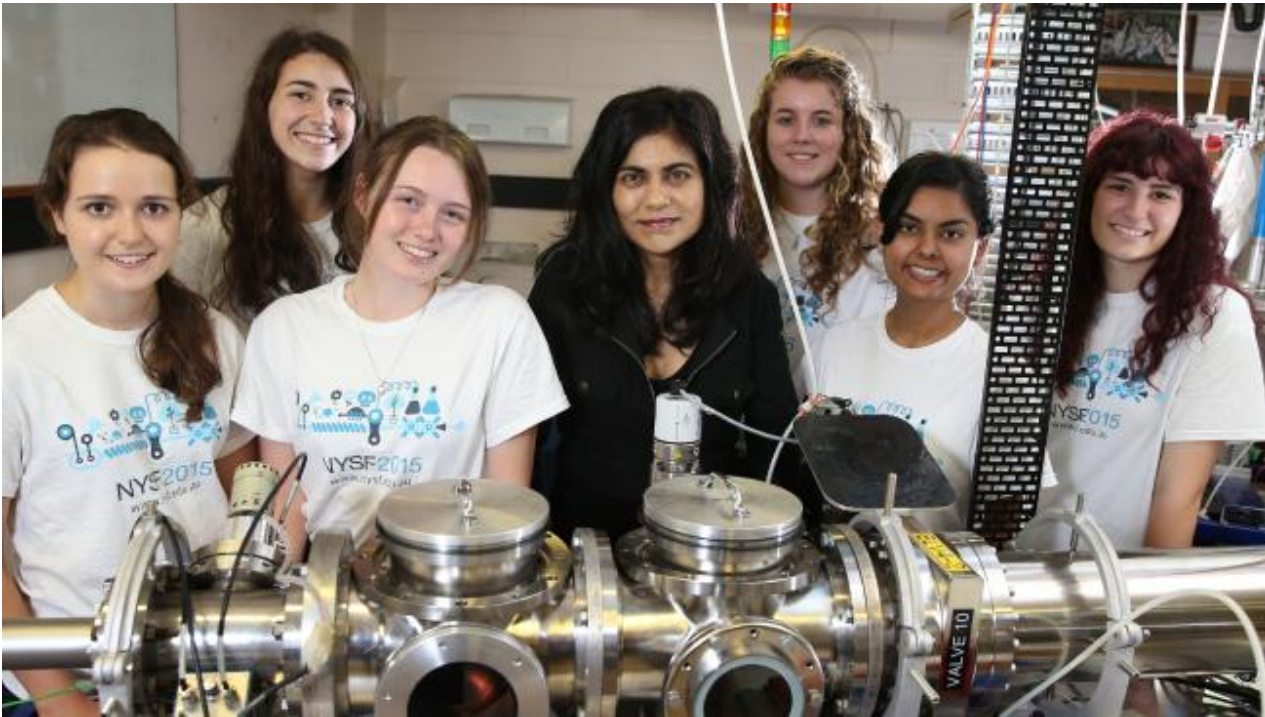


## THE AUSTRALIAN

# Imagine that: Veena Sahajwalla's 50:50 gender split for science

ROSIE LEWIS THE AUSTRALIAN JANUARY 15, 2015 12:00AM



Veena Sahajwalla in Canberra yesterday with, from left, Elyse Gambell, Molly Orr, Emma Wignell, Holly Coyte, Ananya Sangla and Sarah Skitt. Picture: Gary Ramage

**VEENA Sahajwalla likes to define the future, and with the start of a new internship program targeted at Year 12 girls the scientist hopes more young students will join her.**

Science 50:50 was launched at the Australian Institute of Sport last night, giving a handful of girls interested in science, technology, engineering and mathematics the chance to gain practical experience in the sector.

The program will offer internships, access to mentors and even university scholarships in a bid to make half the nation's scientists and technologists female.

Professor Sahajwalla — a past winner of *The Australian's* Innovation Challenge — has used \$50,000 in government funding given to her as an Australian Research Council Laureate Fellow to kickstart the program.

“Having something targeted at young women is going to be so critical,” Professor Sahajwalla said. “It’s an open slather in terms of whatever you want to try and do.”

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There was “absolutely no doubt” Australia was falling short in encouraging girls to take up science. “We have to get them to choose the hard sciences, but also for the girls to actually see what kind of career path exists. I don’t want young girls to cut off their imagination at that point.”

Mount Barker Community College Year 12 student Sarah Skitt is in Canberra as part of the National Youth Science Forum and, until yesterday, had not thought about the gender gap.

The 17-year-old wants to study zoology or sleep science and, after learning about the 50:50 program, has been inspired to promote sciences to girls at her school near Albany in Western Australia.

“In my generation I’ve always seen women in science, but I had one of my friends today tell me her teacher told her to quit physics because she was a girl,” she said. “A lot of girls think they’re not going to be good enough at science, but all you have to be is interested.”

The ARC’s Aidan Byrne was “very concerned” about numbers of women across research domains, particularly science. “What Veena’s trying to do is specifically address this link,” he said. “If I look at my distributions of who’s applying to us for funds, something like 25 per cent are applicants that are female and 75 per cent male.”

*Visit [science.unsw.edu.au](http://science.unsw.edu.au) for more details about Science 50:50*



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