

● Notes from meeting for geography departments, 11 March 2016

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The Society hosted a meeting for geography departments¹ on equality and diversity initiatives, including applications for the Athena SWAN Charter, on Friday 11 March 2016.

Background

The Society is committed to supporting the higher education geographical community to advance equality and diversity in geographical teaching, research and learning. One route by which this is being addressed in institutions is through the Equality Challenge Unit's (ECU) *Athena SWAN* Charter Mark (for gender equality) and *Race Equality* Charter Mark. Further ways in which the Society is providing support equality and diversity in geography may be found on our website, at: www.rgs.org/equalitydiversity

Changes to the Athena SWAN Charter affecting geography departments

ECU's Athena SWAN Charter was established in 2005 to encourage and recognise commitment to advancing the careers of women in science, technology, engineering, maths and medicine (STEMM) employment in higher education and research. Some geography departments were eligible to make applications under this scheme e.g. where staff/students fell into physical geography and earth sciences subject areas. *This was the "pre-May 2015" application form and process.*

In May 2015 the charter was expanded to recognise work undertaken in arts, humanities, social sciences, business and law (AHSSBL), and in professional and support roles, and for trans staff and students. This means all geography departments are eligible to make an application. The charter now recognises work undertaken to address gender equality more broadly, and not just barriers to progression that affect women. *This is the "post-May 2015" application form and process.*

ECU's Athena SWAN Charter covers women (and men where appropriate) in:

- academic roles in STEMM and AHSSBL
- professional and support staff
- trans staff and students

In relation to their:

- representation
- progression of students into academia
- journey through career milestones
- working environment for all staff

¹ Where reference is made below to "department/s", it is intended to refer to any administrative unit below institutional level (school, faculty) that delivers geographical research and teaching.

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The rest of this document contains notes and information from the meeting.

Introduction to the Athena SWAN Charter

Ruth Gilligan, Athena SWAN Manager, Equality Challenge Unit

[These notes are accompanied by Ruth's presentation slides in PDF.]

The presentation outlined the evolution of the Athena SWAN Award from STEM-focused to covering all disciplines. The differences between the pre-May 2015 and post-May 2015 processes were explained; applications are:

- not just about sciences (now extended to all disciplines)
- not just about one gender (attention is given to career progression for all)
- not just about academics (professional and support staff are included)
- expected to have a more complete data analysis
- expected to address four years from the point of application

Some geography and earth sciences departments have made applications under the STEM-focused programme (pre-May 2015) and [award holders can be found on the ECU website](#). With the expansion of the scheme to all disciplines, geography departments are now welcome to make an application at any time after their institution has received a Bronze Athena SWAN award. Most will now use the post-May 2015 application process.

The Athena SWAN Charter has ten principles; departments are asked to reflect on six of these in applications and action plans. They will not be asked explicitly about: the gender pay gap, support for trans staff and students, and intersectionality, which are asked for in institutional level submissions. Departments should think about these issues in the context of institutional work.

Athena SWAN Principles:

1. Recognise talents of all
2. Advance gender equality
3. *Recognise disciplinary differences*
4. *Tackle the gender pay gap*
5. Remove obstacles
6. Address short-term contracts
7. *Tackle discrimination against trans people*
8. Demonstrate senior commitment
9. Make structural and cultural changes
10. *Consider intersectionality*

Key changes to the application process for departments making an application in the future are:

- = Inclusion of professional and support staff
- = Questions about REF & RAE
- = Support for grant applicants
- = Four year award (and action plan)
- = Aggregated, extended word count

[Application process, on the ECU website](#)

Advice for making a successful application

Disaggregate your data to make trends clear, e.g. consider whether human and physical geography show the same patterns. Make reference to actions within your discussion of the data

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(e.g. within a box below the relevant paragraph), to signal to the panel that you have identified the issue and an action.

Your actions should cover *four years*, and be SMART-S (specific, measureable, achievable, realistic, timebound, and strategic) – the panel should see that they are appropriate for your issues in your context. Don't forget to plan how you will measure the impact of your actions.

Common reasons for being unsuccessful:

- = Poor action plan that is not *SMART*
- = Lack of senior management *buy-in*; team lacks power
- = *Descriptive*, rather than analytical narrative
- = Applications not *identifying* issues raised by the data
- = Action plan not *targeted* to issues raised
- = Inappropriate balance between process and *proactive* action
- = *Changing the women not the processes*

Questions and discussion about applications

Participants raised questions about promotions; staff retention; salaries and pay gaps; zero-hours contracts/casual/adjunct/seasonal staff; presentation of pipeline data; intersectionality and crossover with Race Equality Charter Mark; applications at school vs discipline/department.

Promotions and retention

While departments are usually obliged to follow university-wide policies and processes for promotion, it is useful for the panel if these can be made explicit. Description of where the department/school has input to the process (e.g. representation on promotion panels; nomination of individuals for promotion) can be helpful in identifying issues, as can feedback from staff on their experience of the promotion process. Staff retention might be considered in the context of the progression pipeline, including where there are bridging/redeployment positions.

Salaries and a gender pay gap

The gender pay gap is primarily addressed in institutional applications. Departments may address this if they think it is important to their activities (this would usually only be at Silver and Gold level applications, if it was undertaken), but care should be taken to maintain anonymity. Participants acknowledged the wide diversity of promotion and pay-related processes between institutions, and the large inequalities that can exist within contract grades within institutions (e.g. the professoriate). It was noted that if staff self-report an issue with the gender pay gap in departmental Athena SWAN surveys, SATs should address this in their application.

Zero-hours/casual contracts

ECU is working on an FAQ which will be published in the near future. The draft FAQ is below, which may be expanded upon before publishing:

Data on 'zero hours staff' also covers casual staff, including student demonstrators, adjunct staff, associate lecturers, graduate teaching assistants, etc, and these staff should be included in question 4.2 (ii). You may exempt data on one-off contracts such as for a single lecture. It is advisable to give a short account of the types of staff covered by this designation in your department, possibly even with some proportions, if available. Data on this cohort need not be included in the subsequent data-focussed questions of the supporting and advancing women's careers section, but consideration should be given to the experience of and consideration given to these staff in the career development section. Depending on how these contracts are used, it is suggested that a particular focus on how staff are supported to transition to contracts offering more stability, and how these contracts might be used to support the transition from student to staff member, may be relevant.

Applicants should also consider that staff on permanent contracts may include a number of staff whose contracts are funding dependant (the likelihood of this has increased since The Fixed-term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002). Particular focus on the support for staff on funding-limited contracts is encouraged.

Presentation of pipeline data

Pipeline data should be presented in the way that makes the most sense to the submitting department. This may mean disaggregating by subject or some other variable. Disaggregating can also help to identify issues within career stages.

Intersectionality and a crossover with the Race Equality Charter Mark

Intersectionality is the consideration of how multiple factors intersect to influence social positions and identity, e.g. sexuality, gender, race, disability, age, and religion. Institutions are asked to consider intersectionality in their applications, but this is not required at department level (though departments may reflect upon intersections where relevant to their circumstances). The Race Equality Charter Mark has been launched to specifically consider the career progression of black and minority ethnic staff and students. It is separate to, but aligned with, Athena SWAN. There will be shared learning, but no plans to merge the awards in the short term.

Applications at faculty/school/department/discipline

The ECU use the term department to apply to a range of units that sit below institution-level awards. There are precedents for a wide range of successful submissions from very small departments to large faculties, but administrative units should give consideration to the need to disaggregate data for substantially different programmes/lines of work and the benefits of consistency (e.g. of data collection for upgrade/renewal). [See Pages 16-19 of the post-May 2015 Athena SWAN handbook](#) for more information.

The following sections were accompanied by the following resources:

- The meeting slide pack, with headings as below
- Notes from the Athena SWAN workshops held at the Annual International Conference 2015 (organised by Ian Cook (Exeter) and Hilary Geoghegan (Reading))
- Jackson, P and Maddrell A (1996) [Arena Symposium: equal opportunities](#). Journal of Geography in Higher Education, 20:1, 123-125 (contains a framework for evaluating the inclusivity of geographical teaching)
- Advice, guidance and suggestions from institutional Athena SWAN teams (see example links at the end of this document).

Getting started, maintaining momentum – teams, applications and cultures

[Slides 3-5]

Participants discussed the challenges of creating a culture/ethos of equality in a department or school, starting with the self-assessment team. Feedback from discussion groups (see questions in slide 5) is summarised below.

Self-assessment teams (SATs):

- Participants contrasted experiences of institutions with centralised/professional support services (or an external consultant) for making Athena SWAN applications and those where Departments had full devolved responsibility. Involvement of equality & diversity professionals is recommended.
- Wide variation in how workload was allocated and reflected. Approaches included: a pool of hours shared amongst self-assessment team members according to tasks allocated; another is to recognise work as counting towards promotion (but not necessarily in

workload model); recognition of work going beyond admin responsibility into research? In some cases, only the application lead was given recognised hours.

- Consider workload allocations extending beyond the application to ensure time allowed for action delivery.
- It was noted that workload should be shared fairly to avoid 'women doing all the work', and to avoid meeting fatigue amongst those undertaking data collection and analysis.
- Teams should seek to avoid having junior staff undertake all the data analysis, as presenting difficult findings could create tension and dissension.

Cultures of management – supportive management cultures can help to avoid some of the issues of over-worked self-assessment teams, in particular where someone with the authority to make and direct change, and to recognise and appreciate efforts made, sits on the SAT.

Supporting progression

[Slides 6-8]

Participants discussed the barriers and enablers to career progression at different stages of the career pipeline. Feedback from discussion groups (see questions in slide 8) is summarised below.

Barriers to progression:

- Exist at every stage in the career pipeline and are often stage-specific. Are intersectional; gender is not the only factor creating inequality.
- Are both linked to the individual's personal circumstances (their work-life situation), the university's strategic priorities (e.g. promotions in key research areas), and the structural context (e.g. top heavy department creates blocks). Policies and processes need to be able to allow departments to recognise this and adapt as needed?
- Gaining and losing 'reputational footholds' with changes to line management – this especially the case for individuals making a combination of tangible and intangible contributions to departmental success
- Goalposts keep moving (especially where institutions often change promotion criteria or process). Promotion processes are often very institution-specific, especially in senior grades.

Enablers for progression

- Nature of the department and what they need, and how well they develop staff to meet that (short and long-term)
- Goodwill for policies and processes, e.g. flexibility around caring arrangements (children and others) – good work/life blend is wanted by everyone, not just parents
- Aligned value and judgment systems – everyone understands how they will be assessed for promotion by peers, and that is consistent from year to year, and subject area
- Staff mentoring; personal encouragement; writing retreats and similar opportunities; the cultivation of valuable experiences to encourage individuals to meet promotion criteria
- Departmental ethos needs to live beyond the HOD, and to be adopted by successive HODs
- Training in unconscious bias etc can be useful for recruitment and promotion panels, but should not be treated as tick-box training, rather an opportunity to create a safe space to discuss issues of how to confront our own bias.
- Anonymised applications (for professional and support staff) can make a big difference to diversity in short-listing stage; departments might also have an impartial observer watch recruitment/interview panels for bias (looking for evidence-led decision-making).

SMART- action planning and measuring impact

[Slides 9-10]

Participants discussed common issues facing departments, using examples drawn from a range of departmental Athena SWAN applications. They drew up actions and discussed approaches for

measuring impact. Refer to notes above on *Advice for making successful for applications* and *Demonstrating impact* for more information.

Participants suggested that a future meeting could include reflections on successful (and unsuccessful) actions from departments who have already been through the Athena SWAN application and renewal process.

Wrap-up

The day ended with a conversation about the importance of reflectiveness at multiple levels, incorporating judgment and subtlety in our self-assessments, along with showing appreciation for the “small acts of generosity” that take place in departments every day.

It was agreed that another meeting should take place, most likely in late September 2016. More information will be shared by RHED.

Resources and advice

Past applications and action plans

- Via www.ecu.ac.uk and www.rgs.org/equalitydiversity

ECU: <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/>

RGS-IBG (for disciplinary questions): rhed@rgs.org

Email lists:

- Athena SWAN Charter members’ network: athenaswan@jiscmail.ac.uk
- Athena SWAN geography: geography-athena-swan@jiscmail.ac.uk
- Equal Opportunities administrators: ADMIN-EO@JISCMail.AC.UK

Search for institutional support materials with advice for making an application, for example...

- UCL Athena SWAN toolkit (has examples of data presentation): <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/equalities/gender/1.%20UCL%20SWAN%20Toolkit-%202015.pdf>
- Bristol Athena SWAN: <http://www.bris.ac.uk/equalityanddiversity/act/protected/gender/swancharter/guidance.html>
- University of Cambridge: http://www.equality.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/athena_swan_departmental_guidelines_2014.pdf
- University of Lancaster: <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/hr/equality-diversity/AthenaSWAN-guide.pdf>

Self-Assessment Teams and application leaders should be aware that guidance given by other institutions may not reflect the latest award process for Athena SWAN – please use with caution and always consult the ECU website for the latest information.

Become an ECU panellist: <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/get-involved/become-charter-mark-panellist/>

Attendance

The meeting was hosted by Stephanie Wyse, RGS-IBG. The following institutions were represented: Birkbeck, University of London; Lancaster University; London School of Economics; Manchester Metropolitan University; Northumbria University; Queen Mary, University of London; University of Birmingham; University of Cardiff; University of Glasgow; University of Manchester; University of Southampton; University of Sussex; University of the West of England. They were joined by Ruth Gilligan, Manager Athena SWAN (Equality Challenge Unit).