Athena SWAN – getting started
4th August 2017
This guide is designed to help departments get started on the Athena SWAN process. It outlines procedures and timescales and gives information about support available from HR.

The Athena SWAN Charter was established to encourage and recognise commitment to gender equality in higher education and research. Awards are available to departments at Bronze, Silver and Gold level.

The University’s commitment to Athena SWAN, at both institutional and departmental level, is a crucial aspect of our EDI Strategic Vision 2020, which in turn supports the University Strategy 2020. Our commitment to EDI improves our ability to achieve the Strategy 2020, by contributing to achieving excellence, improving outcomes and experiences for individuals and groups, and supporting our institutional culture, values and behaviours.
1. Initial commitment from HoD

The Athena SWAN process is not a simple box-ticking exercise, but rather demonstrates a commitment on the part of an academic department to changing processes and culture to promote gender equality. The HoD should think about how the Athena SWAN process should fit into departmental structures, how the committee will report back to senior management (eg standing items at relevant meetings), and what administrative support will be made available.

Support available from HR: We can put you in touch with the HoD from a department which is further advanced along the Athena SWAN path who can advise you on committee structures, administrative issues and the broad types of actions that your department is likely to be asked to take. We are also happy to attend a departmental meeting to explain the charter and processes involved to staff. If you would be interested in support from HR, please contact Rob Kemp or Sophie Black.

2. Appointment of a departmental Athena SWAN lead

The departmental Athena SWAN effort should be led by a permanent member of staff. The lead should be senior staff member with the power and influence to deliver the action plan and effect culture change. They can be male or female and should have a strong commitment to gender equality and family-friendly work policies. The position of Athena SWAN lead should be included in the department’s workload model. Note that under the new promotions criteria for academic staff, leading the department’s Athena SWAN effort is explicitly recognised under the Academic Leadership and Engagement criteria.

Support available from HR: We can ‘partner’ your AS lead with the lead from another, more experienced department, who can offer support and advice, including attending one another’s SAT meetings. The AS lead will be invited to sit on the University’s central Athena SWAN committee.
3. Formation of a departmental self-assessment team (SAT)

The SAT is a very important part of the process and the submission should be driven by the full team rather than one or two individuals. The SAT’s composition should be representative of staff in the department and should include members with a mixture of grades and roles, including PDRA, postgraduate, possibly undergraduate and support/technical staff. The gender balance of the SAT should also be broadly representative of that of the department. It is important that clear reporting lines are established from the SAT to HoD/senior management group/committees.

It may be useful initially to form sub-groups of 2-3 people to focus on particular issues, for example staff diversity data/staff survey/student attainment.

Support available from HR: We can provide examples of SAT composition from other Lancaster departments, as well as those in your discipline from other institutions.

4. Frequency of SAT meetings

Athena SWAN centrally have advised us that the SAT should initially meet monthly in order to kick-start the process. Once the committee and workplan is better established, meetings can become less frequent, with a minimum laid down centrally of three times a year. However it is unlikely that a department could gain a first award without meeting more frequently than that. Athena SWAN expects that SATs will meet for around a year before first submission.

Support available from HR: We are able to send a representative along to your first meeting upon request, although due to staffing constraints we cannot commit to attending all meetings.
5. Analyse staff and student data and conduct staff survey

Athena SWAN actions should be based on an analysis of departmental data. You should consider gender balance of students at undergraduate level, including breakdowns by degree course and degree result, as well as PGT and PGR levels. Gender balance data at all staff grades should also be provided. All data should be benchmarked against suitable sector-wide data.

As well as extensive quantitative analysis, departments are expected to consult their staff and use that process to provide qualitative data. Staff surveys are the most common means of consultation but you may also wish to hold focus groups.

Support available from HR: When you are ready to start looking at staff data, please contact Sophie Black, who will prepare the relevant spreadsheets and send them to you. We can also explain to departments how to access relevant student information, show you how to access relevant benchmarking data, and provide a sample staff survey which can be adapted to your department’s needs.

6. Identify key gender equality challenges

Departments which are starting out in the Athena SWAN process are not expected to solve all their gender equality problems before applying for an award. At Bronze level the aim is to identify issues and put in place actions to tackle them.

Quantitative and qualitative data analysis should be used to identify areas to target in terms of gender equality. For example, if your proportion of female senior staff is very low (either in actual terms or in comparison to benchmarks) then this is something that might be identified as a key problem. Another example could be that you find there are comparatively few female applicants for undergraduate places. Don’t try to tackle everything at once – identify the most pressing problems to deal with first.
7. Adopt a series of actions to address these issues
Once key problem areas have been identified, actions should be put in place to tackle these. Actions should have measurable outcomes and be time-limited. Many actions are quite standard and are used in many departments, for example holding meetings in core hours, using a transparent workload model and ensuring the visibility of female role models. While actions do not have to be novel, they do have to be ‘owned’ by the department itself; providing a list of central university actions is not sufficient.

Support available from HR: We have published a Quick Actions Checklist which aims to tackle commonly-found gender equality issues, and are in the process of compiling a broader document detailing best practice both within the university and in other institutions. We can also provide you with the action plans of departments which have successfully applied for Athena SWAN awards, or partner you with a Lancaster department which already has an award.

8. Complete and submit Athena SWAN application
Once all the analysis has been done and actions established, departments can apply for an award. The application form is substantial (≈80 pages) so plenty of time should be left to complete it and the task should be broken up where possible among different members or sub-groups of the team.

There are two application rounds each year, one with a deadline of the last working day of April and one the last working day of November. The fee for submission is currently £500 and some help with funding this may be available centrally, dependent on future budgets.

Support available from HR: If you believe your department may require help with funding, please enquire with HR for further information

The University Athena SWAN committee has a special meeting before each submission round to give feedback on draft submissions. If more help is needed in putting the submission together, an EDI adviser’s time can be bought in by departments at a rate of £105 a day (subject to staff availability).
Further information
For more information, please contact

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Resources
Guide for departments:
http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/media/lancaster-university/content-assets/images/athena-swan/Guidefordepartments-update2.pdf

Quick actions checklist:
http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/media/lancaster-university/content-assets/images/athena-swan/AthenaSWANquickactionschecklist.pdf