Athena SWAN Biosciences Best Practice Workshop

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#BiosciencesForAll
What makes a good Athena SWAN application?

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Athena SWAN: award levels

**Bronze**
- self-assessment and analysis
- identify issues and challenges
- plan activities on a solid foundation

**Silver**
- additional to Bronze
- evidence of progress and achievement

**Gold**
- significant record of activity and impact
- beacons for gender equality and good practice

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Personal Reflections

1. AS certification not the end in itself; the correct mindset is to want to improve equity in the department. AS Bronze, Silver and Gold are just staging points

2. Buy-in from senior management is essential

3. Needs commitment from most (all?) staff to create sustainable change

4. There is no “correct” AS application: departments have different issues so applications should be bespoke
Athena SWAN: Process of application

Plan
- Team: skills, experience, knowledge & commitment
- Who does: what, how & when

Data
- Quantitative
- Qualitative

Analyse
- Trends & gender differences
- Pipeline & key career transition points
- Link different issues together

Write
- Narrative
- Action plan
- Consultation & revision

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Plan

- Self-assessment team (SAT) should be diverse (e.g. not 80% women) and representative (i.e. all grades of staff + students) in terms of experience, knowledge and points of view.

- Some has to lead process but this person shouldn’t be doing all the work. Many SATs have different sub-groups working on different sections of the application (but beware inconsistency).

- The SAT has to be embedded in departmental structure and have sufficient influence to elicit change.

- The SAT has to link with the members of the department, both senior management and the rank and file – nothing should be a surprise.
Data

- **Identify sources (not always easy!) and monitor relevant data all the time (not just for the submission)**

- **Quantitative data:**
  - ensure it is self consistent and present in an intelligible form
  - make it clear which cohort you are referring to
  - if you use %, ensure it is clear what it is a % of
  - give numbers as well as %

- **Qualitative data:**
  - can be collected via surveys; clickers in meetings; focus groups
  - Methods should be well embedded by the time of the application
Analyse

• Look for significant trends in the data over time (but don’t analyse noise!)

• Look at transitions – for example:
  • applications to shortlist to offer to appointment
  • lecturer to senior lecturer to reader to professor
  • UG to PG

• Golden Rule: Compare data with the stage below (e.g. applications with A-level : PG with UG: Senior lecturer with lecturer) and also compare with benchmarks

• Try to link issue across categories (hard!) and to actions

• Issues for the Action Plan should emerge from the analysis. Good idea to refer explicitly to specific actions from the narrative (also ensures AP is evidence-based)
Write

- Write narrative in good clear English with a logical flow and uniform style
- Present data clearly
- Analyse, not just describe
- Don’t try to pull the wool over the assessor’s eyes or sound complacent
- Leave yourselves time and manage the formal approval process...
- ...but own the document
The framework

1. Letter of endorsement
2. Description of the department
3. Self-assessment process
4. Picture of the department
5. Supporting and advancing careers
   • Key career transition points
   • Career development
   • Flexibility and managing career breaks
   • Organisation and culture
6. Case studies
7. Action plan

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Letter of endorsement

- HoD to show **personal** commitment with specific examples
- Comment on how AS is embedded in structure and processes + any financial support
- Refer to departmental + university strategy
- Endorse the application as accurate and honest
Description of the department

- Be concise: assessors want to know key points without being bogged down by detail

- Diagrams are helpful but make sure they are properly labelled

- Highlight anything that is unusual. Examples:
  - New department or recent split/merger
  - Split site
  - Shared studentships
  - Formal arrangements with other organisations
Self-assessment process

• Provide names, roles and brief pen picture of each SAT member

• Give brief details of the *modus operandi* including frequency of meetings etc.

• Explain carefully how each interested group in the department was consulted and engaged

• Describe how the SAT fits into the departmental structure, where it reports, and how it ensures change occurs
Picture of the department

• Present data clearly and critically. Do not simply describe, analyse too

• Ask yourself whether the numbers are reasonable and reflect

• Use benchmarks and link to external trends where appropriate

• Ensure data are self consistent

• Link issues explicitly to the Action Plan (e.g. see AP1.5.a)
Supporting and advancing women’s careers

1. About equity not just promoting women

2. This is a long section with overlap – try not to repeat too much

3. Transparency of procedures, particularly promotion, is very important e.g.
   - Clear criteria
   - Staff are encouraged to apply not just left alone
   - Staff briefings by HoD or Dean
   - Feedback
   - Allowance for maternity leave/special circumstances

4. Provide clear descriptions of policies and procedures at all levels – be honest
Supporting and advancing women's careers 2

- Report on male participation and engagement as well as female
  - Paternity/parental leave
  - Training
- Ensure flexible working and reduced loads after career breaks are formally included in processes and procedures
- Don’t forget research data (REF entrants; grant applications etc.)
- Assessors appreciate transparency of procedures and data.
Organisation and structure

- A fully transparent and balanced workload model (rare!)
  - AS and similar activities included
  - If it is not in the model, it is not valued

- How is information gathered about perceptions, including bullying and harassment?

- Core hours – give data as well as state policy

- Gender balance monitoring
  - Committee membership
  - Interview panels (cuts both ways)
  - Seminar speakers
  - Who does outreach?
Case studies

- Only required for Silver
- Do not just describe a successful woman academic
- Should be a description of how the policies in your department/institution have made a difference to an individual (male or female)
Athena SWAN: evidence

Good applications:
= Are honest
= Depend on data reporting
= Link data, analysis and action
= Target support
= Don’t make it a ‘women’s problem’
= Always ask ‘So what?’
= Include a SMART action plan

**SMART** = Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound

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Action Plan 1: SMART

• Specific: Refers to a particular issue identified in the analysis

• Measurable: Criteria for success can be measured (qualitatively or quantitatively)

• Achievable: Do not promise things that are implausible

• Relevant: Should relate to specific issue. Don’t invent actions that are not related to issues

• Time-bound: Provide milestones/deadlines. Be realistic and ensure AP is spread across several years.
Action Plan 2

• State the action

• Say why you think such an action is necessary (i.e. link to the analysis)

• Say why you think this action is relevant to the issue and likely to make a difference

• Say who is responsible and provide dates for milestones, completion etc.

• Success criteria should refer to the original issue and be as specific and quantitative as possible
**Action Plan 3: Bad practice**

**Action:** Increase the number of grant applications made by women in the department  OK but...

**Rationale:** Support required for academic members of staff making, or considering making grant applications. Hopeless. Just a statement. No link to data so no idea what issue is being addressed.

**Dates:** Start May 2017 End May 2018

Implausible – would not know in such a short time

**Success criteria:** An increase in the number of successful grant applications made by women in the department

Vague – what rise is acceptable? No link to original numbers
Action Plan 3: Better practice

**Action:** Identify reasons why women make fewer grant applications than men and take steps to increase the number of grant applications made by women in the department

**Rationale:** Data show that, on average, women staff submit 40% fewer grant applications than their male colleagues. Anecdotal evidence from focus groups indicate this is because they have larger informal administrative loads.

**Dates:** Start May 2017: Identify issues and implement plan: May 2018: Completion May 2021

**Success criteria:** An increase in the number of grant applications made by women in the department to parity with men.
Criteria for success

Avoid this type of thing:

• Altered wording in all adverts coming from Department (that is a process not an outcome and no link to “success”)

• Monitor data and analyse progress Ditto

• An increase in the ratio of women seminar speakers (too vague – will 1% do? Link to data)

• Senior management more aware of E&D recommendations (as measured how?)
Athena SWAN challenges

= Requirement for robust self-assessment
= Common reasons for being unsuccessful:

- Poor action plan that is not **SMART**
- Lack of senior management **buy-in**; team lacks influence
- Descriptive, rather than analytical narrative
- Applications not **identifying** issues raised by the data
- Action plan not **targeted** to issues raised
- Actions being **process** driven rather than outcome focused

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Questions?

“I don’t have any answers. I’m a non-prophet.”