

Athena Swan FAQs

Further guidance and FAQs are available on the [Advance HE website](#). You will also find more detailed guidance in the Queen Mary Athena Swan Toolkit <https://hr.qmul.ac.uk/equality/charter-marks/athenaswancharter/support-for-schools-and-directorates/>.

1. What is Athena Swan and why is it important?

The Athena Swan Charter provides a robust framework through which higher education institutions, academic schools and professional services directorates can progress gender equality.

The 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. The Charter has been expanded to cover all academic disciplines as well as Professional Services. It is now being used across the globe to address gender equality more broadly, and not just barriers to progression that affect women.

2. What is the Transformed Charter?

In 2020, Advance HE revised and transformed the UK Athena Swan Charter, which is now referred to as the 'transformed Charter'. This Transformed Charter was developed in consultation with sector practitioners; equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) champions; and the charter's governance committee. The changes are based on the recommendations of an independent review led by the Athena Swan Steering Group.

The transformed Charter builds on the strengths of the existing framework to create a Charter that is more flexible, transparent, and supportive. Benefits of the transformed Charter include greater focus on autonomy and flexibility, reduced administrative burden for applicants, developmental and supportive approach.

The Transformed Charter includes new [Principles](#) as well as a new application route for Professional Services Directorates to undertake their own applications.

3. What does applying for an award involve?

An Athena Swan application involves undertaking a targeted self-assessment of the institution/academic school/directorate to understand key issues and to identify areas for positive action as well as recognise and share good practice. You will be required to review and analyse qualitative and quantitative data to inform your assessment as well as develop a Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound (SMART) action plan to address the issues identified.

Applications covers gendered analysis in Academic roles, Professional, managerial and support staff roles, Students at all levels and overall organisational or local culture. Applications are assessed against set criteria as published by Advance HE.

4. What support is available for Schools and Directorates undertaking an Athena Swan submission?

The EDI Team will provide support for each academic school and professional services directorate undertaking an Athena Swan application. Please refer to the Athena Swan contacts page

<https://hr.qmul.ac.uk/equality/charter-marks/athenaswancharter/athena-swan-contacts/> to find out who your local EDI Officer is.

In supporting an Athena Swan application, your EDI Officer will support with the following:

- Guidance on project timelines and submission deadlines
- Obtaining the necessary data for your application
- General guidance and consultation to support the development of your application
- Providing contacts with other schools and directorates undertaking (or who have recently undertaken) an application
- Mock-panel application review*

* At Queen Mary we offer all Athena Swan applicants the opportunity to have their final draft reviewed by a mock panel. This panel is made up of colleagues within the EDI team who have experience of the Charter and the external panel assessment process. The mock panel will review your application against the set criteria following the same process set by Advance HE for panel reviewers. The panel will provide detailed feedback to you to support a high-quality submission.

The EDI Team are very happy to provide guidance and support sessions on specific areas of your application upon request. Please note that the EDI Team do not have the capacity to attend every Self-Assessment Team meeting or to read multiple drafts of your application.

5. How do I set up a Self-Assessment Team?

Each applicant applying to the Athena Swan Charter must have a Self-Assessment Team (SAT) in place to collectively manage the application. This is important in relation to sharing workload and ensuring diverse perspectives and consultation.

The SAT must be representative of the School/Directorate in relation to gender profile and staff type, grades, and roles. You must also incorporate student voice either through membership or consultation groups. In line with the Athena Swan Principles, you should also consider intersectionality here.

Some areas choose to repurpose their existing EDI Committee to act as their SAT for their application, others choose to set up a specific SAT for Athena Swan. You should consider how best to invite membership to the SAT to ensure engagement and representation. Many areas do this via a recruitment drive in local communications and newsletters, others may choose to take a more direct approach. Involvement and leadership in the SAT can provide valuable career development opportunities. Queen Mary recognises EDI work, including Athena Swan, as contribution to Citizenship in the promotion, appraisal, and bonus criteria.

Whichever approach is taken, it is essential to ensure that an undue burden of work or emotional labour is not placed on those impacted negatively by existing structures, policies, and cultures and that the work of the SAT members is appropriately recognised and rewarded

6. How do I get access to the data I need?

The EDI Team will support you to obtain the data required for your Athena Swan application. The mandatory data is provided via the Queen Mary data dashboards and HR EDI data spreadsheets. For any data additional to the mandatory requirements of the Charter, please ensure you inform the EDI Team in good time to enable us to do our best to meet your request.

Visit the Queen Mary Athena Swan Toolkit <https://hr.qmul.ac.uk/equality/charter-marks/athenaswancharter/support-for-schools-and-directorates/> for more guidance relating to data for your application.

7. How much time should I allow for an application?

The suggested timeframe for a high-quality submission is between 12 - 18 months. This includes initial organising and planning stages through to submission. Please refer to the Gantt chart in the Queen Mary Athena Swan Toolkit <https://hr.qmul.ac.uk/equality/charter-marks/athenaswancharter/support-for-schools-and-directorates/> for more detail on recommended timelines for an Athena Swan submission.

8. What is a SMART action plan?

As part of your application, you are required to create a Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound (SMART) action plan to address your key priorities.

A SMART action plan is one in which actions are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound:

Specific – be specific about what you will do (and who will do it and by when). Avoid including large aims or general ideas. If a new SAT were to be appointed, it would be helpful for SAT members to be able to pick up the action plan and understand exactly what is required of them.

Measurable – describe how the success of the action will be measured. How will you evaluate the effect of the action on gender equality (e.g., a change in culture, gender profile, or other defined outcome to progress gender equality) rather than just action completion? Where possible, it might be helpful to include baseline data and use this to develop achievable, quantifiable targets against which success can be measured.

Achievable – ensure actions and success measures are possible to deliver within your five-year award period. Consider resources needed, time constraints and what your scope of influence is. In order to ensure ambitious change is achievable through your action plan, you will want to ensure the action plan has buy-in from organisational leadership.

Relevant – will your action make a meaningful difference to your gender equality priority? It's useful to explain the rationale for your action and detail how the action emerges from your data analysis and self-assessment.

Time-bound – include timeframes for your actions. The timeframe for the action should give a clear picture of when the action will be implemented and reviewed. The action plan should span the five-year award period. For larger actions, it might be helpful to identify sub-actions or key milestones and timescales for the review of these milestones.

9. What does a good application look like?

Queen Mary's Institutional Silver Athena Swan renewal application is available on [our website](#). This application was successfully awarded with very positive feedback from the assessment panel.

This application was submitted under the Post-May 2015 application form which is no longer in use since the introduction of the Transformed Charter. For examples of successful applications submitted under the Transformed Charter please contact the EDI Team (hr-equality@qmul.ac.uk)

10. How will the application be assessed?

Athena Swan applications are assessed by peer-review panels made up of experts who are leading gender equality work in their own institutions. The panel review submissions against the core criteria and underpinning expectations. These must all be met to achieve a successful award.

Advance HE aim to give results and feedback within twelve weeks from the submission of your application. The panel will recommend one of the following outcomes:

Award

- The applicant has satisfied all the criteria and an award is conferred.

Minor revisions

- The applicant has narrowly missed one or more criteria and will be offered the chance to address the panel's feedback through a process of minor revisions;
- The applicant will have eight weeks to revise the application and return for approval by Chair's action.
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Major revisions

- The applicant has not satisfied one or more criteria and will be offered the chance to address the panel's feedback through a process of major revisions.
- If an application requires more significant improvement, major revisions will enable applicants to revise and resubmit within six months for assessment by the same panel.

11. How do we keep momentum after achieving our award?

It is important to remember that achieving an Athena Swan Award is not the end of the work! Now that you have confirmation of your award, it's time to begin implementing your action plan.

You will first need to review your Self-Assessment Team to ensure you have the right governance in place to support implementation of the agreed actions. In order to keep momentum and effective delivery of your actions, it is essential that you establish mechanisms to hold yourself accountable and to monitor success and impact during your award cycle.

The Queen Mary Athena Swan Toolkit provides tips and suggestions on how to do this effectively, including embedding this work into your local governance. Whilst you may not be thinking about your next submission at this point, these tips will help significantly to collate the important information needed next time you put together an application and are required to reflect on your progress against your action plan.

The EDI Team can provide guidance and advice on best practice in delivering action plans and monitoring progress and impact.