



Athena SWAN Charter Awards Handbook

This handbook has been put together to provide a comprehensive reference point for any institution or department looking to submit an Athena SWAN award application. It should be used in conjunction with past successful submissions. If you have any further queries, please check the FAQs on the website. Otherwise, please contact athenaswan@ecu.ac.uk.

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What is a department?

It can often be difficult to decide which organisational unit should submit an award application. Athena SWAN recognises that universities operate a range of academic and management structures, and not all institutions use the term 'department'. There are many academic groupings with different names, sizes and compositions. It is down to the individual institution to decide the composition of units that put forward award applications. However, below are some areas for consideration when making an application.

Size

Size alone does not preclude a unit from submitting (that is to say there are no minimum or maximum limits), but the departments should bear the following in mind:

- The panel expect data from all the constituent units in a large department, not averages.
- Large departments need to clearly demonstrate good practice (and impact) across all units, and that issues specific to different subject areas have been identified.
- Communication of the Charter principles needs to be apparent across the department; it should not be driven by one single unit within.
- Small departments need to be able to demonstrate sufficient autonomy to implement change.
- All departments need to find suitable comparators for benchmarking.
- All departments are subject to the same word limits.

Management structures

The head of department should have overall responsibility for resource allocation, budgets, academic strategy, and policy in the department, so as to be able to effect the changes set out in the action plan.

Students

Where a department has its own students (undergraduate and/or postgraduate), this data should be provided. A unit may still apply if it does not provide teaching, but this should be noted, and national student figures for that subject area should be considered in the application as this will impact on the pipeline in that area.

If in doubt, contact the Athena SWAN Officer (athenaswan@ecu.ac.uk) no later than two months in advance of the deadline to ascertain eligibility.

Completing the submission document

Style

Although applicants may wish to consult previously successful submissions (all successful institutions and departments are expected to publish their submission documents), there is no prescribed style for completing the various sections of the application form. It is up to individual institutions and departments to make a decision on this; Athena SWAN staff cannot read through submissions prior to the deadline, or advise on content.

The self-assessment team and process

Panels are keen to see a diverse membership of the self-assessment team, covering different levels of the department or institution (and, for an institution, all areas of STEMM). It is important to balance administrative and human resources input with that of academics; Athena SWAN should be driven by the academic community. Moreover, the team should include men and women. In addition to this, where possible the cumulative experience of the self-assessment team should include:

- balancing home responsibilities and work (particularly part time/flexible working/career breaks)
- dual career families (the partner does not have to be from a STEMM background)
- recent experience of the institution or department's recruitment and promotion processes
- different stages of the career ladder (particularly at the early and mid career stages)
- departmental and university management responsibilities
- senior management

The panel does not require that the self-assessment team is a committee in its own right; if institutions and departments wish to include it under the umbrella of another group, that is acceptable, as long as it undertakes to follow the Athena SWAN self-assessment process.

The panel expects to evidence of a rigorous and thorough process, including regular meetings (three times a year as a minimum) and varied methods of data collection (both qualitative and quantitative).

Data

Data may be presented in whichever way applicants feel most explanatory (tables or graphs), as long as they clearly highlight trends and draw these out in the narrative. However, it is not advisable to present data in percentage form without referring to numbers. Data should correspond to the section heading, and should cover the three years preceding the submission. Where data is not available, this should be explained with reasons given (and, in most cases, a relevant action).

Evidence of good practice

While it is recognised that good practice benefits men and women, Athena SWAN awards specifically recognise what is being done to address the underrepresentation of women in STEMM, and to support and encourage their career progression. Accordingly, panels expect to see some evidence of gender-specific measures.

There is no prescriptive list of measures that panels expect to see in place at every institution or department, but failure to recognise issues fundamental to career progression will be looked upon negatively e.g. universal appraisal and an equitable promotions process. For more information, please consult the Athena SWAN 'Best Practice' booklets. Panels are particularly keen to see examples of innovative and inventive good practice.

Where good practice is cited, ensure that policies are explained in sufficient detail rather than just stated as a title. Submissions should also avoid presenting legal compliance as good practice.

Web links

Panellists are only asked to consider information contained within the submission documents. Thus inserting web links to information crucial to a submission will lead to this information being missed.

It is recognised that this represents a change from previous guidance, but the rapid increase in the number of submissions has meant there is not sufficient time to read any supplementary information.

Word limits and appendices

Words limits help ensure that submissions are of a readable length for panellists, taking into account that each panel assesses eight submissions. Accordingly the word limits are final, and may not be aggregated between sections. The number of words used in each section should be indicated.

In the same vein, appendices, other than the action plan and letter of endorsement, are not permitted. Any supplementary appendices will be removed from submissions and will not be considered by the assessment panels.

Case studies

For Silver department recognition, case studies are required. These provide an opportunity to focus on the career progression of two individuals working in the department, and to show how the inclusive culture and working practices of the department have enabled them to pursue a career in a STEMM subject area.

One of these case studies should be a member of the self-assessment team, and the other should be someone else in the department. No more than two case studies should be put forward, even if within the word limit.

Letter of endorsement

The letter of endorsement from a Vice-Chancellor or Head of Department sets the tone for the submission, so it is vital that it resonates with the panel.

- Above all, it goes without saying that the letter should be written by the Vice-Chancellor or Head of Department, not just signed off.
- It should be addressed to the Senior Policy Adviser (Athena SWAN). Contact details can be found on the website.
- The letter should explain why the department or institution values the Athena SWAN Charter, and how the action plan will help meet their strategic aims.
- If it is a renewal, reference should be made to the impact of the previous award.
- For higher levels of recognition, the panel will expect to hear how the department or institution has championed gender equality in STEMM.
- Although the Vice-Chancellor or Head of Department may well wish to refer to an institution's history and achievements, this should not be the focus of the letter.
- Panels are keen to get a sense of individual commitment to gender equality at the top of the organisation, so it is good to draw on personal experience.

Action plans

Action plans are crucial to a submission's success; a poor action plan can cause even the best submission to be unsuccessful.

- Where actions are identified in the submission document, these should be clearly highlighted, so that when a panellist reads the action plan it is clear whence that action has come.
- Actions should be scheduled across the three year validity of the award.
- Actions (and action plans) should be **Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely** (SMART).
- The panel will expect to see evidence of prioritisation. Action plans may be ordered by priority level rather than chronologically or thematically.
- Responsibility for completing actions should be even distributed; action plans where human resources and equality and diversity practitioners are responsible for everything are not well received.
- Completed actions or measures already in place should be omitted from the action plan.
- It is important to indicate how you will measure the success of an action. This should take the form of the column in the table.
- There is no right or wrong number of actions. However, it is important to balance conciseness with a good level of detail.
- Action plans are organic documents, which is to say they should be constantly reviewed and updated (not just prepared as part of an award submission). When awards are renewed or upgraded, panels do not expect to see every single action completed by the deadlines set out in the plan. However, they do expect to see evidence of progress responsive to the needs of the department or institution.
- Action plans should be aspirational and innovative, particularly at higher levels of award.
- Where awards are being renewed or upgraded, a copy of the previous action plan should be included, with indications of progress made.

Submitting the form

Institutions and departments that are preparing submissions should notify Athena SWAN of their intention to apply two months in advance of the deadline. This enables panels to be scheduled in advance of the deadline, expediting the process. An email reminder to do this is sent to the Athena SWAN JISCmail list, so at the earliest stages of planning, a representative from the self-assessment team should seek to join this list.

Athena SWAN requires that forms are submitted by email to athenaswan@ecu.ac.uk by 5pm on either 30 April or 30 November.

This should include:

- A copy of the original letter of endorsement from the head of institution or department
- The submission document
- The action plan
- For a renewal submissions, the previous updated action plan

These should be submitted as one consolidated PDF file. Once received, these will be acknowledged by Athena SWAN, but in the case of submissions made shortly before the deadline, this might not be until after the passing of the deadline.

We no longer require a hard copy original of the letter of endorsement

Although Athena SWAN staff are happy to field questions at any time, be aware that the team is extremely busy in the days running up to the deadline and cannot guarantee to respond to queries made at late notice.

Submissions for panellists will be printed in black and white; if a submission needs to be considered in colour, submitting departments and universities should send in ten colour copies within five working days of the deadline. These should be sent to:

Athena SWAN Officer
Equality Challenge Unit
7th floor, Queens House
55/56 Lincoln's Inn Fields
London
WC2A 3LJ

Panels sometimes request supplementary information before making a decision on a submission. Submitting departments and institutions should be prepared for such requests, which will normally be made two or three months after the passing of the deadline.

It is expected that institutions and departments that receive awards will publish their submission form on their website. However, please remove any personal or confidential information from the submissions prior to doing this.

Submission timeline

Timescale (+/- deadline)	Action required
-3/4 months (minimum)	Organisational units that are unsure about whether to submit as a department, college, faculty or school should contact the Athena SWAN Officer (athenaswan@ecu.ac.uk).
-2 months	Institutions and departments that will be submitting applications should inform the Athena SWAN Officer (athenaswan@ecu.ac.uk) of their intention. An email reminder to do this will be sent out to the JISCMail list and key contacts.
30 April/November, 5pm (deadline)	Submissions (including letter of endorsement, application document and action plan) should be sent in PDF format to athenaswan@ecu.ac.uk . Late submissions will not be considered.
+5 working days	Institutions and departments wishing for their submissions to be considered in colour should send 10 colour copies to:
+2 months (April), +3 months (November)	Assessment panels take place, and supplementary information may be requested.
+3 months (April), +4 months (November)	Outcome letters and feedback are sent to institutions and departments.
+4 months (April), +5 months (November)	The awards ceremony is held.

Bronze University Award

Pre-requisites

- The applicant institution must be an Athena SWAN Charter member, and have no outstanding membership fees.

What needs to be demonstrated

- A Bronze university award recognises that the university has a solid foundation for eliminating gender bias and developing an inclusive culture that values all staff. This includes: (i) an assessment of where the university is in quantitative (staff and student data) and qualitative (policies, practices, systems and arrangements) terms, which has identified both challenges and opportunities; (ii) a plan that builds on the assessment, the activities that are already in place and what has been learnt from these; and (iii) an organisation (the self assessment team) to carry proposed actions forward.

Renewals

- A Bronze university renewal award submission should show that the university remains responsive to the challenges that face women in STEMM and that the university continues to maintain a solid foundation for eliminating gender bias and developing an inclusive culture that values all staff. The submission must show evidence that clear progress has been made against the original Bronze university application and action plan.

Potential outcomes

- Bronze university award
- No award

Silver University Award

Pre-requisites

- The institution must hold a valid Bronze award.
- A majority of the institutions STEMM departments (not including faculties, colleges, or any other groupings of departments) must hold Silver department awards.

What needs to be demonstrated

- A Silver university award recognises a significant record of activity and achievement by the university in promoting gender equality and in addressing challenges across the full range of STEMM departments within the university. Applications should demonstrate Athena SWAN is well embedded within the university with strong leadership in promoting the charter principles, and evidence the impact of Athena SWAN activities.

Renewals

- In addition to the above, a renewal submission should provide evidence of progress and impact of the original Silver university award application and action plan.

Potential outcomes

- Silver university award
- Bronze university award
- No award

Bronze Department Award

Pre-requisites

- The institution to which the applicant department belongs must hold a valid Bronze university award.

What needs to be demonstrated

- Bronze department awards recognise that in addition to university-wide policies, the department has identified particular challenges and is planning activities for the future. This includes an assessment of where the department is in quantitative (staff and student data) and qualitative (policies, practices, systems and arrangements) terms, which has identified both challenges and opportunities; a plan that builds on the assessment, the activities that are already in place and what has been learnt from these; and an organisation (the self assessment team) to carry proposed actions forward.

Renewals

- In addition to the above, a renewal submission should provide evidence of progress made against the original Bronze department award application and action plan.

Potential outcomes

- Bronze department award
- No award

Silver Department Award

Pre-requisites

- The institution to which the applicant department belongs must hold a valid Bronze university award.

What needs to be demonstrated

- In addition to the future planning required for Bronze department recognition, a Silver department awards recognises that the department has taken action in response to challenges previously identified (within or without the Athena SWAN process) and can demonstrate the impact of the actions implemented.

Renewals

- In addition to the above, Silver department renewal submissions must show evidence that clear progress has been made against the original Silver department application and action plan.

Potential outcomes

- Silver department award
- Bronze department award*
- No award

**Please note that unsuccessful Silver department submissions are not automatically awarded a Bronze award*

Gold Department Award

Pre-requisites

- The applicant department must hold a Silver department award.

What needs to be demonstrated

- A Gold department award recognises sustained progression and achievement by the department in promoting gender equality and to address challenges particular to the discipline. A well established record of activity and achievement in working towards equality in the career progression of women in STEMM should be complemented by data demonstrating continued impact in all areas. Gold departments should be beacons of achievement in gender equality and should champion and promote good practice to the wider community.

Renewals

- In addition to the above, a Gold department renewal award should evidence consistent progress and impact against the initial Gold department application and action plan.

Potential outcomes

- Gold department award
- Silver department award
- No award

The assessment process

As well as the particular requirements at each level of award, panels make judgments on the following points at every level. Panels take into account a number of general points at all levels of awards:

Communication

How well are policies and plans communicated to staff?

Senior or high-level commitment

Is it there, and if so, how is it communicated?

Effective analysis of the data

What does the data show, and which actions are being taken to address the issues identified? Even more importantly, how will impact be measured?

Self-reflection and honesty

The panel accepts that there will be challenges and mistakes may be made, but these need to be recognised openly and steps taken to address them.

Engagement

Are staff at every level involved in developing policies, implementing them and evaluation?

In reaching a decision on the appropriate level of award, panels will take account of the level applied for and will also consider:

- the clarity of the evidence provided on what was done and what is planned
- the rationale for what was done and what is planned and how they link to the organisation's strategic mission and goals
- how successful the actions taken have been, how that success was measured and evaluated and how they have benefited the organisation and the individual women and men who work in it
- the linkage between the data and the action plans
- the understanding demonstrated of the institutional context/local circumstances and what the key issues are
- the significance of any changes, programmes/initiatives in terms of their anticipated outcomes, their sustainability and the likely longer term impact on the organisation, its processes and its culture
- the level of input, investment, involvement/commitment and support from senior management, heads of departments, senior academics and research team leaders (male and female) and women research staff and academics
- the extent to which what was developed and introduced was different, innovative or particularly challenging

- the organisational 'fit', the sustainability of what was developed and the ease with which the change has been or is likely to become embedded in the organisational/departmental culture
- the extent to which their activities, programmes, and changes have successfully addressed perceptions and expectations which shape or constrain career choices and outcomes
- the extent to which the value of what has been done is recognised, welcomed, and valued by staff generally, by managers and by female staff

Award validity

- All awards made are valid for three years from the submission deadline i.e. a successful award in the April 2011 round will be valid until April 2014.
- Awards can be renewed or upgraded in any round up to the end of these three years. The validity period of the most recent successful renewal supersedes the previous validity period.
- For awards made before the introduction of the biannual awards rounds, the three year validity period lasts until the November submissions round i.e. an award made in 2010 is valid until November 2013.
- If a renewal is submitted at the end of the three year validity period, and this renewal is unsuccessful, the submitting institution or department receives a year's extension to put in an improved renewal submission.
- Under exceptional circumstances, a year's extension to the validity of an award may be negotiated when no renewal is submitted before the end of the validity period. This needs to be agreed in advance with the Senior Policy Adviser (Athena SWAN), and is entirely at her discretion. Note that in such circumstances, the submission would not receive another year's extension if unsuccessful.
- If, after three years, no renewal submission is made and no extension is negotiated, status as an Athena SWAN award holder will be rescinded.
- If, after receiving a year's extension, no renewal submission is made or the renewal submission is still unsuccessful, status as an Athena SWAN award holder will be rescinded.
- In such circumstances, institutions or departments are expected to remove promptly all reference to being Athena SWAN award holders from their website and communications (including the Athena SWAN logo). The institution and department will also be removed from the list of award holders on Athena SWAN website.
- Where an institution loses its bronze award, departments at that institution also lose the right to submit their own applications. The validity of extant department awards is unaffected, but if the institution does not regain its bronze award by the end of the department award's validity period, that department will not be able to submit a renewal application.