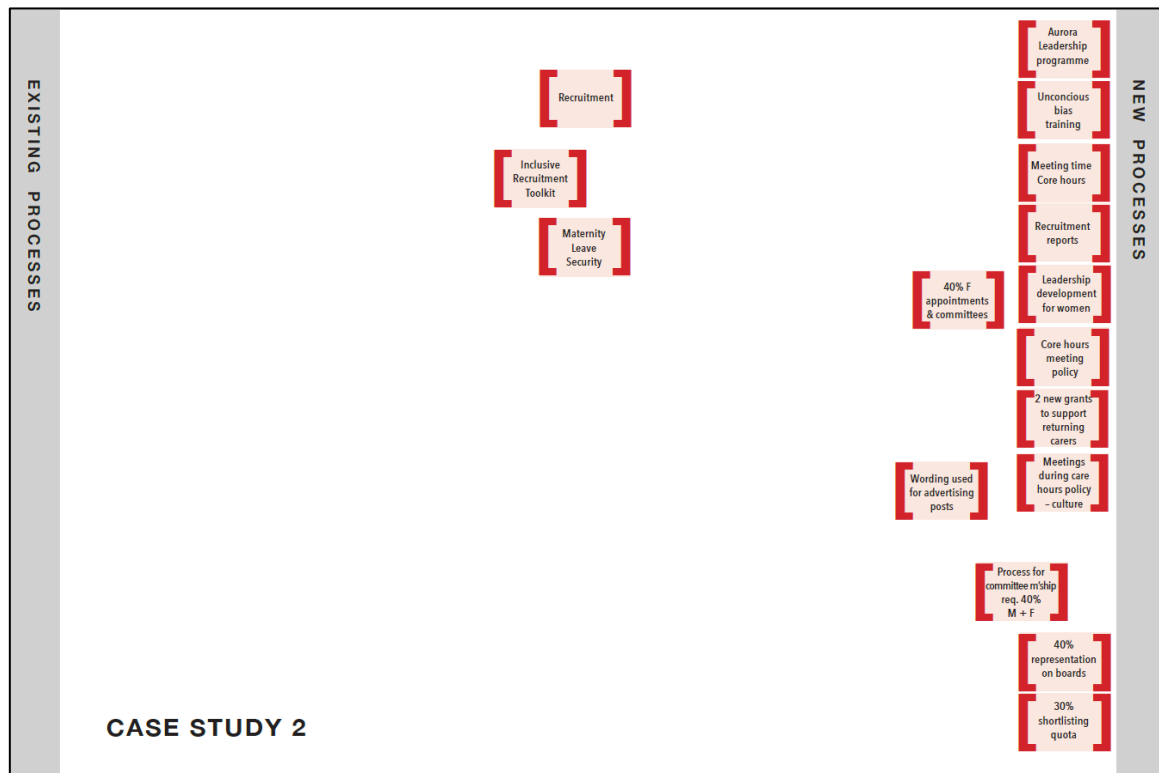
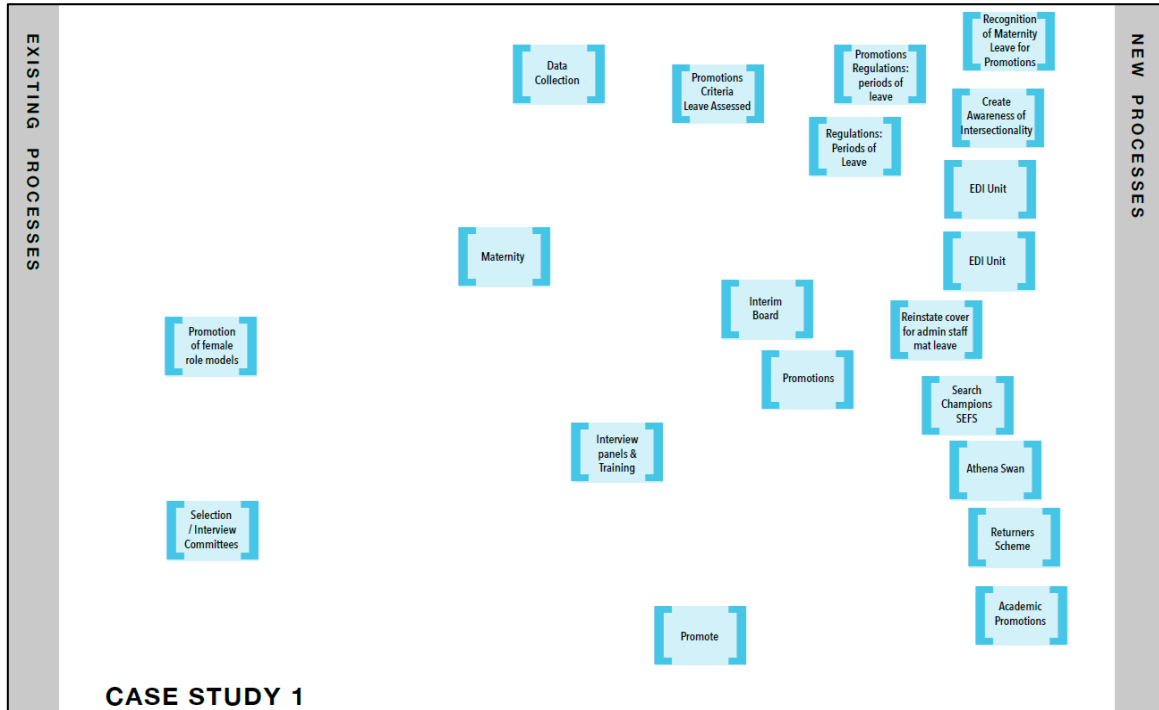
This adaptation of processes, building on existing ones, is a phenomenon of institutional change in higher education, as was found in this study (O'Mullane & Ní Laoire, 2025) and others carried out in Ireland (O'Connor 2020; White & O'Connor 2017; Clavero & Galligan 2020; Bencivenga & Drew 2020). Evidencing this point, the pattern of where the actions are located in the maps in Figure 3 being predominantly on the side of '*existing processes*,' indicates the phenomenon of incremental institutional change as being an adapting of existing processes.

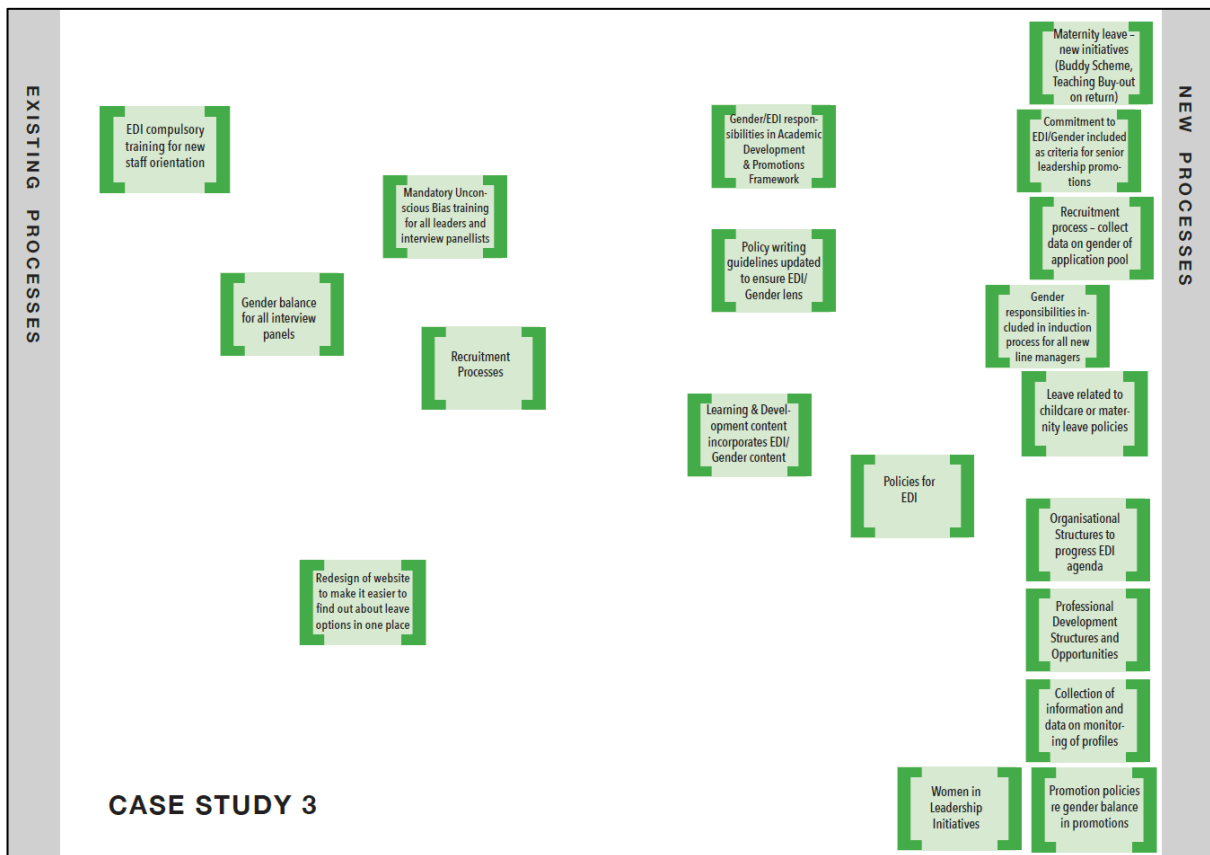
Employing the mapping technique allowed for a collection of data on perceptions of types of actions related to Athena SWAN, whether they are aligned with existing processes or new ones. The data presented in Figure 3 comprises a qualitative collection of responses within each of the three case study universities.

Overall, the interactive nature of the technique changed the conversational tone and atmosphere, shifting to a more relaxed one, breaking for a while beyond the structured conversation of the interview. The technique also allowed for a shift in agency within the interview space, from one where the interviewer had posed all the questions and asked them one at a time, to a changed situation where the participant was the person holding the activity, doing the technique, and driving the task including establishing the time spent on the task.

This finding indicates that such a technique can provide space for participants to reflect further on their work during an interactive portion of the interview, fostering greater dialogue and is an opportunity to collect subjective perceptions around issues being raised in the interview process. Such practice in enhancing reflection and interaction can be further used in teaching, research and learning practice in the higher education environment, in line with current person-centred approaches to engagement (Boistrup & Selander, 2021).

Figure 3: Three maps visualising the data from the case studies 1, 2 and 3 in electronic form (Credit: Designed by Aoife Dorney).





2.1.2 Some participants did not engage in the visual mapping technique.

A number of participants did not engage in doing the mapping technique, namely 9 out of 26 participants, 35% of the sample. Some participants continued with the interview as if the mapping technique was not there or that it was not mentioned at all. Particularly those in senior management positions, the majority of whom were men in the sample, who did not complete the mapping technique (as detailed in O’Mullane, 2023), were speaking so fluently about the culture and strategies within the institution and the ethos and value of Athena SWAN, that they could not or would not break from the stream of institutional ‘happy talk.’ It was evident that this category of participant was not talking about any specific actions, unlike the cohort described in the previous paragraph, and so writing them on pieces of paper and placing them on a map, was a challenge. Clearly, some participants find such an interactive exercise easier to do than others; and to engage in such an exercise, one must have something to recall and write.

This finding also speaks to the nature of senior management’s performative engagement with

Athena SWAN, possibly reflecting critiques around the Charter as gender washing and a statement of commitment than evidence of action (O'Connor, 2025). It may also reflect the notion of institutional peacocking in the neoliberal university as Yarrow and Johnston (2023) suggest, that the badge of Athena SWAN is more significant than knowledge on the part of all teams members responsible for driving actions plans that are context-specific to each institution. The finding that some senior leaders are *'talking the talk'* of Athena SWAN but struggle to recall concrete actions is significant, both methodologically and substantively. This point about *'talking the talk but not necessarily walking the walk'* was raised by a participant when describing the university where they worked, as being a place where senior management's *"innate conservatism makes them uncomfortable with the idea of sudden changes on how things are done"* (A3), when reflecting on why the pace of change is not more transformative with the Athena SWAN Charter. This reflection is also aligned with the dominance of Athena SWAN actions set on the side of *'existing processes'* in the Figure 3 maps, as opposed to bringing in new changes. Overall, the non-engagement of senior management in recalling specific actions that they are leading on highlights the gap between rhetoric and practice in the context of gender equality in higher education, a key issue in institutional change given the vital role leaders play in instigating long-term and sustainable change; senior management must be cognisant of the change agenda that they are leading (Hodgins, O'Connor & Buckley 2022; Kenny 2014; Mackay 2020).

3. Discussion.

Creating and applying the mapping technique contributed a new way of mapping subjective perceptions of research participants in the study.

The purpose of the mapping technique within the research interviews' space was to understand further how participants perceive Athena SWAN actions: as resulting in a removal of practices and structures, an adaptation of existing practices and structures, or an introduction of new ones, or a mixture of everything. The mapping technique did allow for the dialogue to continue in more depth on the participant's actions that they worked on, and where on the spectrum do the actions go, from the perspective of the participant. This reflective process was teased out further while the participant did the exercise. The technique fostered greater deliberation and an unpacking of types of Athena SWAN Charter actions that are being brought into the university.

For those doing the interviews online, a greater proportion did not complete the technique, namely 57% in one case, compared to 27% in another and 22% in another. At the time of the online interviews, the research study was being undertaken while the author and interviewer was working from home during pandemic lockdowns. It was difficult to adapt the mapping technique for online interview use during the pandemic lockdown era in a way that was engaging for participants. The lesson here is that such interactive exercises need to be appropriately adapted for an online space during virtual interviews, as well as in person.

It was the hope that the mapping technique would enable participants who would engage in institutional rhetoric or '*happy talk*' to break with the language of mission speak and engage in an interactive way with the technique. However, it was clear that those engaged in such dialogue spoke unabated in the language of the institution, never coming out of "*telling a happy story of the institution that is at once a story of the institution as happy*" (Ahmed, 2012, p.10). However, they spoke little in specific detail about the actions of the Charter. This lack of detail meant engaging in the exercise was always going to be a challenge, and it did result in non-engagement in the mapping activity. Fully admitting naivety on the part of this qualitative researcher, it was difficult to fully expect that a participant who sits on an SAT would not to be familiar with the actions they are involved in operationalising, or to speak in such vagueness as to render participation with such a technique as non-viable. However, employing the technique in the interviews highlighted the lack of knowledge at senior management positions in the core work of the Charter. This finding suggests that whilst senior management may 'talk the general talk' of Athena SWAN, particularly pertinent in Ireland given the financial tie between research funding and Athena SWAN accreditation in Irish higher education, their knowledge of basic actions being carried out in the Charter work was lacking. This behaviour was also observed by a participant when reflecting on senior management in their university, noting that they "*present a manically happy face*" (A1), which can be inferred as institutional '*happy talk*,' when talking publicly about the Athena SWAN Charter.

The use of the mapping technique was a welcome change in format during the interview space and allowed for a discussion of issues and an unpacking of nuances underpinning the embedding of gender equality through the Athena SWAN Charter. Using the mapping technique altered the power dynamics between interviewer and participant, allowing the participant to focus on actions they were most familiar with and could reflect most on in the interview, thus enhancing their agency within the research space.

3.1 Methodological limitations.

A number of methodological limitations arose during the undertaking of this research study. When implementing the mapping technique in the interviews, the voluntary nature of doing the exercise and the uneven engagement in this technique across the cases means that conclusions drawn from the data generated is limited as to the generalisability of findings. Also, the potential impact of the interviewer and author's positionality as a woman academic researcher working in the sector on the conduct of the interviews and on the application of the mapping technique with participants is a factor of consideration when assessing the rigor in the research conduct.

3.2 Implications from the study for teaching, research and learning in higher education.

The research study has important implications for teaching, research and learning in higher education beyond the study of the Athena SWAN Charter in Ireland. The current higher education sector's focus on fostering participatory learning environments, student-centred learning, inclusive education and curriculum co-design can adopt relevant learnings from this study and others that seek to develop and use techniques that enhance dialogue (McKenna & Martin, 2014), reflection (Ali, 2022), participant agency (Kortegast et al. 2019) and mediate a disruption of institutional rhetoric (Quinlivan, 2017). The multifocality of reflective practice across research methods and teaching practices, and the relevance of learnings across both contexts, can be enhanced further so that research continues to inform teaching and learning, and vice versa (Boistrup & Selander, 2021).

4. Conclusion.

The research study described in this article involved the development and application of a mapping technique that fostered more dialogue and enhanced agency with research participants during the interviews. It also sought to unpack subjective perceptions and key narratives of individuals responsible for designing and implementing Athena SWAN action plans in Ireland. Overall, the exercise worked well in the research interview setting. It allowed for a greater depth of deliberation on key issues and concepts, unpacking the nuances and understandings around Athena SWAN actions in instigating types of institutional change, highlighted a finding on non-engagement on the part of the participant in doing the technique

while engaging in a research interview, and the need to adapt such exercises for both the in-person and virtual space. Finally, learnings generated from this study contribute to advancing methodological repertoire used in qualitative research studies, which is also relevant for enhanced student-centred and participatory teaching and learning praxis in higher education.

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Appendix 1: Research interview questions included in the topic guide.**1. Your own personal experience.**

- a. How did you come to be a member of the Athena SWAN self-assessment team (SAT)? Which Athena SWAN actions are you working on, and how is it going for you?

2. Ongoing process of Athena SWAN.

- b. Keeping in mind the work you do as part of Athena SWAN, can you tell me how it works with existing processes?
- c. How have existing practices changed?
- d. How would you describe the structure of the university? Does this context you've described help or hinder implementing the Athena SWAN actions?
- e. Thinking about your work on Athena SWAN and as a member of the SAT, would you say that the implementing of the actions has meant a removal of existing structures or practices and an introduction of new ones?
- f. Would you say Athena SWAN actions require different ways of working? Do you rely on informal ways (social capital, social networks) of working to implement the actions you're involved with? Or not at all?
- g. Do you think the fact that Athena SWAN awards are tied to research funding from research bodies is a driver for the process now?

3. The role, position and perception of Athena SWAN.

- h. How do you think the gender topic is perceived by senior management? Does that help or hinder the Athena SWAN process?
- i. Do you think that senior management is engaged with all levels of staff in operationalising Athena SWAN actions? Would you describe the Athena SWAN process as top-down, bottom-up, or both?
- j. Are you aware of masculinist practices and culture in this institution?
- k. Can you think of any people championing the Athena SWAN process and actions? Are those people in positions of seniority?
- l. How do you see the potential, and reality, of Athena SWAN as a way of bringing about meaningful change?
- m. Based on your experience, do you feel the Athena SWAN process is challenging the status quo or maintaining it in terms of gender equality?
- n. Leaving aside the Athena SWAN process, what would you like to see done in addressing gender inequality and how could you see it happening?