

The New Athena SWAN Charter and preparing for Silver

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University of
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My Background

- Chair of the SMSAS Athena Swan committee (2011-2020) and led our successful applications for **Bronze** award (2014) & **Silver** award (2018).
- Member of more than 20 Athena Swan panels, and chaired 7 panels. Currently a reviewer on Athena Swan panels.
- Member of the LMS Women in Mathematics committee 2007–2015; member of the Good Practice Scheme steering committee 2009–2018 (chair 2013–2018).
- Given presentations about Athena Swan at various events.
- Advised over 20 UK Mathematical Science departments about their Athena Swan applications, and universities in Australia and Ireland.
- At the University of Kent, I was Head of School (1998–2001, 2013–2015) and Head of Mathematics (1996–1998, 2003–2013).
- Awarded LMS Senior Anne Bennett prize in 2020 for “work to support gender equality in UK mathematics”.

Athena Swan Panel

Typically a panel has a chair and five reviewers, drawn from a network of about 20 chairs and 60 reviewers, as well as a moderator from Advance HE. These are virtual panels on Zoom.

- Each panel considers about 4–6 applications.
- For each application, three reviewers are nominated to speak to it, who send written feedback and their scores to Advance HE two weeks before the panel, which are then circulated.
- The first reviewer presents a summary of the independent assessments of the application, outlining key strengths and weaknesses and highlighting areas of agreement and disagreement amongst the panel.
- The other two reviewers highlight any key issues that have been missed.

Panellists do **not**:

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

Criteria for a **Bronze award**

- A. Self-assessment of gender equality using quantitative & qualitative data.
- B. Identification of key challenges and opportunities.
- C. An action plan linked to the self-assessment.

Additional Criteria for a **Silver award**

- D. Progress against the applicant's previously identified priorities has been demonstrated (the previous Bronze plan is completed or superceded).
- E. Success in addressing gender inequality has been evidenced (evidence of desired outcome/improvement against at least two priorities).

Additional Criteria for a **Gold award**

- F. Evidence of sector-leading gender equality practice and supporting others to improve.

Scoring Rubric

4. **Good**. The application addresses the criterion very well.
3. **Satisfactory**. The criterion is adequately addressed.
2. **Narrowly missed**. There are some areas requiring improvement to adequately address the criterion.
1. **Poor**. The criterion is inadequately addressed.

Result

- Result within 10 days of panel.
- **Award**. Scored at least 3 against each criteria.
- **Minor revision**. The application has received a score of 2 for up to three award criterion (as long as all scores are ≥ 2).
- **Major revision**. The application has received a score of 1 for any award criterion or more than three scores of 2.

Feedback

- Feedback is given within 12 weeks of submission and agreed between Athena Swan and the chair of the panel.

Minor revision

- Often this means one part of the application, e.g. the Action Plan.
- To be submitted within 8 weeks and considered by the chair of the panel which assessed the original application.

Major revision

- To be submitted within 6 months and considered the same panel which assessed the original application.

Mandatory data requirements

- Students at foundation, UG, PGT, PGR
- Degree attainment & completion rates
- Academic staff by contract function & by contract type
- Professional, Technical & Operational (PTO) staff by job family
- PTO staff by contract type
- Academic applications, shortlist & appointments
- PTO applications, shortlist & appointments
- Applications & success rates for academic promotion
- Applications & success rates for PTO progression

Other aspects

- **Culture Survey:** either full survey (28 questions) or embed 7 core questions into existing survey, ideally not more than 1 year prior to application.
- **New submission deadlines:** there are 6 across year.
- **Transition period:** until November 2022 round.

What makes a good Athena Swan application?

- An **honest reflection** of the data, situation and challenges .
- An analysis of the data which **reflects on**, not just repeats what the data says. Panels frequently criticise applications for “lack of reflection and analysis”.
- A pragmatic, evidence-based and data-driven approach to the issues.
- Data presented clearly and consistently, with numbers and percentages.
- Evidence of being **pro-active** rather than **reactive**.
- An **SMART** Action Plan that goes beyond **monitoring**, has **measurable outcomes** and addresses the issues that have been identified.
- An application which answers the questions posed, not the questions which the applicant thinks should have been posed
- An application which includes illustrative examples and tells a story – it is **not** a box-ticking exercise.
- Make things easy for the panel to find and assimilate the information they want.

Action plan

- An Action Plan should be **SMART** (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely).
- Actions should go beyond **monitoring** and have **quantitative, 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 addressed. These are **not** included in the word count, e.g.

Action 4.1: Hold Unconscious Bias workshops for all staff .

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 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, and if so what is the reduction?

● 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 is seen to be a good thing to do.

Some Ideas

- Have “critical friends” read a draft of the application before it is submitted. The LMS Good Practice Scheme has a “pairing scheme”.
- Ensure a senior academic is either the chair or deputy chair of the SAT.
- Embed EDI, not just gender, into departmental activities, e.g.
 - * the chair or deputy chair of the EDI committee being a member of the department’s management and promotion committees;
 - * social events with an EDI theme.
- Be pro-active! What are you doing above and beyond what the university provides? How is information disseminated within the department?
- Putting up photographs of female and black Mathematical Scientists can have significant effect.
- Focussing on inclusive communities allows resources to be devoted to clearing obstacles for participation, as opposed to finding women for reluctant organisers to invite.

Some Quotes

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

Paul Walton (former Head of Chemistry, University of York, the first department to receive an Athena Swan **Gold** award)

“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”

Paul Brennan (Reader, School of Medicine, Cardiff University)

Thank You!