

London Mathematical Society Good Practice Scheme Workshop

*An Athena SWAN panel member
perspective
on the pre-May 2015 process*

Caroline Wardle
Visiting Professor of Computer Science
UCL and Queen Mary University of London

6 November, 2015
De Morgan House, Russell Square, London

Athena Swan Awards – key points

Bronze

- Analyse staff and student data to identify key areas of attrition and leaks in the pipeline.
- In response to your data analysis, identify key plans to address issues. Create an action plan for the next three years

Silver

- In addition to the above, the department will need to **provide evidence** that they have **implemented** actions and can illustrate **impact**.
- The department should illustrate a shift in culture that benefits staff at all levels

Gold

- The department needs to show considerable action and impact.
- Gold departments should support other departments by sharing their ‘beacon’ activities.

AS Panels - membership

- 5 people (F & M) per panel, with gender balance depending on available panelists, mix of more and less experienced panelists, a breadth of geographical location.
- May be only 1 panel member in your academic discipline.

I have sometimes been the single CS academic on panels assessing only CS applications.

- Panel Chair appointed from experienced members, can be academic or non-academic.
- Gender balance of chairs depends on availability of experienced panelists.

In April 2015, women made up 70% of chairs (19 out of 27).

- 1 ECU member acts as moderator to ensure consistency, 1 ECU member takes notes which then become feedback to applicants.

AS Panels – membership (cont.)

- Academics: at least 2 but not more than 3; drawn from large or small, research intensive or teaching intensive universities.
- Non-academics: at least 2 but not more than 3 from HR, university AS staff, equality and diversity, STEMM department managers, management strategy, etc.

Expanded Charter will include professional and support staff

- Observers may attend but do not take part in decision making process.

May be less experienced (future) panelists.

- ECU training for panelists & chairs starts December 2015.

Webinar sessions for panelists, face to face sessions for Chairs.

AS Panels - judging

- Panel considers 4-6 submissions, average of 5.
- Panelists receive all submissions (electronically and hard copy if requested) ahead of time.
- My evaluations can take 1-4 hours per submission.*
- Panelists given assessment guidance to help in evaluation.
- Panelists asked to use information in application only, no personal knowledge used outside of this.
- Panel decisions usually reached by consensus although vote may be taken if disagreement.

AS Silver - Departmental submissions

You are expected to:

- have **IDENTIFIED** challenges, in addition to university-wide issues.
- have self assessment team (**SAT**) in place to carry forward proposed actions.
- be **DOING** activities to support and advance women's careers in STEMM.
- demonstrate the **IMPACT** of your activities so far.
- for upgrade to Silver are asked to attach previous action plan and provide evidence of **PROGRESS** made against the previous submission and action plan.

AS Silver- departmental submissions

Lessons Learned

- Start writing your application at least 6 months before the deadline.
- Expect collecting and cleaning up central data to be slow.
- If your data analyst is a student, be prepared for them to graduate in the middle of your write-up.
- One person should put application together but other SAT members & staff should contribute.
- SAT should meet regularly, several times a term
- Make sure action plan is realistic but sufficiently ambitious

AS Silver- departmental submissions

Lessons Learned (cont.)

- Read other successful applications
- For renewals, action must be maintained for 3 years, panelists will check
- Use ECU guidance. E.g. Awards Handbook
- **Volunteer to be an Athena Swan panelist**

Many Bronze applications include every possible activity however small, but no clear framework that they fit in, and no strategy or clear definition of success. For a Silver level, concentrate on 2-4 problem areas, some of which should be solvable in the short-term.

AS - Letter of Endorsement from HoD

Panel opinions differed on importance but

- Outstanding letter pleases panel.
- Moderate letter may have no effect on panel but likely to be noted in feedback.

Bad letter can influence panel negatively.

Content of letter should show:

- HoD involvement & engagement in AS activities, give examples.
- HoD awareness of issues.

Panelists like to see personal involvement by HoD.

- How AS fits into formal dept. structure.
- If renewal or upgrade, reference impact of previous award

AS Silver - Self-Assessment Procedure

SAT membership – panel looks for

- gender balance, range members at all stages of academic pipeline, different work-life balance experiences
- Good idea to include postdoc and students

Absence of HoD or deputy is a black mark.

SAT procedures

- When did SAT start meeting?

Starting one year ago will not be credible for Silver application

- Frequency of meetings?

Panels expect frequent meetings even at Silver level.

Consultation with academic staff

- Where does SAT fit within dept. mgt. structure?

Obvious when no awareness of AS activities by rest of dept.

AS Silver - Picture of Department

- Give an outline of the department: brief details of staff and student numbers.
- Location details, especially if the department split over buildings or sites. Describe how this affects staff.
- Describe how the department is organised - how line management works.
- Briefly describe research groups and how they are organised
- Any other important and relevant details.

Provides background/calibration for panelists. But have not seen it affect panelists judgments negatively or positively.

AS Silver - Data

- Provide three years' data or explain why you can't.

Important to have reliable data but some institutions may not have centralised data system in place. I expect silver application to be using centralised data.

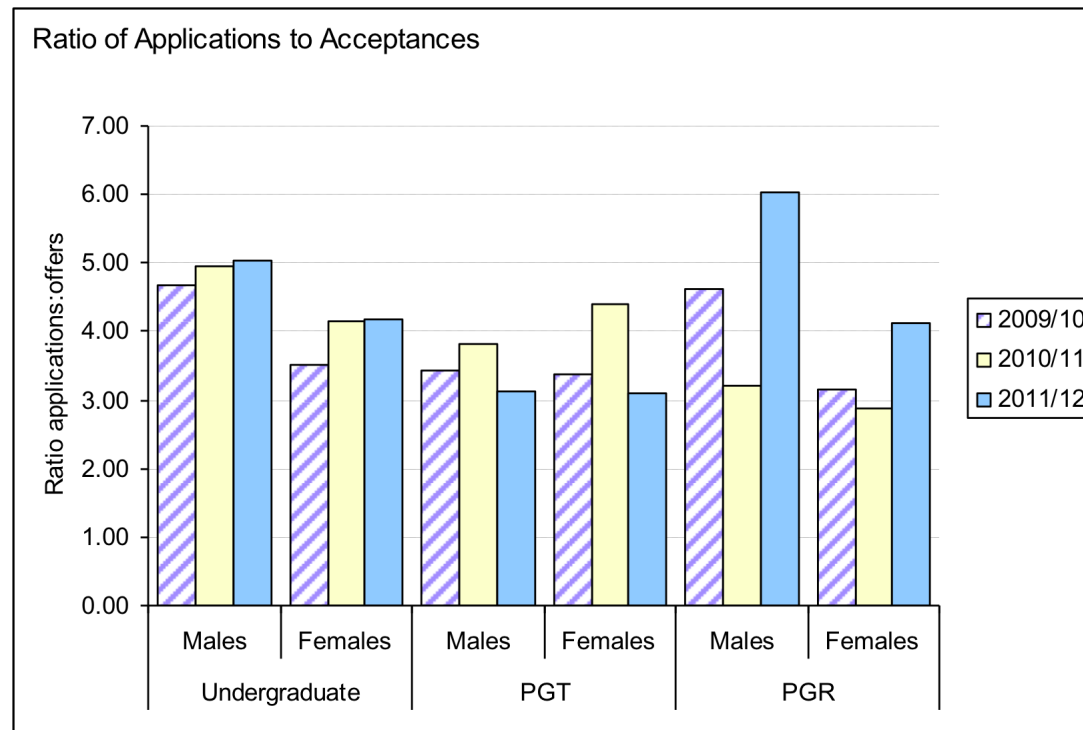
- Plot the full pipeline from UGs to professors to help you identify problematic transition points.
- Compare your data with national figures in same discipline.

I always look to see how numbers compare to national figures.

AS - presenting your data

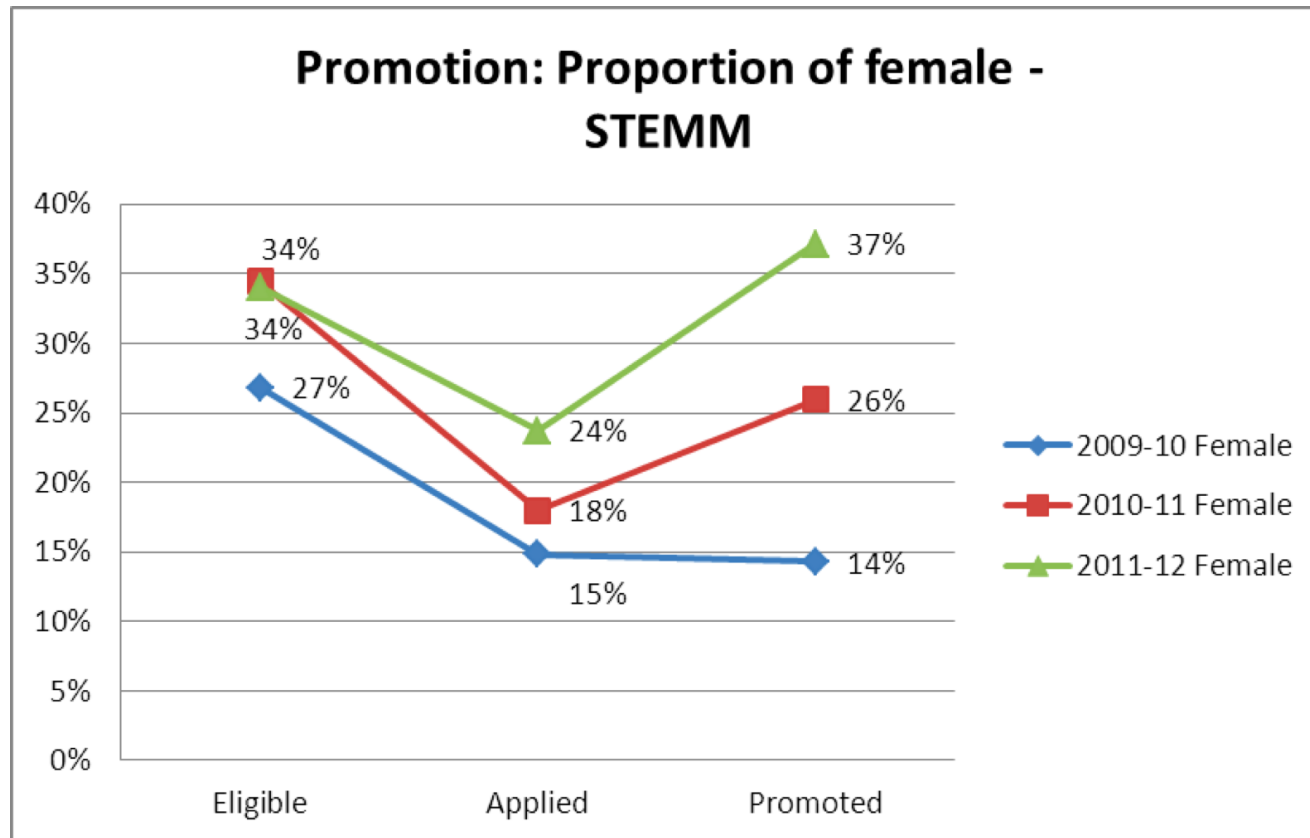
- Use both graphs/charts and associated tables.
Use percentages but label graphs to include raw numbers if underlying tables not present.
Some panelists like to see the numbers underlying the graphs. Very important if the numbers are small.
- Choose designs and fonts to look good in B&W.
Even if you use colour in your graphs/charts, some panelists will use B&W copies.
- Do **NOT** use tiny graphs/charts/tables.
I have sometimes had to use a magnifying glass to read the numbers on a graph. This does not put me in a generous mood.

AS - presenting your data



Not good enough – why?

AS - presenting your data



Getting better.

AS Silver - discussing your data

- Do not just report the data, reflect and analyse. Why do you think certain trends might be happening in your dept? Focus on any gender differences and what action(s) you intend to put in place to address this.

Some panelists will drill deep into your data. If your commentary is poor, panelists will get impatient.

Compare to national averages if possible.

- If your data are bad, then admit that and say what actions you will take to address issues.

Panelists get annoyed with applications that say nothing about obvious problem areas.

- Highlight issues and areas for action, describe what you have already done and the impact it has had (if any) and describe the actions you intend to take.

Remember, the purpose of analysing your data is to understand the key problem areas in your dept. and to inform your action plan.

AS Silver – evidence for impact?

- Illustrating the impact of your actions is what distinguishes a silver from a bronze application.
- It will take time to improve your staff statistics, particularly at senior levels. Some ways to show change, might be an increase in:
 - female committee membership
 - female representation on interview panels
 - numbers of women applying for and obtaining promotion
 - number of female speakers in dept. seminar series
- But be careful about over-burdening women

I have seen an impressive HoD letter that discussed balancing the need for women to be better represented on important committees and panels with the problem of over-burdening them with administrative tasks

AS Silver - Key career transition points/ problems

These are frequently one or more of:

- Small number of female students
- Postdoc->lecturer transition
- Reader/Snr. Lecturer->Professor transition
- Small number of women at all academic ranks

*Provide three years' data or explain why you can't.
Some of these problems are long-term, some short-term.
Don't try to do everything. Select a set that you can do something about at your institution.*

AS Silver – Career Development

- Does the department have initiatives in place to support women at key career transition points, advance and support womens' career progression, enable flexible working, support and manage career breaks and improve the culture through increasing visibility of women for example?
- Is there a record of current activities and future actions under each of the headings? How successful are the activities? **What impact have these actions had?**
- Are there any particularly innovative or interesting initiatives?

AS Silver – Organisation & Culture

- Decision-making committees.

I always check numbers of women on important strategic committees because they are often poorly represented.

If composition of male-dominated committees is determined by academic role (e.g., head of research group), then try to enlarge and/or change criteria to add women.

- Outreach to schools – is this work considered in appraisal and promotion?
- Workload allocation model.

Panelists like to look at this, to see if AS activities count at appraisal and promotion time.

AS – flexibility & managing career breaks

- Flexible working hours – do you have formal or informal options?

Many departments will have informal procedure for flexible working. If so, how many staff (F and M) take advantage of this?

- Maternity leave – the panel will expect your university to have a policy in place. Does your dept. offer more?

Is same support open to staff on fixed term contracts or students?

- Are departmental meetings in ‘core hours’ (e.g. 10am-4pm)?
- Keeping in Touch days - how are these used to help the woman’s career?
- Do departments have procedures for giving women returning from maternity leave reduced teaching and administrative loads?

University funded schemes to assist those returning from maternity leave were particularly liked by the panelists.

AS Silver – 2 case studies

- One about member of SAT
- One about individual in department not on SAT

Choose individuals at different stages of career.

- Should highlight good practice in dept.

Panelists look for evidence that actions by the department contributed to individuals' career progress.

Panels liked case studies written in the first person.

AS Silver – any other comments

Is there any other relevant information that should be taken into account when assessing the submission?

This provides an opportunity to describe activities that have not fitted into the structure of the AS application form.

But some departments choose not to fill this in.

AS Silver – Annotate previous action plan

- For departments who are applying for an upgrade to Silver or a Silver renewal, provide previous action plan and describe progress made.

Indicate whether goals have been achieved, are in progress, partially achieved, not achieved (goal modified, goal changed, goal dropped, etc.)

- Say in the application body or in the Action plan or both, whether the original plan been updated and modified.

AS Silver – action plan

- Describe future actions. Actions already completed should be in the body of the application.
- Make sure the plan covers 3 years.
- The plan should have targeted actions, outcome/success measures, clear responsibilities and timelines, based on priorities identified in the body of application. Include some quantified targets.
- Reference actions from your action plan in the application body.

Action plans that have HR or administrative staff responsible for the majority of actions won't be viewed positively.

Panelists often felt action plan too vague, wanted realistic quantitative targets e.g. increase no. of women postdocs by 5% each year for the next 3 years.