**Athena Swan Review Summary**

**Background**

The Athena SWAN Charter Independent Review Steering Group, chaired by Professor Julia Buckingham, was established in July 2018 to review the Athena Swan Charter and to make recommendations to the Advance HE Board on how the Charter can be best placed to serve our universities and research institutes over the coming years.

The findings and recommendations (which have been accepted by Advance HE) are set out below.Please note that we are awaiting to hear from Athena Swan the details of how and when they will implement these changes.

The full report is available here:

<https://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/review-of-the-athena-swan-charter/>

**Main findings from the consultation**

* The application process must be streamlined and the administrative burden on staff, particularly female staff, reduced
* The assessment process must ensure consistency and transparency of award outcomes to have the confidence of the sector
* The important role of positive and supportive cultures in driving gender equality must be a key part of the assessment
* The Charter must embrace the wider definition of gender (note: the report does not have recommendations as to how this be done)
* Advance HE must provide more training and support for Athena SWAN applications
* The governance structure must ensure that the Charter is owned and led by the sector

**MAIN CHANGES**

**Scope of awards expanded**

1. Professional Services budget centres will be able to apply for departmental awards (revised application form to be developed by Advance HE for this).
2. The scope of departmental awards is broadened to enable cognate departments to make joint applications, and other groups (e.g. schools, budget centres, faculties or colleges where there is a degree of cultural homogeneity) to apply as a single unit.

**Longevity of awards increased**

1. Awards are held for a maximum of five years, commencing from the date of the award letter (not the date of the application).
2. Existing awards are extended to five years from the date of the award letter with immediate effect.

**Introduction of online application process and standardised data**

1. Online award application process will be developed and accessed via a dedicated portal.
2. Advance HE will develop a data resource to enable institutions to download, cut and analyse EDI data collected centrally by HESA, OfS, UCAS and SFC. All data which are mandatory for the application are downloaded from this source, with the exception of data on applications for jobs and promotion, (which should be limited to application numbers and final outcomes).
3. Applicants have scope to include relevant additional internal data to support their action plans and to demonstrate progress against previous plans.

**Introduction of sector culture survey**

1. Departmental applicants are required to consider departmental culture in their application and to include the data from a standardised sector-wide culture survey conducted amongst their constituents

**Increased support for the application process**

1. The level of support provided by Advance HE to applicants is increased, in particular for first time applicants. Such support could include: webinars providing advice on how to apply for an Athena SWAN award, on-line question and answer sessions, and access to exemplar applications (successful and unsuccessful) for each award level via the web.
2. Advance HE develops an optional service to provide advice for mid-award guidance for award holders via an on-line system, a teleconference or a site-visit. This is developed as a paid-for service with charges on a sliding scale to ensure smaller institutions are able to afford additional support.
3. Institutions/departments are required to demonstrate how they recognise (e.g. through promotion criteria) and support the work of individuals who invest time in:

* preparing Athena SWAN applications
* implementing and monitoring progress against action plans
* contributing to the assessment process by acting, as members of Athena SWAN review panels as appropriate, and explain how this work is factored into departmental/institutional workload models or equivalent.

**Separate application process for award renewals**

1. Renewal applications at both institutional and departmental level focus on evidence of progress made against the action plan, describe any new developments, and include an updated action plan taking into account any changes in circumstances.
2. Progress is measured against the stated action plan rather than against the data and also recognises

* critical evaluation and learning from actions that did not achieve the desired outcome
* developments beyond those described in the plan that arose through local innovation, recognised and built on good practice in the sector or were initiated locally due to changing circumstances (for example, restructuring).

1. Applicants applying for their first Bronze award, or seeking to upgrade a current award from Bronze to Silver or Silver to Gold, are still required to complete a full application which includes both background information and an action plan.

**Increase in number of award application deadlines**

1. Six deadlines for applications per year, (up from two).
2. Applicants will hear the outcome of their applications within two months of submission.
3. Applicants are informed of the outcome within five working days of the panel meeting and are provided with detailed feedback within fifteen working days.

**Clarity on outcomes and the potential removal/downgrading of awards**

1. There will be three possible award outcomes: −

* Award
* Minor revisions required with the revised version to be re-submitted within an agreed timescale and reviewed by the same panel with the expectation of the award being made
* Unsuccessful, major revision and resubmission required. Unsuccessful applicants have the right of appeal; appeals will be considered by a different panel

1. Unsuccessful applicants receive constructive feedback from the panel chair via panel secretary to ensure they understand the revisions that are required to be successful upon re-submission.
2. Awards will only be removed or downgraded if there is little or no evidence of progress against the action plan since the last application and no reports of other developments.

**Balanced and representative award panels**

1. Panels will have five members and be gender-balanced. Three members should be academics, and an appointed chair who is or has been at PVC level or holds a lead EDI role in their institution.
2. Panels reviewing STEMM-based applications include at least one STEMM expert, while those reviewing AHSSB-based applications will have one expert from these disciplines and those reviewing professional services applications will similarly have appropriate expertise.
3. All panels include at least one member who is experienced in the use of statistics.
4. A transparent mechanism is introduced to appoint panel members and chairs, akin to that used by research funders. This includes a formal process following a call for applications, selection against defined criteria and a job description which defines the expectations of the role.
5. New panel members and chairs will be required to attend an initial training session which may include observing panels.
6. Chairs and panel members are appointed to a pool for a fixed term of three years, renewable for a further term.
7. Panel meetings should be held at different locations across UK.

**Award panel operating style**

The panels operate in a manner akin to grant awarding panels. Thus:

1. Applications are pre-circulated to the panels. All members are required to read and score each application and return their scores to the panel chair in advance of the panel meeting.
2. The panel chair nominates two members to speak to each application at the meeting before inviting other members to contribute to the discussion and moving to agree a final score for the application.
3. The panel decision is final and panel members will take cabinet responsibility for decisions; the role of the moderator is removed.
4. Panel chairs meet annually to review progress, identify any issues that have emerged and agree a report for submission to the Governance Committee.