

Athena SWAN – the new format

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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 eleven Athena SWAN panels, chaired six panels
- Member of the ECU's Athena SWAN Advisory Group

Mathematical Sciences Departments

- Seven Mathematical Science departments have Athena SWAN **Silver** awards
 - * University of Exeter (Department of Mathematics & Computer Science)
 - * Loughborough University (Mathematical Sciences Department & Mathematics Education Centre)
 - * University of Oxford (Mathematical Institute)
 - * Oxford Brookes University (Department of Mathematics & Statistics)
 - * Queen's University Belfast (School of Mathematics & Physics)
 - * University of Reading (School of Mathematical & Physical Sciences)
 - * University College London (Department of Mathematics)
- Thirty-eight Mathematical Sciences departments have Athena SWAN **Bronze** awards
- Fifty-three Mathematical Sciences departments and five EPSRC Centres for Doctoral Training are Good Practice Scheme members

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 and what procedures are in place for women?
- **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 an application to new panel if the moderator is concerned about the panel's recommended decision
- Panel chair training and online panel member 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**

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 Action Plan that goes beyond **monitoring**, has **measurable outcomes** and addresses the issues that have been identified
- An Action Plan which is **SMART**, i.e. **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**elevant and **T**ime-bound.
- Embedded references to Action Plan entries in the various sections (these are **not** included in the word count), e.g.

Action 4.1: Hold Unconscious Bias workshops for all staff

- 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
- Athena SWAN is about the **recruitment**, **retention** and **progression** of women and this needs to be brought out in the application

Some common mistakes

- Lack of analysis and reflection
- The frequent 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”
- 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”

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>