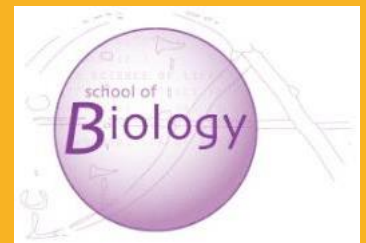# Going for Gold (or maybe just Silver or Bronze?)

What you need to know to help develop and submit

a successful Athena SWAN

departmental application

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ATHENA SWAN CHARTER

- **2005:** Athena SWAN (Scientific Women's Academic Network) Charter established

- **2005:** Original purpose to encourage and recognize commitment to advancing the careers of academic women in science, technology, engineering, math and medicine in HE

- **2015:** Charter expanded to include the arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law faculties

- **2019:** Now includes the advancement of staff in professional and support roles, as well as trans staff and students

- **2019:** Now includes assessment of all work undertaken to address gender equality more broadly, and not just barriers to progression that affect academic women

THIS SESSION WILL:

- Discuss what you already know about the Athena process

- Explore why applying for and having the award develops real equality and fairness within a HE department and is not just as a tick-box exercise!

- Encourage assessment of your equality and diversity environment within the application framework

- Identify actions for change that might be developed

- Show how making actions SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound) helps to build equality and diversity into future activities

- Encourage those who have engaged with the Athena process to share their experiences with the group, today and whenever it's needed

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- **Understand how the Athena SWAN Charter relates to your institutions and departments**

- **Identify how to begin the process of developing an Athena SWAN application**

- **Know where to find resources to develop your application, including sample applications and HE contacts**

HIGHER EDUCATION: FIT FOR THE FUTURE

- **Equality and diversity is at the very heart of an education and work environment**

- **Involvement with the Athena SWAN agenda improves the workplace**
  - **makes it a more equal and diverse environment**
  - **respects the professional aspirations of ALL HE staff**
  - **makes HE itself a fairer environment for all HE staff and students**

- **Develops everyone's talents, ultimately creating a workplace that encourages each person to contribute the very best they have to offer**

- **Gives all staff and students the space and opportunity to work and learn in a supportive environment**

TOP TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL ATHENA APPLICATION

Not quite 100 people (the 23 people on our school Equality and Diversity Committee) were asked what non-pointless tips they thought contributed to a successful Athena application:

- Delegate tasks early in the process, give deadlines, and enforce them

- Highlight that we were already doing good stuff, even if it doesn't seem like very much

- Have committee members look at successful applications and give best practice suggestions

- Leave plenty of time to get all the information, check it, write, and re-write…

- Don't underestimate the aesthetics of the application!

- Make sure the action plan hits all the **SMART** criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound)

- Don't expect the committee convenor to do everything!

STARTING YOUR ATHENA SWAN APPLICATION

- **Link to site (AdvanceHE, formerly Equality Challenge Unit):**

  https://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/

- **Link to application and guidance handbook (Apply for an award/Departmental applications and Eligibility sections):**

  https://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/apply-award/

- **Notice of intention dates currently February (for April application) and September (for November application)**

- **Look at at other applications for your award level (Athena SWAN members):**

  https://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/athena-swan-members/

- **Give yourself plenty of time: 12 to 18 months, especially if this is your first application**

STARTING YOUR ATHENA SWAN APPLICATION

THINKING ABOUT YOUR APPLICATION

- **Do you have a self-assessment team? If not, how will you organize one?**

- **Will the application be solely written by your committee?**

- **How will the application be organized ? (Who will do the work?)**

- **Where will you get the data?**

- **How much time can realistically be allocated?**

- **Which level is right level for you?**

THINKING ABOUT YOUR APPLICATION

Which level is right level for you?

- **Bronze (Beginning):**

  Showing what issues exist and what good practices are in place, or can be put in place, to change these issues

- **Silver (Impact):**

  Showing that the issues identified have been addressed by good practices and there have been identifiable changes

- **Gold (Beacon):**

  Showing your good practices are being shared within and out-with your institution

WRITING YOUR APPLICATION

- **Identify who works on each section: spreadsheets can be good for this**

- **Give deadlines!**

- **Identify one person, or a small group of people, who will homogenize the feedback from each section**

- **Bronze: Have you shown how the department is working to promote gender equality and identified challenges that are particular to you department and discipline?**

- **Silver: Have you identified how actions that have been put in place since your Bronze award have resulted in changes? This demonstrates the impact reviewers are looking for.**

- **Gold: Have you shown how the actions of your department have become imbedded in the culture, and how these actions are being demonstrated as best practices outside the department and university?**

REVIEWING YOUR APPLICATION

- Have you answered the questions being asked in the application?

- Does your text explain your data?

- Does your data support your text?

- Is your application easy to read and understand?

- Is it visually interesting?

- Have selected specialized staff in your department read the sections—are they factually correct?

- Have staff with no specialization read the sections—do they read well and make sense?

- Is your action plan SMART? Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound: reviewers look at this!

- Ask others who have received the award to read your application—give enough time!

THE REVIEWER FEEDBACK

- We received excellent feedback on our submission, including the reviewers' overview assessment:

"This is a strong submission that evidences a track record of effective activity. Equality and diversity work is clearly embedded in the school, rather than being driven by Athena SWAN cycles. The school is a leader within the institution. Where there are areas that need further attention, these are recognised and actions are in place."

- Advance HE also produce a resource from the most recent award round, highlighting examples of good-practice from each submission round:

  https://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/athena-swan-round-results/

- Our submission was also noted for Undergraduate tutorials on unconscious bias and disability issues. But it wasn't always this way…

THE REVIEWER FEEDBACK

Feedback is provided for each section of the application, so you can see the level of review each is given:

- 1. Letter of endorsement from the head of department
  Achievements, address key actions

- 2. Description of the department
  Clear overview, address specific departmental challenges

- 3. The self-assessment process
  Gender parity and rotation on committee, workload model recognition

4. A picture of the department

- 4.1 Student data
  Unconscious bias training before interviews, address PG (Research & Teaching) decreased optimism

THE REVIEWER FEEDBACK

- 4.2 Academic and research staff data

    Improved further particulars, address reasons for staff leaving

5. Supporting and advancing women's careers

- 5.1 Key career transition points: academic staff

    Increased applications by women, address gender recruitment imbalance

- 5.2 Key career transition points: professional and support staff

    Successful regrading, address support and encouragement for regrading

- 5.3 Career development: academic staff

    Early career network, address low uptake of appraisals by research staff

- 5.4 Career development: professional and support staff

    Mentoring and coaching, address female training opportunities

THE REVIEWER FEEDBACK

- **5.5 Flexible working and managing career breaks**
  Increasing uptake of paternity leave, address negative perceptions
  of parental leave

- **5.6 Organisation and culture**
  Engagement with HR policy revision, address diversity of committees across school

- **6 Case studies: impact on individuals**
  Benefits to both partners, career progression aided by school

- **7 Further information**
  Positive feedback on forward-looking attitudes at staff council

- **8 Action plan**
  Clear links between main body of submission and action plan, actions are clear and SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound)

ACTION PLAN

Arguably, this is one of the most important sections of the application,

and the easiest to get wrong…

- Template available in **AS** handbook (Apply for an award/Eligibility section):

    https://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/apply-award/

- Actions in the application should be clearly highlighted and cross-referenced with the action plan: if an action is in your text or action plan, it also needs to be in your action plan or text

- Actions and action plans should be **SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound)**-–this probably can't be said too many times!

ACTION PLAN

- The panel will expect to see actions prioritised, so the action plan may be ordered by priority level, chronologically or thematically—we used the thematic approach

- Responsibilities for completing actions should be distributed across a range of staff and not just the self-assessment team—this helps to show an embedded culture and that the application is not just a tick-box exercise

- Action plans need to be aspirational and innovative, particularly at the silver and gold award levels:

  - At the bronze level, you're identifying the actions that will improve your department from the baseline identified in your application

  - At the silver and gold levels, you're showing how the actions in your earlier application had impact and how you're working with others to improve their baselines and impact

ACTION PLAN

Final key point:

To successfully embed change with staff and students and within departments,

an action plan need to be an <u>organic document that is constantly reviewed and updated</u>—it isn't just a document prepared for the Athena SWAN application

- To help make this happen, our Equality and Diversity committee agenda:
1. includes a link to our full action plan
2. agenda items reference action plan sections
3. staff responsible for action plan sections are identified in a table at the end of the agenda

APPLICATION EXAMPLES

- **https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/hr/edi/sex_gender/athenaswansupport/**

    University of St Andrews Athena SWAN support page, including links to departments and departmental award status

- **https://synergy.st-andrews.ac.uk/bio-equalityanddiversity/**

    Link to University of St Andrews School of Biology Equality and Diversity site, with link to our Athena SWAN silver application

- **https://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/athena-swan-members/**

    Institutional award holder contacts and Departmental award holders—most applications can then be found on their institution's web pages

THANK YOU

YOUR QUESTIONS?

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