

Athena SWAN Award Submission Feedback – April 2012

The following feedback is a summary of the panel's discussion of the submission. It is intended to assist departments and institutions in preparing future submissions; there is no requirement to provide a formal response.

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| Name of institution | Imperial College London |
| Name of department (if applicable) | Department of Physics |
| Level of award | Gold |
| Letter of endorsement | |
| The panel felt that the letter was highlighted support for Athena SWAN and some of the work undertaken in the department. There was, however, little specific mention of the impact of the work. | |
| The self-assessment process | |
| The panel felt the Juno Committee was diverse, the self-assessment process and plans for the future were good. | |
| Description of the university or department | |
| The panel felt that in general the data were reasonably well presented. Overall the data show that there is still a clear "pipeline" issue in respect of falling proportions of women in moving from junior to more senior levels. The panel noted the consultation with UG students to understand the motivations of female students. The panel was not sure that enough was in place to understand the attainment differences between men and women on the F300 and F303 courses. The panel would have appreciated more detail as to why particular benchmarks were chosen. The panel also wanted to point out that HESA can separate academic staff by function: research, teaching, and teaching and research (see p28). | |
| Supporting and advancing women's careers | |
| <p>Overall the panel felt that the submission evidenced a thorough and thoughtful approach and commends the impressive work that the department has undertaken so far. However, the panel felt that more work is still needed in a number of areas and more evidence of impact is needed around recruitment and promotion in particular.</p> <p>The panel found the recruitment figures surprising. The panel were pleased to note the comprehensive dataset on recruitment but were disappointed to note that women appeared to be less successful than men. There was not enough evidence of impact in terms of increasing proportions of female applications and appointments. The panel was also struck by the low number of applicants for some of the advertised posts (e.g. lectureship in cold matter physics) and wondered why this was. The intention to retain fellows is good, but the panel felt that greater effort is needed to attract more female fellows.</p> <p>The provision of flexible working and a technicians group was widely praised. The panel noted that specific challenges were highlighted and actions proposed in the action plan, such as the review of teaching load for postdoctoral researchers. However, the panel felt that there was also an issue around postdocs not feeling appreciated, which still requires attention. The panel also thought that the core hours still seemed relatively long and the representation of women on committees had actually dropped.</p> | |
| Any other comments | |

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| The technicians group was praised. | |
| Case studies (for silver/gold submissions) | |
| The case studies were good, and demonstrated some impact of good practice. | |
| Action plan | |
| The action plan was praised for its clear success measures, and it responds to the issues identified but there were some strange statements, such as, 'difficult to tackle unconscious bias as it is unconscious'. The panel also felt that a number of actions had been transplanted from the previous plan. The panel thought actions around widening the applicant pool for tenured positions as insufficient given the apparent depth of the problem. | |
| Final comments | Decision |
| The panel felt that the beacon element of the requirement for gold had been met: in particular Professor Cohen is a very good advocate. However, the panel felt that there had not been enough progress since the silver award and in particular wanted to see more evidence of impact for a gold award. However, the panel were happy to renew the department's silver award, and wished to congratulate the department on the impressive work undertaken. The panel also felt that the department is on target for gold award in the future once more evidence of progress and impact is available. | Silver renewed. |
| Noteworthy good practice | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technicians group • Work with undergraduates to understand the motivations of females. | |