This guidance note summarises what the Equality and Diversity Unit has learned about Athena SWAN’s expectations of departments applying for Bronze and Silver awards, based on feedback received on the University of Oxford’s submissions to April 2012 and advice given at the Athena SWAN ‘Going for Silver’ seminar held in December 2012.

For full guidance on preparing your application see the Athena SWAN awards handbook: http://www.athenaswan.org.uk/content/guidance-and-application-forms

Departments applying for Silver should also refer to the presentations from the ‘Going for Silver’ seminar: http://www.athenaswan.org.uk/content/going-silver-seminar-0

Bronze Department Award

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.

**Covering letter**

- Must clearly demonstrate the personal engagement and commitment of the Head of Department.
- Should show awareness of the key issues and of how Athena SWAN is beneficial to the Department.

**Self-assessment process**

- The self-assessment team should have a good balance of men and women and should be representative of the different roles and career stages within the department.
- Pen portraits of the team members are the preferred way of demonstrating this balance but are not obligatory.
- The self-assessment should take place over a reasonable period of time and there should be evidence that the team has met regularly during this period.
- The self-assessment must be a rigorous process, able to demonstrate wide consultation with and engagement of staff and students.
- If you are using surveys, you should be proactive in getting responses. You should also be aware of the limitations of surveys and use focus groups to gather qualitative data that will help you to gain a nuanced understanding of the situation in your department.

---

1 Any sensitive personal information can and should be removed before the final application is published on your website.
• The aims of Athena SWAN and of the self-assessment process should be clearly communicated to the whole department.
• The self-assessment team should show leadership within the department and the process should be connected to departmental management and strategy.

Description of the Department

• Data should be provided exactly as asked for in the template and in the relevant place. If a certain section does not apply (e.g. foundation courses), a simple statement to this effect is sufficient.
• Data should be well-presented, easy to understand and both percentage and absolute figures given.
• Both student and staff data should be benchmarked against other comparable institutions.
• An honest assessment of the data and highlighting of weaknesses is welcomed. The purpose of this section is to use data to understand your situation, and to use this understanding to inform your action plan.

Key career transition points

• It is helpful to map the full pipeline, from undergraduate to professor.
• This section should include a solid analysis of the issues and provide evidence to support conclusions.
• The narrative should discuss all gender disparities shown by the data.
• You should include commentary on how you will encourage and support female applicants for posts and promotion.

Career development

• Induction, mentoring and appraisal for staff at all levels are critical points to address.

Organisation and culture

• Good practice includes: a workload monitoring system; representation of women on committees; holding meetings, seminars and social events within core hours; removing images that reinforce male and female stereotypes; increasing visibility of women in departmental communications and events.

Flexibility and managing career breaks

• Good practice includes: leadership from senior staff; clear communication of University policies on flexible working, maternity and paternity leave and childcare provision; support for flexible working; support to women before, during and on return from maternity leave.

Action plan

• The action plan should directly address the issues outlined in the analysis and the two should be cross-referenced. Actions should not be included because they are ‘good practice’ if it is not clear what challenge they are intended to address.

Adrienne Hopkins, Equality & Diversity Unit, January 2013
• Actions should be SMART and should be phased across the full three years of the award period.
• Actions should be innovative and include women-focussed activities.
• It should be clear who is responsible for the actions and what accountability mechanisms are in place.
• The action plan is a living document and should be regularly reviewed and updated, at minimum on an annual basis.

Silver Department Award

In addition to the future planning required for Bronze department recognition, a Silver department award 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.

The application should address all the points outlined above, and include two case studies that demonstrate how departmental policies and practices have supported women’s career progression.

The key difference at Silver level is that the application must be able to demonstrate that actions have been in place over a sustained period of time (a minimum of 18 months) and present evidence that there has been change within the department as a result of these actions. Athena SWAN recognises that an increase in numbers will take time, particularly at senior levels, but you should be able to demonstrate positive trends, for example:

• An increase in women’s uptake of training and development opportunities.
• Qualitative evidence of the effectiveness of mentoring, such as the number of women reporting greater levels of confidence in their own abilities.
• An increase in the number of women applying for roles.

Self-assessment process

• If the department already holds a Bronze award, you should show that you have taken on board the feedback given on your original application and describe how the self-assessment team has managed implementation and review of your action plan.
• It should be clear that there is a structure and resourcing in place to support implementation of your action plan.
• Consultation with students and staff is critical and you should clearly describe how this has happened.
• There should be evidence that the process initiated by the self-assessment team is sustainable. For this to happen:
  o There should be buy-in and ownership across the department, from both men and women and at all levels.
  o Actions should be embedded into departmental policies and procedures.
  o Over-reliance on one person to drive the process should be avoided.
  o You should include details of your plans for maintaining momentum after the application has been submitted.
  o You should plan for regular communications, using a variety of media.
Data

- If you are unable to provide the required data, you must clearly explain the reasons for this.
- Carefully consider what gender equality means in the context of Higher Education and of your discipline, and be ambitious but realistic in your analysis.
- Don’t fall into the trap of thinking that having a proportion of female students or staff that is as good as (or even better than) the national average is ‘good enough’ if it nonetheless shows that women are underrepresented.
- You must be able to clearly explain the reasons for any negative trends.
- It is expected that you will have an understanding of the reasons for attrition at key points in the pipeline, e.g. through collecting data on destinations of leavers.

Actions

- Your action plan should show ambition.
- There is an expectation that easier actions or ‘quick wins’ will already have been implemented and therefore not included in the action plan.
- While the focus is on culture change within your department, you should be seeking to have wider influence if elements are beyond your immediate control.
- Although some actions will benefit everyone within the department, you should not lose sight of Athena SWAN’s end goal and your focus should be on what’s good for women.

There are elements that the Athena SWAN panel particularly value for a successful Silver award. If you do not have these in place, you should provide a convincing argument as to why not:

- Annual appraisals/career discussions embedded in Departments for all academic and research staff.
- Career development support mechanisms exist and are communicated clearly.
- Gender balance on key decision making committees.
- A fair and transparent workload allocation model.