

Briefing Note: Changes to the Athena SWAN Charter and application forms

Changes to the charter:

From May 2015, the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) has made a number of changes to the Athena SWAN Charter. The charter has been expanded to include all university departments – rather than focusing specifically on Science, Technology, Engineering Mathematics and Medicine (STEMM) departments. At UCL, this means all academic departments in SLASH are now eligible to apply for Athena SWAN awards.

The Charter Principles have been updated, the key changes are:

- Inclusion of Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences, Business and Law departments (AHSSBL)
- Universities and departments need to commit to supporting the career development of Professional Services staff (including administrative and support, managerial, and technical staff).
- Universities and departments need to consider intersectionality – i.e. how gender interacts with other identities such as sexuality or ethnicity.
- Universities need to evidence how they support Trans staff and students

While the focus of the charter is still predominantly on women's progression, there is now a stronger focus on gender equality more broadly. This means that some departments may focus on activities to attract more male students or junior staff. However it is important to recognise that there is still a pipeline issue for women in most if not all academic disciplines and within professional services roles.

The ECU has published a new Athena SWAN handbook. This is far more detailed than previous versions so I would strongly advise departments read through the new handbook, along with updated guidance available on the UCL Athena SWAN website. (Please note: the ECU refer to the 'new' forms and guidance as 'Post-May 2015', and the 'old' forms as 'Pre-May 2015').

Transition period: STEMM departments at UCL can continue to use the Pre-May 2015 forms up until and including the November 2016 deadline. From April 2016, all departments must use the Post-May 2015 forms. All departments in SLASH can apply for awards from November 2015 onwards and must use the Post-May 2015 forms.

Additional requirements and changes to the application form:

New sections in the Post-May 2015 application forms:

- **Professional Services staff:** there are additional sections for Silver award applicants relating to the induction, promotion, training, appraisal and career progression support available to professional services staff.
- **Technical staff:** applicants for Silver awards should discuss whether there is support available for technical staff to transition into academic or research roles.
- **Support for grant applications:** the section on career development has been made clearer and more detailed (for example, there are now separate sections for training, appraisal and support for academic career progression). There is an additional section requiring departments to evidence how they support staff applying for research grants and fellowships.

- **HR policies:** describe how the department communicates and monitors consistent implementation of HR policies; particularly policies relating to equality and diversity and dignity at work.
- **Transition from part-time to full-time:** explain the provision available to staff to return to full-time after a period of part-time working following a career break.
- **Participation in influential external committees:** discuss how staff are encouraged to participate in external committees.
- **Visibility of role models:** explain how gender is considered when organising events and seminars, in publicity materials and websites.
- **REF:** comment on the gender balance of staff entered into the REF2014 compared to the RAE2008.
- **Intersectionality:** there is not a new section specifically on intersectionality, but departments should comment and reflect on the role of the intersectionality where relevant throughout the application. At Silver level, departments should provide an explanation of actions and any impact in this area. In the first instance, the ECU are expecting departments to discuss the intersection between gender and ethnicity. The Equalities Team are developing tools and advice on intersectionality for departments.

Additional data requirements in the Post-May 2015 application forms:

- **Contract function:** where a department has 20 staff or more, data should be presented by contract type – research only, teaching only, or research and teaching roles. This information is already included within the HR Athena SWAN reports.
- **REF data:** applicants need to present the gender balance of staff entered into the REF2014 and compare this to data from the RAE2008. This data will need to be produced at department level.
- **Maternity data requirements:** departments applying for Silver awards are now expected to provide information on the maternity return rate 6, 12 and 18 months after return from maternity leave.
- **Zero-hours contracts:** as well as data on fixed-term and permanent members of staff, departments are now required to present data on zero-hours contracts. It is likely that this will need to be discussed with each department to understand particular issues/contexts before data is provided by HR.

Improvements and clarifications in the Post-May 2015 application forms:

- **Reduced repetition:** some sections of the application form have been moved or edited to avoid repetition or confusion.
- **Award validity and action plans:** currently, successful applications last for 3 years from the point the department receives their award results from the ECU. Applications under the Post-may 2015 scheme will last for 4 years from the submission deadline. This means that action plans must span 4 years – rather than the current requirement for 3-year action plans.
- **Word count:** word limits have been increase - to 10,500 for Bronze, and 12,000 for Silver. There are now no specific word counts for each section so words can be spread across the application.
- **Consultation:** consultation with staff is now expected rather than recommended within department applications. Consultation could include the analysis of the department data from the UCL-wide staff survey, running internal surveys, holding focus groups or discussions at staff meetings.
- **Self Assessment Teams:** the ECU now stipulate that SATs must meet at least 3 times per year, and students should be members of the SAT.

Changes to the Athena SWAN process:

There is also [new guidance](#) outlining improvements to the Athena SWAN process. While the process remains largely the same, the key changes are:

- **The appeals process:** an appeals process has been developed, however, disagreement with the panel's decision is not grounds for appeal. Appeals can be made if the department believes the procedure has been unfair (i.e. there has been a substantial failure to adhere to the published procedure) or if the decision was manifestly unreasonable (i.e. irrelevant information was taken into account).
- **Right to withdraw an award:** the ECU can withdraw an award if it comes to light that information presented in the application is false or misleading, or that the applicant no longer satisfies the requirements of the award. Information identified or received must be independently verified and/or be from a credible source.
- **HoD statement:** within the letter from the Head of Department, there must be a statement confirming that the qualitative and quantitative data and information presented in the application is "an honest, accurate and true representation of the department".

Advice for departments considering an application:

All STEM departments at UCL have the choice to apply under the Pre-May 2015 or Post-May 2015 scheme up to and including the November 2016 deadline. Athena SWAN provide some guidance on which scheme to apply for on their [website](#).

Things to consider:

- Applications under the Post-May 2015 scheme will be treated as new awards. This means that departments applying to renew or upgrade their award will technically not submit a renewal application, so are not required to submit their previous actions plan.
- If you are due to apply, renew or upgrade before November 2016, consider the level of activity and impact you can evidence for the new requirements. If little has been done to date to support professional services staff, for example, it may be appropriate to apply under the Pre-May 2015 scheme – particularly for a Silver or Gold application.
- If your department does decide to apply under the Pre-May 2015 scheme, please include activities within your action plan illustrating how you intend to address the new requirements. This will ensure you are in a good position to apply under the Post-May 2015 scheme within the next three years.
- The application forms for departmental Gold submissions have not yet been published. However, the recent advice from the ECU has been that departments holding a Pre-May 2015 Silver award will be eligible to apply for a Gold award on the Post-May 2015 charter (i.e. you won't have to apply for a 'new' Silver first). However, it may be a challenge for departments to evidence that they are at 'Gold standard' under the Post-May 2015 charter given the short time-frame. I would suggest that departments aiming for a Gold award should apply under the Pre-May 2015 Charter if they are due to upgrade or renew in 2015.

If you have any questions about the Pre-May 2015 or Post-May 2015 forms or process please contact [Harriet](#).