

Athena SWAN – the new format

Peter Clarkson

*School of Mathematics, Statistics and Actuarial Science
University of Kent, Canterbury*

HoDoMS Conference
April 2017

University of
Kent



My Background

- Chair of the SMSAS Athena SWAN committee
- Member of the University of Kent's Athena SWAN working group
- University of Kent's Athena SWAN Champion 2016
- Member of the LMS Women in Mathematics committee since 2007
- Member of the LMS Good Practice Scheme steering committee since 2009, chair since 2013
 - * Developed the LMS Good Practice Scheme
 - * Commissioned a report "*Advancing women in mathematics: good practice in UK university departments*", which was launched at the House of Commons in 2013
 - * Organises workshops to provide departments with knowledge and tools they can use to improve recruitment, retention and progression of women in Mathematics, including assisting departments with Athena SWAN applications
- Member of nine Athena SWAN panels, chaired four panels
- Member of the ECU's Athena SWAN Advisory Group

Mathematical Science Departments

- Four Mathematical Science departments have Athena SWAN **Silver** awards
 - * University of Exeter (Department of Mathematics & Computer Science)
 - * Loughborough University (Mathematical Sciences Department & Mathematics Education Centre)
 - * Queen's University Belfast (School of Mathematics & Physics)
 - * University of Reading (School of Mathematical & Physical Sciences)
- Thirty-Seven Mathematical Science departments have Athena SWAN **Bronze** awards
- Fifty-three Mathematical Science departments and five CDTs are Good Practice Scheme members

Athena SWAN Charter

Recognising advancement of gender equality: representation, progression and success for all.

ECU's Athena SWAN Charter was established in 2005 to encourage and recognise commitment to advancing the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM) employment in higher education and research.

In May 2015 the charter was expanded to recognise work undertaken in arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law (AHSSBL), and in professional and support roles, and for trans staff and students. The charter now recognises work undertaken to address gender equality more broadly, and not just barriers to progression that affect women.

Athena SWAN awards

Bronze Department award

- Identified particular challenges
- Planned activities for the future

Silver Department award

- Significant record of activity and achievement
- Identified particular challenges and implemented activities
- Demonstrating impact of implemented activities

Gold Department award

- Significant sustained progression and achievement
- Beacons of achievement in gender equality
- Champions of Athena SWAN and good practice

Athena SWAN Award

- Athena SWAN is about the **recruitment, retention** and **progression** of women and you need to bring this out in your submission.
- Although successful submissions are on the internet, you don't know which parts a panel thought were good and which were not so good.
- An Athena SWAN award does **not** depend on the numbers of women.
- Having an above average number of women does **not** guarantee a successful application and conversely, having a below average number of women does **not** prevent an award being made.
- For **Silver** awards, the panels interpreted these as activities that had been happening over a period of time (years), with **evidenced, measurable** effect.

Changes to the Athena SWAN process

There is new guidance outlining improvements to the Athena SWAN process. The key changes are:

- **The appeals process:** an appeals process has been developed, however, disagreement with the panel's decision is not grounds for appeal. Appeals can be made if the department believes the procedure has been unfair (i.e. there has been a substantial failure to adhere to the published procedure) or if the decision was manifestly unreasonable (i.e. irrelevant information was taken into account).
- **Right to withdraw an award:** the ECU can withdraw an award if it comes to light that information presented in the application is false or misleading, or that the applicant no longer satisfies the requirements of the award. Information identified or received must be independently verified and/or be from a credible source.
- **HoD statement:** within the letter from the Head of Department, there must be a statement confirming that the qualitative and quantitative data and information presented in the application is “an honest, accurate and true representation of the department”.

New sections in the Post-May 2015 application forms

- **Professional Services staff:** there are sections for Silver award applicants relating to the induction, promotion, training, appraisal and career progression support available to professional services staff.
- **Technical staff:** applicants for Silver awards should discuss whether there is support available for technical staff to transition into academic or research roles.
- **Support for grant applications:** the section on career development has been made clearer and more detailed (for example, there are now separate sections for training, appraisal and support for academic career progression). There is an additional section requiring departments to evidence how they support staff applying for research grants and fellowships.
- **HR policies:** describe how the department communicates and monitors consistent implementation of HR policies; particularly policies relating to equality and diversity and dignity at work.

- **Transition from part-time to full-time:** explain the provision available to staff to return to full-time after a period of part-time working following a career break.
- **Participation in influential external committees:** discuss how staff are encouraged to participate in external committees.
- **Visibility of role models:** explain how gender is considered when organising events and seminars, in publicity materials and websites.
- **REF:** comment on the gender balance of staff entered into the REF2014 compared to the RAE2008.
- **Intersectionality:** there is not a new section specifically on intersectionality, but departments should comment and reflect on the role of the intersectionality where relevant throughout the application. At Silver level, departments should provide an explanation of actions and any impact in this area. In the first instance, the ECU are expecting departments to discuss the intersection between gender and ethnicity. The Equalities Team are developing tools and advice on intersectionality for departments.

Additional data requirements

- **Contract function:** where a department has 20 staff or more, data should be presented by contract type – research only, teaching only, or research and teaching roles.
- **REF data:** applicants need to present the gender balance of staff entered into the REF2014 and compare this to data from the RAE2008. This data will need to be produced at department level.
- **Maternity data requirements:** applications for Silver awards are now expected to provide information on the maternity return rate 6, 12 and 18 months after return from maternity leave.
- **Zero-hours contracts:** as well as data on fixed-term and permanent members of staff, departments are now required to present data on zero-hours contracts. It is likely that this will need to be discussed with each department to understand particular issues/contexts before data is provided by HR.

Improvements and clarifications

- **Reduced repetition**: some sections of the application form have been moved or edited to avoid repetition or confusion.
- **Award validity and action plans**: currently, successful applications last for 3 years from the point the department receives their award results from the ECU. Applications under the Post-may 2015 scheme will last for 4 years from the submission deadline. This means that action plans must span 4 years – rather than the current requirement for 3-year action plans.
- **Word count**: word limits have been increase (10,500 for Bronze, 12,000 for Silver). There are now no specific word counts for each section so words can be spread across the application.
- **Consultation**: consultation with staff is now expected rather than recommended within department applications. Consultation could include the analysis of the department data from the university-wide staff survey, running internal surveys, holding focus groups or discussions at staff meetings.
- **Self Assessment Teams**: the ECU now stipulate that SATs must meet at least 3 times per year, and students should be members of the SAT.

Improvements to process

- Applicants have right to appeal decision – application may be put to new panel
- Applicants may object to specific panellists
- Mechanism for raising objections to assessment or award
- ECU may put application to new panel if the moderator concerned about recommended decision
- Chair training
- More complete guidance in new ECU Athena SWAN handbook

Impact v Progress

- Impact is not the same as having taken action
- Need to show effect that activity has had effect on gender equality
- **Progress**: A department runs an annual promotions workshop, which after a year has reached 100% staff
- **Impact**: As a result of these workshops, promotion success rate has increased
- **Progress** = **Bronze renewal**
- **Impact** = **Silver**

In addition to the future planning required for Bronze recognition, Silver awards recognise that the applicant has **taken action** in response to previously identified challenges and **can demonstrate the impact of these actions**

Athena SWAN Panel

Athena SWAN panels consist of four individuals, with a breadth of experience and geographical location, together with a Chair, together with a moderator and note taker from the ECU.

- Each panel considers about 5 submissions during the day.
- It takes 2–3 hours to read each one thoroughly, with about an hour spent on each application in the panel meeting.
- Panellists are given a handbook and assessment guidance and refer to these for clarification of what evidence submissions are required to demonstrate for each level of award.
- All panelists undertake online training, panel chairs attend a training workshop.
- At most panels there are also observers.

The Panel Meeting

The principles of the assessment panel meetings are that:

- Only information contained within the submissions is taken into consideration in coming to a decision
- The reference point for decisions is the criteria in the awards handbook
- Where possible, panel decisions should be reached by consensus (though majority decisions are accepted)
- The Chair gives their opinion after everyone else

Athena SWAN invite panellists with an academic background in the subject area of the submissions under consideration so they may offer insight into specific issues that the discipline as a whole might face.

Panellists do **not**:

- Introduce any personal knowledge of a department or individuals within a department to the discussion if it is not contained within the submission document
- Give personal opinions on a department or individuals within a department if it is not based on information contained within the submission document

Baseline data and analysis

- The panel is sent copies of the applications in **black and white**, so **colour** diagrams are not as effective and in some cases were quite difficult to read. The panel is also sent electronic versions.
- If you want the panel to consider a colour version of your application, then you have to send the relevant number of copies of it to the ECU.
- Analyse your data **honestly**. The panels liked (and commended), applications that were very honest, sometimes brutally honest, in their assessment of the current situation.
- If the data is bad, then it's **essential** to comment on it rather than say nothing. It's better to just admit it and say what actions you're going to take to address the issue.
- Be **consistent** when comparing your data to that of other departments in your discipline. Either compare your data to the national average, or compare with a set of comparator universities (with reasons). One application seemed to choose a different set of comparators for each set of data and the panel was not amused!
- Do **not** make the diagrams too complicated. Some members of the panel might not be very numerate!

1. Letter of endorsement from Head of Department

- Should show the Head of Department is involved and engaged in the Athena SWAN work and aware of the issues, both locally and nationally.
- Should include one or two examples of good practice, ideally with regard to the **recruitment**, **retention** and/or **progression** of women.
- Illustrate how Athena SWAN has become an **embedded part** of the department.
- Highlight that the Head of Department will ensure the resources are in place to deliver the action plan.
- Ideally the Head of Department's letter should talk about a **strategic vision**, but few do!
- Within the letter from the Head of Department, there must be a statement confirming that the qualitative and quantitative data and information presented in the application is “an honest, accurate and true representation of the department”.
- **First impressions matter!** The Head of Department's letter is the first thing a panel members reads, so get this right and you will make a strong impression!

2. Description of the department

- A brief description of the department including any relevant contextual information.
- If there are different groups within the department of different natures then the data should be separated out for each group.
- Data on the total number of academic staff, professional and support staff and students by gender. These are just an overview; detailed data is given in §4.

3. Self-assessment process

- Does the Self-Assessment Team (SAT) have a diverse membership?
- When was the Team formed and how often does it meet?
- What wider consultation has taken place?
- Is there evidence of engagement and support for the Athena SWAN Charter at a senior level?
- For applications for **Bronze** awards, is there evidence of a commitment to culture change in the department which will affect staff at all levels?
- For application for **Silver** awards, is there evidence of real culture change in the department which affects staff at all levels?
- It is very important that the senior management team of the department is seen to be **fully engaged** with the process (and be represented on the SAT).
 - * Is the SAT represented in the senior management team?
 - * Is the SAT involved in the promotion process, e.g. a member of the SAT is on the department's promotion committee?
- What are the plans for the future of the SAT?

4. Picture of the department

- There was a feeling that many applications were too complacent/placid about what the current structures/situation was without any attempt to consider trying to change things if that would be helpful. There was a need to be seen to be taking or planning pro-active actions.
- The panels really wanted an **honest assessment** of where the department is and were not happy if they thought applications were trying to hide something or were just too complacent.
- The data does need to be complete and well presented – and then (very importantly) there needs to be **honest reflection** on what the data is saying, what the **key issues** are and what **actions are proposed** to try and address the issues. The panels really liked an application that cross-referenced the action plan in the main text.

5. Supporting and advancing women's careers

• Recruitment:

- * What is done to encourage women to apply?
- * Are you **pro-active** in the recruitment of women? If so how?
- * How do you know if representative number of men and women apply for posts?
- * What happens if there are no women to be interviewed?
- * What is the interview procedure? Do interviewees visit the department and meet members of staff (other than the interview panel)?
- * What input do members of the department have in the appointment process? Do members of the department attend the presentations and give feedback?
- * Does the appointment panel have both female and male members?
- * Is there a female member of the department on the appointment panel?
- * Has the appointment panel undertaken **Equality & Diversity** and **Unconscious Bias** training? Is this mandatory or optional?

● Retention:

- * What support is given to new members of staff on probation?
- * Do staff on probation have a mentor?
- * Do staff on probation have reduced teaching loads?

● Progression:

- * How are promotion candidates identified and supported?
- * Is there a **pro-active** system whereby staff are encouraged to apply?
- * What are the schemes to support candidates for promotion such as workshops and mentoring?
- * Does the department organise events **in addition** to what the university or faculty organise?
- * Are there any specific actions aimed at women, and if there are what are they?
- * Having the department's promotion committee look at all CVs annually was seen to be a good thing to do

Some Important Issues

- **Induction:** What is in place for new staff?
- **Appraisal:** How often does it happen? Who does it? What does it cover?
- **Committees:** Careful placing of women on strategic committees is important, particularly important for departments with very few women.
- **Workload model:** Is this clear and transparent?
- **Timing of meetings, colloquia and seminars:** Are these in ‘core hours’, e.g. 10am-4pm?
- **Outreach:** Who does it? Included in the workload model?
- **Flexibility:** Can staff request flexible working (“family friendly lecture times”)?
- **Maternity leave:** How is the teaching covered? Do staff take KIT days? If so, how are these used? What are the procedures when staff return?
- **Paternity leave:** What is the take-up?

6. Case studies

For **Silver** department recognition, 2 case studies are required.

- The Case Studies should illustrate the individuals experiences in the department.
- How have the department's policies affected the individual concerned?
- Make sure the Case Studies are honest and talk about the good, the bad and the ugly — especially if you have actions in place to tackle the bad.

7. Further Information

- This is a section which gives you an opportunity to say something (relevant) which has not been said elsewhere.

Action plan

- An Action Plan should be **SMART** (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely).
- Actions should go beyond **monitoring** and have **measurable outcomes**.
- Action plans should have **concrete, realistic targets**.
- Actions should **not** be front-loaded, rather spread throughout the duration of the award.
- Include a **Timeline diagram**.
- Embed references to Action Plan items in the main part of application to illustrate how an issue is to be addresses. These are **not** included in the word count.

What makes a good application?

- An **honest reflection** of the data, situation and challenges
- An analysis of the data which **reflects** not just repeats what the data says. Athena SWAN panels frequently criticise applications for “lack of reflection and analysis”
- A pragmatic, evidence-based and data-driven approach to the issues
- Evidence of being **pro-active** rather than **reactive**
- An Action Plan that goes beyond **monitoring**, has **measurable outcomes** and addresses the issues that have been identified

Some common errors

- The SAT chair is a junior female academic
- The SAT has no male professors
- The gender balance of the SAT is very different from that on other committees in the department
- The HoD letter does not state that resources will be provided to support Athena SWAN
- The use of the word “monitor” in the Action Plan
- “Our data is better than the national average, therefore we have no action planned”
- “The data is not statistically significant so no conclusions can be drawn and no action is planned”
- “Our recruitment data illustrate no clear gender bias at the point of invitation to interview or appointment, therefore no action is planned”

Assistance

- The ECU produces annual statistical reports which are designed for use by Athena SWAN applicants
- ECU hold workshops for unsuccessful applicants
- LMS Good Practice Scheme steering committee is keen to assist Mathematical Science departments who don't have an Athena SWAN award, in particular those who made unsuccessful applications, through an Athena SWAN mentor.
- LMS Good Practice Scheme steering committee has introduced a “buddy scheme” for departments who are applying to upgrade an Athena SWAN **Bronze** award to an Athena SWAN **Silver** award
- ECU Athena SWAN and LMS Good Practice Scheme websites
<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/>
<https://www.lms.ac.uk/women/good-practice-scheme>

Some Challenges

- Getting engagement with the Athena SWAN agenda from senior (male) members of the School; in my School several (younger) male members have children of school age and have partners who work away from Canterbury
- Getting accurate data from the University; in my School we keep a record of some of the important data, in particular with regard to recruitment and promotion
- Complacency; e.g. thinking that having some female members of staff is sufficient. One application stated that 10% of their professors were female (1 out of 10), which is above the national average and said that they were doing fine!
- A “blokeish” culture; e.g. “our seminars have always been at 4pm”

Some SMSAS Initiatives

- All committees have female (and male) members
- Appointment panels and PhD selection panels include female (and male) academics from the SMSAS
- Short-listed candidates are invited to visit the School the day before interview and meet members of staff
- SMSAS staff on probation have assigned mentors and probation supervisors, neither of whom is a member of the SMSAS promotion committee, and have enhanced research funding
- The SMSAS promotion committee, chaired by the HoS with female and male members of the professoriate, identifies future promotion candidates, provides objective evaluations of each case and gives support to staff applying for promotion

SMSAS Initiatives (cont.)

- SMSAS female professors have minimal School administrative duties to reflect that female professors are frequently asked to other duties for the faculty, university and externally
- The SMSAS holds termly lunches with an Athena SWAN theme for discussion; the theme for the Autumn term lunch was “promotion”, the theme for the Spring term lunch was “unconscious bias”
- Academic staff are given a form annually to request constraints on teaching hours
- Reduced teaching load and additional research funding for staff returning from maternity leave. The teaching has to be approved by the Chair and Vice-chair of the School’s EDI committee.
- Fixed-term staff are employed to cover maternity leave
- The SMSAS extends EPSRC First Grants (a 14-month PDRA position is extended to 2 years)

Cambridge Special Scheme

Donor who wanted to support women in mathematics in Cambridge. He chose a scheme, in collaboration with Murray Edwards College to support a lectureship in pure mathematics for a women

Cambridge Special Scheme

Donor who wanted to support women in mathematics in Cambridge. He chose a scheme, in collaboration with Murray Edwards College to support a lectureship in pure mathematics for a women

Advert. The post involves research and other activities aimed at promoting women's participation and achievement in Mathematics. The successful applicant will have a genuine interest and commitment to developing the role of women in mathematics, and an interest in establishing innovative, evidence based programmes that will target women at all levels (school and college, University and beyond). In addition, the successful candidate will need to demonstrate the potential to be a strong role model to female mathematicians

Cambridge Special Scheme

Donor who wanted to support women in mathematics in Cambridge. He chose a scheme, in collaboration with Murray Edwards College to support a lectureship in pure mathematics for a women

Advert. The post involves research and other activities aimed at promoting women's participation and achievement in Mathematics. The successful applicant will have a genuine interest and commitment to developing the role of women in mathematics, and an interest in establishing innovative, evidence based programmes that will target women at all levels (school and college, University and beyond). In addition, the successful candidate will need to demonstrate the potential to be a strong role model to female mathematicians

Result. They also advertised two other positions and encouraged those applying for the Murray Edwards Scheme to apply for the other posts as well. They appointed two women and one man!

Professor Paul Walton



- Former Head of the Department of Chemistry, University of York
- Department of Chemistry, University of York was the first department to receive an Athena SWAN **Gold** award in 2007 under Paul's leadership
- Shortlisted for the WISE Man of the Year Award 2016

Paul Walton's Policy Guidelines

- Membership of key committees
- Open management
- Effective dissemination
- “Inclusiveness” committee
- Resource allocation during leave
- PDRA development officer
- Flexible working practices (annualised hours, part-time)
- Scheduling of meetings in core hours
- Inclusive departmental social activities
- Day to day behaviour

‘When language switched from being focused on women to being about “fairness”, men were much more eager to engage with the issues.’

Paul Brennan, a Reader in the Institute of Cancer and Genetics at Cardiff University, wrote an interesting article “Women in STEM: four steps to a stronger Athena Swan application” which appeared the Guardian

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/higher-education-network/blog/2013/apr/18/athena-swan-application-women-academia>

- “Does winning an Athena Swan award mean you are running a better department or university? To be honest, I’m not sure. To win a **Bronze** award, in the first instance, you need to analyse your data and make good plans for the future. But to renew this requires continued commitment”.
- “The key difference between silver and bronze seems to be a department that has shown demonstration of **impact**. ‘Impact’ is a very fashionable word at the moment. In this case it means that change is being put in place, reviewed and making a difference. Examples include increased staff satisfaction, increased uptake of flexible working or training and increased knowledge of Athena Swan principles. In many cases, these are not tremendously difficult things to achieve”.
- “My concern is that Athena SWAN applications, like REF and other assessments, encourages us to focus on ‘looking’ good. A colleague suggested that if universities spent more time focusing on ‘being’ good, we wouldn’t have to spend so much time on appearances”.