The Future of Athena SWAN

The report of the Athena SWAN Charter Review Independent Steering Group for Advance HE
March 2020

Appendix 4 –
Summary of outcomes from the task and finish groups
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Assessment Criteria Task and Finish Group
The Assessment Criteria Task and Finish Group met four times to explore the award criteria and assessment processes of the Athena SWAN Charter and make recommendations on how these elements could be improved. The following reflects the recommendations submitted to the Steering Group for consideration plus clarification of the award levels relating to the requirements and key criteria:

Recommendations:
1. The current Bronze, Silver and Gold awards should remain, rather than being replaced with a GPA score.
2. Brief criteria should be provided for each award (with a few defined criteria for each level reflected in the tables below).
3. Applications should focus on issues of specific concern to the institution/department/institute. Applicants should be invited to identify and discuss their key issues, and link these directly to their action plan.
4. Institutional and departmental applications should have a different focus and separate application forms. Institutional applications should focus on institutional policies (e.g. promotion, development, progression, recruitment etc.), and departmental applications should focus on how they deliver and adhere to institutions policies and, where relevant, discuss any deviation from institutional policy.
5. Advance HE should prepare exemplars for both successful and unsuccessful applications for each award and make these available to applicants.
6. Athena SWAN work should be appropriately resourced and rewarded by institutions. Institutional leadership and ownership, and support for departmental roles, are key and should be clearly evidenced. Institutions should ensure a holistic approach is taken to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) activity with clear governance structures reporting into the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Clear expectations should be set about who is leading and undertaking the work, what credit they get for doing Athena SWAN work within the department/institution, and how work in this space is set against promotion criteria etc.
7. Award duration should be lengthened to 5 years, with award-holders encouraged to apply in advance of the award end date for a higher-level award if they have achieved impact.
During the consultation process, there was strong support in the sector that culture was a key criterion which was not being addressed. Therefore we recommend that the findings from a short culture survey are included in future applications.

Applicants (at all levels) wishing to apply for a Silver award should first hold a Bronze award. This will allow the applicant to refer directly to the Bronze action plan and priorities identified through the Bronze application to evidence impact.

Bronze award-holders will be encouraged to undertake proactive activity in order to apply for a Silver award at the end of the Bronze award period. If an institution/department/institute does not feel they have achieved sufficient progress they can apply for a renewal of their Bronze award, though repeated renewal will be discouraged.

The panel will be drawn from a team of professional, trained academics and EDI specialists, appointed to be panel assessors for a fixed term. An agreed job description for panel membership and terms of reference will be devised.

The assessment process will more closely mirror those of research councils: the assessment will be done in advance of meetings and marks/feedback collated prior to the meeting.

Marking will be against specified criteria, with numerical marking for various sections and comments/feedback expected on the strengths and weaknesses. For example, feedback may include ‘what is needed for this application to succeed?’ Committee members will be expected to ‘speak to’ a specified number of applications during the meeting to aid final decisions.

Committees will deal with a large number of applications during meetings. They will meet frequently to ensure that applicants do not have to wait long.

If some applications are close but do not quite meet the expected criteria, they will get supportive feedback and be invited to clarify or show how they have improved to ensure a successful award. The overall assumption is that the process will support successful awards.

Feedback from the assessment committees will be designed to be supportive with helpful feedback to maximise chances of success.

Applications to renew an award will need an action plan for the coming period.
Clarification of award levels:

**Institutional level**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
<th>Key Criteria</th>
<th>Other details†</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Institutional Bronze** | • Who we are  
• Overview of institutional policies  
• What our issues are (including what are our key priorities)  
• What we plan to do about issues  
• Action plan  
• Gender focus | • Recognition of the key issues facing the institution  
• Action plan to address identified issues, including plans to improve policies | • 5 years  
• Can be renewed as long as some progress (and continued momentum) is demonstrated |
| **Institutional Silver** | • Who we are  
• Update detailing progress/impact made since Bronze award  
• What we are doing at institutional level to drive change via policies  
• Gender focused  
• What our issues are (including what are our key priorities)  
• What we plan to do about issues  
• Action plan | • Demonstration of progress and evidence of achievement against the applicant’s priorities | • 5 years  
• Must hold Bronze award first  
• Can be renewed as long as some progress (and continued momentum) is demonstrated |
| **Institutional Gold** | • Who we are  
• Update detailing progress/impact made since Silver award  
• Outcomes/impact from what we have done at institutional level via policies  
• Gender focused  
• How we have supported others  
• What our issues are (including what are our key priorities)  
• What we plan to do about issues  
• Action plan | • Continued progress and outcomes against key priorities  
• Lead/support others to improve  
• Clear evidence of sustained success in addressing gender inequality  
• Evidence of progressive new policies/practices | • 5 years  
• Must hold Silver award first  
• Can be renewed as long as some progress (and continued momentum) is demonstrated |

†Maximum word count to be determined upon finalisation of recommendations relating to application format.
## Appendix 4 – Summary of outcomes from the task and finish groups

### Departmental level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Other details¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Departmental Bronze | • Who we are  
• What our issues are (including what are our key priorities)  
• What are we good at  
• What we plan to do about issues  
• How we deliver and ensure adherence to institutional policies  
• Culture survey completed and analysed  
• Action plan  
• Gender focus | • Recognition of the key issues facing the department  
• Action plan to address identified issues | • 5 years  
• Can be renewed as long as some progress (and continued momentum) is demonstrated |
| Departmental Silver | • Who we are  
• Update detailing progress/impact made  
• Update on completed action plan showing outcomes for each action  
• Gender focus  
• Update on changes in culture survey  
• What our issues are (including what are our key priorities)  
• What we plan to do about issues  
• How we deliver and ensure adherence to institutional policies  
• Culture survey completed and analysed  
• Action plan | • Demonstration of progress and evidence of achievement against the applicant’s priorities | • 5 years  
• Must hold Bronze award first  
• Can be renewed as long as some progress (and continued momentum) is demonstrated |

¹Maximum word count to be determined upon finalisation of recommendations relating to application format
## Appendix 4 – Summary of outcomes from the task and finish groups

### Departmental Gold

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Other details†</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Who we are</td>
<td>• Continued progress and outcomes against key priorities</td>
<td>• 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Update detailing progress/impact made</td>
<td>• Lead/support others to improve</td>
<td>• Must hold Silver award first</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Update on completed action plan showing outcomes for each action</td>
<td>• Clear evidence of sustained success in addressing gender inequality</td>
<td>• Can be renewed as long as some progress (and continued momentum) is demonstrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Gender focus</td>
<td>• Evidence of progressive new policies/practices</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Update on changes in culture survey</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Demonstrate activities of supporting others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What our issues are (including what are our key priorities)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What we plan to do about issues</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How we deliver and ensure adherence to institutional policies</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Culture survey completed and analysed</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Action plan</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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### Renewal applications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Other details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Renewal (all levels, institutional and departmental)</td>
<td>• Who we are and any significant changes since the previous application</td>
<td>• Demonstration of progress against previous action plan and the updated action plan</td>
<td>• Include culture survey in appendix for departmental and directorates applications only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What our issues are (including what are our key issues)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Any additional actions undertaken plus rationale</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Update detailing progress made since previous award (linked to action plan outputs and culture survey)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Any change in circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How we will build on this progress through an updated action plan</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Costing Models Task and Finish Group

The Costing Models Task and Finish Group met three times to explore costing models in relation to the current panel system, definitions of expert groups and costing models for supporting panel members.

Recommendations:

1. The panel wanted to support a longer length of an Athena SWAN award at silver and gold level, but noted the feedback from the consultation. It is therefore proposed it should be 4-5 years.
2. A mixed pool of expert panellists, both academic and professional services should be recruited to aid consistency of decision-making on application, offer pre-application support and mid-award reviews.
3. Appointment end dates should be staggered to ensure sufficient continuity of expertise and knowledge retention amongst these expert.
4. Secondments of 3-5 years could be part-time appointments. This flexibility would widen the pool of applicants and also permit keeping up to date with their existing careers.
5. Advance HE should provide extended training for moderators, such that they are appropriately skilled to ensure the consistent quality of decisions made by assessment panels.
6. Implementation of a virtual panel system for Bronze applications to be completed on a rolling basis with Silver and Gold applications being reviewed by face to face panel meetings.
7. Advance HE to create an online system to support new Charter application forms, ensure a standardised approach to the inclusion of data and reduce the issues of formatting.
8. Advance HE should create better pre-application support including extended guidance, phone helplines and heightened support for first time applicants and those who have been unsuccessful.
Data Task and Finish Group

The Data Task and Finish Group met three times to explore the quantitative and qualitative data collection requested of applicants:

**Recommendations:**

1. The current list of required data requirements has been assessed and the list below denotes what data should be requested within an Athena SWAN application as mandatory or optional including future considerations i.e. REF 2021.

2. For JISC, HESA and Advance HE to work together on a combined project to develop an online portal where institutions can upload their Athena SWAN data to be viewed alongside HESA data to provide benchmarking data to institutions in a standardised way ready for their Athena SWAN applications.

3. To review the inclusion of a culture survey as a mandatory element of the Athena SWAN application process.

**Data sets – mandatory or optional**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Numbers of students by gender at foundation, UG, PGT and PGR level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Degree attainment and completion rates by gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Numbers of academic staff by grade, contract function (teaching and research, teaching only, research only) and gender. At Silver institution level, for professional service posts too (excepting contract function)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Numbers of academic staff by grade, contract type (fixed-term, open-ended, zero-hours) and gender. At Silver institution level, for professional service posts too</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Applications and appointments made in recruitment to academic posts, by grade and gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Applications and success rates for academic staff promotion, by grade and gender.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>