



## Athena SWAN Silver award guidance

Applications for a Silver SWAN are open to departments in universities which already hold a Bronze award. Applications at Silver level should demonstrate what the individual department is doing to work towards equality in the career progression of women and men in SET, in addition to university-wide policies. They should also demonstrate the impact of these activities so far. While Athena SWAN is primarily aimed at female staff, at Silver level we also expect to see initiatives to increase numbers of female students where they are underrepresented as these students will form the pipeline for the academics of the future.

Universities cannot apply in the first instance for a Silver award. University-wide Silver awards will be made when the university can demonstrate that a significant proportion of its departments hold individual Silver awards and that there is strong leadership in promoting the [charter principles](#) at the university level. University Silver awards are about quality as well as quantity and applications will need to demonstrate that, not only do the majority of SET departments hold awards, but that this number includes some of the more challenging disciplines too. There are different application templates for university and department Silver awards.

We recognise that not all institutions use the term 'department', and that there are many equivalent academic groupings with different names, sizes and compositions. If in doubt, contact Athena SWAN staff in advance to check whether your department, or equivalent, is eligible to apply.

Remember that Athena SWAN is a Charter for women in science so, while recognising that good practice benefits both men and women, the awards are about what you do to increase the numbers of women at all levels. Make sure that your template and action plan are gender-specific.

Not everyone will do well at everything. The recognition panel is looking for a balance of how well you are monitoring progress and acting on what needs to be addressed. Where you cannot comment on data or initiatives, you should explain why not.

Our [definition of SET](#) can be found on the Athena SWAN website.

### A picture of the department

We are aware that different types of institution have different characteristics and it is useful to know this at the beginning of the application. Please include only factual information and avoid unnecessary promotional language. The purpose of this section is to **contextualise the application**, so that we can understand any particular features of the department.

## Gender Data

For Departmental Silver awards applicants are expected to have a sound understanding of the data relating to their department and discipline. University applications will need a comprehensive overview of data relating to their SET departments. At Silver level we expect applications to make an assessment of how the department and university (as appropriate) compares with the national averages using benchmarking data, where available. If any of the data sets are incomplete you need to explain why not and how you intend to collect this information in the future.

We will look for evidence of progress made on recruiting, retaining and advancing women's careers, especially since the university achieved its Bronze award. Applicants are expected to show an understanding of the main points of attrition and outline their priorities to address this. While we do not stipulate a minimum number of women in a department, at Silver level we will be looking for rising numbers of women being employed and/or appointed to senior positions.

We recognise that some disparities in data between men and women may not be statistically significant, which is why we expect you to focus your activities in areas where there is a more striking difference and where departments can make a difference. We are also aware that certain sets of data have small sample sizes and the limitations of analysing small data sets. Low numbers mean that qualitative data should be adopted more rigorously. For instance, if only one or two women go on maternity leave, then it would be appropriate to use qualitative measures to find out their reasons for their return/non-return to work and act on these findings.

The graphical illustrations should provide a picture of the department or university (as relevant) over time. We want to know the main challenges and achievements and the illustrations should communicate this clearly. Please put the data into a PDF document.

The data provided should be in keeping with the university's own Data Protection guidelines.

### **Initiatives to advance and support women in the department (Departmental applications only)**

This section gives you the opportunity to provide some narrative on what the department is doing, above and beyond legal requirements and university-wide initiatives, to advance and support women's careers. It is not required for university Silver applications.

- (i) **Promotion and career development** – we will look for evidence that women are being both put forward for promotion and being promoted at a similar rate as men and that departments are proactive in identifying and preparing women for promotion. We expect to see a range of promotion criteria taken into consideration – teaching

responsibilities, research, pastoral roles and outreach and public engagement work. We also expect that quality of work is emphasised over quantity of work and that maternity and career breaks do not negatively impact on women's promotion prospects.

- (ii) **Support for staff at key career transition points** – having identified any areas of attrition of female staff in your department we will look for a description of activities that support women at these crucial stages, such as personal development training, opportunities for networking, mentoring programmes and leadership training.
- (iii) **Flexible working** – we are looking for evidence of your flexible working policies being taken up by men and women across different grades and of how well the options are communicated to staff. We will also be interested in knowing about how diverse ways of working are managed and any particularly innovative practices.
- (iv) **Culture** – by 'culture' we are referring to the language, behaviours and other informal interactions that characterise the atmosphere of the department. For assistance in gauging how female-friendly the culture and behaviour of your institution is use UKRC's [Culture Analysis Tool \(CAT\)](#). See also the [SWAN factsheet on organisational culture](#).
- (v) **Recruitment of staff** – we are looking for evidence of how you advertise vacancies to attract a diverse range of applicants, how you ensure a balanced shortlist of candidates and how interviewing panels conform to university equal opportunities requirements.
- (vi) **Representation on decision-making committees** – we want to know how people are chosen for committees and to see evidence that women are encouraged onto a range of influential committees in the department as well as more widely in the university and beyond. You should mention how the issue of 'committee overload' is addressed where there are small numbers of female staff.
- (vii) **Workload model** – describe any systems, formal or informal, to ensure that all work across the department is recognised, allocated equitably and valued by the team. We will look for evidence that responsibilities such as teaching, administrative, pastoral, outreach and committee duties are accounted for and factored into appraisals and work plans.
- (viii) **Cover for maternity and adoption leave and support on return** – explain what the department does, beyond the university maternity policy package, to support female staff before they go on maternity leave, arrangements for covering work during absence and to help them achieve a suitable work-life balance on their return. This may, in research-focussed institutions, include initiatives like reducing teaching loads for a temporary period to allow the returner to focus more closely on her research. We will also be interested in ways of managing maternity leave for staff on fixed-term contracts.

- (ix) **Timing of departmental meetings and social gatherings** – we will be interested in what the department considers to be core hours, or whether there is a more flexible system in place.
- (x) **Outreach activities** – if your department engages in outreach activities with schools and colleges and other centres such as women’s groups, describe who the programmes are aimed at, how this activity is formally recognised as part of the workload model, if it is done mainly by women and if it is taken into consideration in appraisal and promotion processes. If relevant, explain how these activities fit in to the institution’s Widening Participation agenda.
- (xi) **Induction and training** – describe the kind of information given to new staff about the employment practices in the department (and the university) when they start. This includes temporary staff and staff on fixed-term contracts. We will be interested in the extent to which the good employment practice in the institution, such as opportunities for networking, the flexible working policy and professional and personal development opportunities, are promoted to staff from the outset. Give details of gender training offered to staff and managers in particular.
- (xii) **Support for female students** – describe any formal or informal activities to support female students in working towards a career in academic science such as mentoring, seminars and pastoral support and the right to request a female personal tutor. Say whether these activities are run by female staff and how this work is formally recognised by the department.

### **Case study: impacting on individuals**

This section provides an opportunity to focus on the career progression of one woman working in the department and show how the inclusive culture and working practices of the department have enabled her to pursue a career in SET.

### **Further SET-specific initiatives**

This section is to describe any SET-specific innovative activities not covered in previous sections. You might like to introduce any work you are doing to address multiple discrimination, e.g. ethnic minority women, lesbians, disabled women working in SET. You could include details of inclusive social activities and initiatives to support and advance the careers of part-time staff. You might also like to take the opportunity here to reflect on activities that were not successful and lessons learnt in the process.

### **The self-assessment process**

The recognition panel will be looking to see a diverse membership in the Self-Assessment Team – a balance of men and women, at different career stages

and with some personal experience of work-life balance issues. It is also useful to have representation of staff in SET, equality and diversity, management and staff development. We will be interested to see when the team was formed, how often it meets and how it operates. You should also note what wider consultation has taken place within the department or university (as appropriate) and whether the application is available on the website.

### **Action plan**

The action plan should be a spreadsheet or table covering the three year validity of the award and containing, at a minimum, a clear description of the action, a named person responsible and a time scale. Avoid allocating responsibility to a team or group, or overburdening one individual, and only describe activities as ongoing if they are planned to continue indefinitely. We will be looking for actions that arise out of the priorities identified by the data and commentary in this application. We will also be interested in what you think success will look like and whether your plans are realistic within the time scales. Reviews of existing activities should be identified as separate (although related) actions.

University action plans may include elements of Departmental action plans but should also include cross-sectoral activities.

Note that progress on the actions stated in the action plan will need to be provided in a summary when the Silver award is renewed after three years (using the Silver/Gold renewal form) and a new three-year action plan supplied. This will not be necessary if the department achieves a Gold award within three years.

### **Embedding Athena SWAN (university applications only)**

This section is for you to demonstrate how you share the good practice identified in Departmental SWAN applications and how you promote Athena SWAN more widely, eg, in publicity or recruitment campaigns, or in working with other universities on their SWAN applications. You could also explain how you communicate Athena SWAN and its aims to staff and students.

### **Any other comments**

This section gives you a final opportunity to add any contextual information or mitigating circumstances that you consider relevant to your application. It may be that your department is coming from a particularly low base and you consider that your progress needs to be viewed in this light, or that there are external factors beyond the control of the department or university that have an impact on the scope or pace of your activities.

## General application guidance

### Here are some general tips about your award application:

- Be concise and stick to the word limits. Focus on what is innovative.
- We look for honesty, self-reflection and awareness of departmental shortcomings with specific actions to address these.
- Make sure your action plan covers 3 years (the validity of the award), not just the next 12 months.
- Avoid focussing on the achievements of individual women scientists in isolation outside section 3. The recognition panel will be interested in the findings of surveys and other qualitative data.
- We want to see evidence of engagement and support for Athena SWAN at a senior level.
- If your institution is applying for multiple SWAN awards from different departments, make sure that each application is distinctive, addressing the particular issues and demographic of that discipline.
- Look at the [previous submissions](#) section of the website for examples of successful submissions. Please note that the SWAN criteria and process have changed over the years, but the good practice and analysis are still relevant.
- Contact other [SWAN members](#) to discuss how they applied for an award and their experience of the process.
- Read some of the other [good practice guidance](#) for women in SET, as many of the initiatives will be applicable to SWAN.
- Come to the SWAN awards workshops held every year to assist applicants.
- Don't be afraid to pilot something unusual and/or risky, as originality and creativity are valued by the recognition panel.
- Any queries should be emailed to [athenaswan@ecu.ac.uk](mailto:athenaswan@ecu.ac.uk)

### Application checklist

Last date for submission to [athenaswan@ecu.ac.uk](mailto:athenaswan@ecu.ac.uk) is **31st May** each year. The deadline cannot be extended.

In addition to this form we need:

- Letter of endorsement from the Head of Department
- Action plan