Oxford Research and Policy:
Ten Steps for a Department to apply for an Athena Swan Award

Introduction

We have produced this Ten Step guide to support you in planning your Athena Swan work. We believe that busy staff in university departments will welcome guidance on the areas to cover in their Athena Swan application. Comments from users are welcomed on the usefulness (or not) of the guide. If you do find it useful, please refer to in your Athena Swan Award application.

We recommend that you use this tool in conjunction with other tools that Oxford Research and Policy have produced including our Application Form Checklist and our Self Assessment Record. Please visit our website for further details (www.oxfordresearchandpolicy.co.uk).

Comments from users will be welcomed on the usefulness (or not) of any of the tools. If you do find them useful, please refer to their use in your Athena Swan award application.

➢ **Step One: Bring together and organise the department self assessment team (SAT)**
- Appoint an Athena Swan lead, or joint leads
- Ensure the self assessment team (SAT) is representative of the department as a whole
- Agree the SAT's terms of reference
- Agree where the SAT 'sits' in the department's governance structure as an officially recognised group
- Agree members' workload allowances
- Ensure the SAT is resourced - time and expertise and support as well as people

➢ **Step Two: Decide how the SAT will work**
- Agree how the SAT and any sub-groups will work
- Agree a timetable and a target submission date
- Identify the date by which the intention to submit should go to Advance HE
- Assign responsibilities among SAT members

➢ **Step Three: The data for the application**
- Identify the data sources to be used for the application
- Bring together the obligatory data and any additional data needed by the SAT/ for the self assessment
- Analyse key datasets covering students, academic and research, and PTO staff
- Record your findings
- Report any significant findings to the department senior management team

➢ **Step Four: Consultation with staff and students**

- For staff, run a survey (that includes the Athena Swan compulsory questions)
- Consider surveys for students and run any additional surveys
- Run small discussion groups, one to one interviews and or other consultations
- Make use of your consultation results
- Explore any issues raised by feedback from your consultations
- Record findings

➢ **Step Five: Self assess current department arrangements and culture**
- Review and record department arrangements for developing, evaluating, and revising policies, practices and procedures
- Review and record department arrangements for implementing institutional policies
- Review and record all department current and ongoing activities and action programmes (from ones that are treading water to those that are making waves)
- Describe and record the department culture - its inclusivity, supportiveness, and flexibility

- Identify, describe and record the good practice in place in the department
- Describe and record any gaps and weaknesses in department practices and procedures
- Record any changes and actions you propose to address the gaps and weaknesses identified

➢ **Step Six: Assess progress on the department's previous action plan (renewals, silver and gold applications)**
- Record how the department responded to the Advance HE feedback on your previous application
- Review and record successes in progressing the key issues and key priorities in your previous plan
- Evaluate the effectiveness and impact of actions in your previous action plan
- Identify the department's strengths on which to build
- Decide what continuing actions and activities could be included in your action plan alongside new actions
- Agree actions from your previous action plan to be carried forwards / changed/ ended
- Annotate the department's previous plan using a RAG approach (Note: the annotated plan forms part of your application)
- Describe and record how the department achieved its desired outcomes or improvements against at least two of your previously identified key priorities

➢ **Step Seven: Identify and confirm department priorities**
- Use the results of your data collection and self assessment, as the basis for identifying a range of priorities
- Identify areas where action is possible / practicable / likely to be successful and affordable
- Agree between four and eight priorities for your action plan
- Share your priorities within the SAT and the department as a whole
- Confirm the priorities with the HoD / management team

➢ **Step Eight: Produce your SMART Action Plan**
- Draft your SMART action plan making clear which actions relate to which priorities
- Bear in mind that not all the actions proposed have to be part of a priority
- Share the draft action plan within the department
- Finalise the department action plan
- Get the action plan formally signed off by the HoD / Department Management Team

➢ **Step Nine: Complete the department application**
- Pull together the data you have analysed, the results of your self assessment, your new action plan, the annotated current action plan, and the required information on your key priorities
- Complete the award application form

➢ **Step Ten: Check and send the department application**
- Before submission ask one or two colleagues who have not been closely involved in producing the department submission to check for clarity / understanding, and to make sure there are no conflicting statements.
- Double check that all the documents are the latest version
- Send the completed application