

Recruitment: What does an Athena SWAN panel look for?

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 **Athena
SWAN**
Bronze Award


LONDON MATHEMATICAL SOCIETY
GOOD PRACTICE
SCHEME

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
- Member of eight Athena SWAN panels, chaired three panels
- Member of the ECU's Athena SWAN Advisory Group
- As Head of School and previously as Head of Mathematics at Kent, I've been a member of numerous appointment panels during the past 15 years or so

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.
- Bear in mind that although successful submissions are on the internet (e.g. LMS Good Practice Scheme webpage), 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 number of women, though having (realistic) plans to increase the number of women is viewed positively.
- 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.

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 an electronic version of the applications.
- 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 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).
- Do **not** make the diagrams too complicated. Some members of the panel might not be very numerate!

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.
- Should include one or two examples of good practice, ideally with regard to the **recruitment**, **retention** and/or **progression** of women.
- Highlight that the Head of Department will ensure the resources are in place to deliver the action plan.
- The panels felt that ideally the Head of Department letter should talk about a **strategic vision**, but essentially none of them did!
- **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!

A 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.
- If there are different groups within the department of different natures then the data should be separated out for each group.

Supporting and advancing womens 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?

Ref No	Job Title	Applications				Interview		Hired		Apply	Inter	Hired
		F	M	U	Total	F	M	F	M	%F	%F	%F
STM0485	Lecturer in Mathematics	12	71	1	84	1	5	0	2	14.5%	16.7%	0.0%
STM0486	Lecturer in Mathematics	9	59	0	68	1	6	1	0	13.2%	14.3%	100.0%
STM0494	Head of School	2	8	0	10	1	2	0	1	20.0%	33.3%	0.0%
STM0508	Lecturer in Mathematics (5-year)	9	59	1	69	1	5	0	1	13.2%	16.7%	0.0%
STM0526	Lecturer in Mathematics	12	80	2	94	0	7	0	1	13.0%	0.0%	0.0%
STM0552	Lecturer in Mathematics (3-year)	8	45	3	56	2	3	0	1	15.1%	40.0%	0.0%
		52	322	7	381	6	28	1	6	13.9%	17.6%	14.3%

Several Athena SWAN applications state that their job advertisements include the statement:

- * “We encourage applications from women and ethnic minorities, who are currently under-represented in this part of the University”

Question:

- * Is it useful?

Athena SWAN Feedback

Commended:

- * Use of Athena SWAN logo in job advertisements.
- * Targeted advertising.

To Improve:

- * Inclusion of shortlisting data.
- * Mandation of E&D training for interview committee members.
- * Unconscious bias training as a requirement rather than an opportunity.
- * Action to get more women applicants, perhaps with targeted advertising.
- * More proactive and effective measures to encourage women applicants.
- * More specific, targeted actions to increase the number of applications from women.

Athena SWAN Feedback (cont.)

- * Further consideration of how the number of applications from women are going to be increases; the number of applications from women has fallen at lower levels.
- * More detail about how and when the effectiveness of job advertisements will be evaluated.
- * Further discussion around why completion of Equality and Diversity training needs to be strengthened if it is a pre-requisite to sitting on a panel; clarity around if panel members can sit on panels if they have not been trained.
- * Stronger and more proactive actions to improve recruitment.
- * More detail on how the pipeline and issues identified are to be proactively addressed.
- * Further reflection on whether previous actions have made any improvements since the last submission.

PhD Recruitment

- * **Who makes the decision about offers of PhD places?**
- * Athena SWAN panels like to such decisions made by a (small) committee which has both female and male members.

Some Important issues

- **Induction:** What is in place for new staff?
- **Probation:** What are the mentoring arrangements for new staff?
- **Appraisal:** How often does it happen? Who does it? What does it cover?
- **Promotion:** How are future promotion candidates identified and supported?
- **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 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? Procedures when returning?
- **Paternity leave:** What is the take-up?

Action plan

- 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**.

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”.