



Athena Swan Ireland: 2021 charter framework

Information pack for professional units

Contents

Background	2
Introduction	3
Athena Swan Ireland charter principles	4
Athena Swan Ireland award criteria	7
Athena Swan Ireland application materials	15
Athena Swan Ireland Bronze application: Professional Units	19
Athena Swan Ireland Silver application: Professional Units	25
Athena Swan Ireland Gold application: Professional Units	32
Athena Swan Ireland renewal application form: Professional Units	40
Guidance on preparing your application	45
Forming a Self-Assessment Team	45
Collecting and analysing data	49
Consulting with your community	55
Developing and implementing a targeted action plan	60
Evaluating and evidencing progress and success	71
Word allocation guidance	76
Charter framework glossary	81

Background

The Athena Swan charter launched in Ireland in 2015 with support of funding from the [Higher Education Authority](#). Engagement with the charter is a key pillar of Ireland's national strategy for gender equality with progress linked to institutional eligibility for funding from Ireland's major research agencies. The objective of the 2021 Athena Swan Ireland framework is to support institutions, departments, and professional units in impactful and sustainable gender equality work and to build capacity for evidence-based equality work across the equality grounds enshrined in Irish legislation. The 2021 charter framework has been developed in line with the findings of a national consultation and offers a framework for progressing equality in higher education and research that is unique to Ireland.

Athena Swan Ireland is managed by Advance HE, a higher education charity that works with institutions across the world to improve higher education for staff, students and society. With offices in Ireland and the UK, Advance HE has expertise in enhancing teaching and learning, effective governance and leadership development, and tackling inequalities through equality, diversity and inclusion work.

Advance HE's equality charters are used across the globe to encourage and recognise commitment to, and progress on, equality and diversity. Charter frameworks to support and transform equality in higher education are in place in the UK, Australia, Canada, the USA, India and Ireland. By participating in Athena Swan Ireland, institutions, departments, and professional units join a global community with a shared goal of addressing systemic inequalities and embedding inclusive cultures in higher education and research.

Introduction

This information pack provides charter participants from professional units with the information and materials needed to apply for an award under the 2021 charter framework. It includes:

- + the charter principles, which underpin Athena Swan Ireland and set out shared goals for participants;
- + the award criteria, which offers transparent descriptions of each level of award;
- + the application forms and guidance (you can download editable versions of our application forms [on our website](#));
- + topic guidance to support your application;
- + charter glossary, which provides definitions of common terms used in the framework materials.

You can also download additional resources to support your application, including a [consultation template](#) and an [EDI literacy glossary](#).

Advance HE is committed to supporting all Athena Swan Ireland participants to achieve their equality goals. Additional developmental advice and guidance is available via the consultancy meetings, webinars, and training provided by Athena Swan Ireland staff. For more information and support, please visit our [website](#) or get in touch with [our team](#).

Athena Swan Ireland charter principles

Introduction to the charter principles and senior leaders' commitment

The charter principles are the commitments that underpin Athena Swan Ireland and articulate the shared goals that all charter participants agree to upholding. The principles act as the foundation for the Ireland charter, with all other elements of the framework – including criteria, application and assessment – aligned to these commitments and the values enshrined within them.

The charter principles:

- + Empower participants to join a global community through articulating a shared commitment to tackle inequalities in higher education and research.
- + Encapsulate the core objectives of the charter to support sustainable and impactful gender equality work and to build capacity for evidence-based equality work in additional equality areas.
- + Ensure that participating institutions and sub-units recognise and reward staff for working on gender equality and wider equality initiatives.

Acceptance of the charter principles underpins participation in Athena Swan Ireland, and professional units demonstrate their support for the principles in applying for an award. Award levels recognise commitment to, and achievement in, upholding the charter principles and driving positive change.

Participants are encouraged to use the charter principles to help focus and structure their equality work and to highlight their ongoing commitment to gender equality and wider EDI interventions to support their staff, students, and wider community.

Guidance for participants

Any institution, department or professional unit interested in participating in the Athena Swan Ireland charter should first consider the charter principles and, together with their senior leadership teams and communities, decide if they agree to uphold these commitments.

Under the 2021 Ireland charter, each applying unit will commit to the principles; for example, the institution's President will commit to the principles on behalf of the institution, and the head of a professional unit will commit to the principles on behalf of a sub-unit applicant in that institution.

Any institution/sub-unit intending to submit an application for an award must first submit confirmation from the President/Director (or equivalent) that they commit to the charter principles. You can find a [template letter](#) on our website and, once confirmed, you will receive a co-signed certificate that you can use to help promote your equality work to your community.

You can commit to the principles at any time prior to submitting your application; however, we encourage you to do this at the outset of your preparation for application.

Athena Swan Ireland principles

In committing to the principles of the Athena Swan Ireland charter, we recognise that we join a global community with a shared goal of addressing systemic inequalities and embedding inclusive cultures in higher education.

We acknowledge that equality, diversity and inclusion strengthens higher education communities—the quality, relevance and impact of teaching and research, and the talent pool of potential staff and students.

By participating in the Ireland charter framework, we strive for impactful and sustainable gender equality work and seek to build capacity in evidence-based equality interventions across the equality grounds enshrined in Irish legislation.

We recognise that each institution, department and professional unit has different equality challenges and development priorities, and that these priorities should be developed based on an understanding of the local evidence-base and national and global equality challenges in higher education.

In determining our priorities and interventions, we commit to:

- 1 adopting robust, transparent, and accountable processes for Athena Swan work, including:
 - a embedding equality, diversity, and inclusion in our culture, decision-making and partnerships, and holding ourselves and others in our institution/department/professional unit accountable.
 - b ensuring active leadership from senior staff, with those in senior roles at the forefront of taking action, and inspiring and fostering dedication and involvement from staff at all levels.
 - c collecting equality monitoring data to measure, understand and publicly report on challenges and progress, taking steps when necessary to support and encourage disclosure.
 - d undertaking transparent self-assessment processes to ensure priorities, interventions, and actions are evidenced-based and inform our continuous development.
 - d distributing tasks appropriately, formally recognising and rewarding work and ensuring there is not a disproportionate burden on underrepresented groups.
- 2 making and mainstreaming sustainable structural and cultural changes to remedy the effects of structural inequalities and social injustices, which manifest as differential experiences and outcomes for staff and students.
- 3 tackling behaviours and cultures that detract from the creation of an institutional campus culture that is safe, respectful and supportive, including condemning sexual violence and harassment, bullying, discrimination, unfair treatment, or exploitation of staff, students or partners.

- 4 addressing unequal gender representation across academic disciplines and professional, managerial and support functions, including examining gendered occupational segregation, and elevating the status, voice, and career opportunities of under-valued and at-risk groups.
- 5 fostering collective understanding that intersectional inequalities must be accounted for in the development of effective equality analysis and actions.
- 6 mitigating the equality impacts of short-term and casual contracts for staff seeking sustainable careers.
- 7 supporting flexibility and the maintenance of a healthy 'whole life balance' and mitigating the equality impact of career breaks and caring responsibilities.
- 8 fostering collective understanding that individuals have the right to determine and affirm their gender, and to implementing inclusive and effective policies and practices that are cognisant of the lived experiences and needs of trans and non-binary people.

Athena Swan Ireland award criteria

Introduction to the award criteria

The Athena Swan Ireland charter provides a framework that supports participants to undertake impactful and sustainable gender equality work and to build capacity in evidence-based equality interventions across the equality grounds enshrined in legislation. Award levels recognise participants' commitment to, and achievement in, progressing along this journey.

The award levels build on the charter principles, and are defined with a set of clear and transparent award criteria.

The award criteria:

- + Provide information on expectations at each award level and what applicants must do to meet the award criteria;
- + Ensure a progressive charter that recognises and supports applicants to make progress and achieve impact over time;
- + Embed flexibility for applicants to tailor interventions to the priorities in their context;
- + Support transparency and consistency of decision making at assessment.

Over the following pages you will find the details of the award criteria at each level and what applicants will be expected to demonstrate for each criterion when applying. The criteria are designed to be flexible and developmental, supporting applicants through a journey of self-reflection, action, and learning from success.

Transparent and consistent

The award criteria form the basis of how your award application will be assessed. The panel of assessors reviewing your application has been trained using the same detail and definitions provided over the coming pages. This ensures transparency and a shared understanding for both applicants and panellists. For more information about how your application is assessed, please see our [website](#).

Athena Swan Ireland award criteria

High-level award criteria	Bronze	Bronze Renewal	Silver	Silver Renewal	Gold	Gold Renewal
A Structures and processes underpin and recognise gender equality work and, where relevant, wider equality work	X	X	X	X	X	X
B Evidence-based recognition of the issues and opportunities facing the applicant	X	X	X	X	X	X
C Action plan to address identified issues	X	X	X	X	X	X
D Demonstration of progress against the applicant's previously identified priorities		X	X	X	X	X
E Evidence of success addressing gender inequality and, where relevant, wider inequalities			X		X	
F Evidence of sector-leading gender equality and, where relevant, wider equality practice, and of supporting others to improve					X	

Expectations underpinning the Athena Swan Ireland award criteria

Bronze applicants – Professional units

Criterion A: Structures and processes underpin and recognise gender equality work and, where relevant, wider equality work

- + evidence of leadership and senior commitment
- + clear governance structure for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)
- + formal processes for recognition and reward of EDI work
- + self-assessment undertaken by a representative team and informed by staff/students
- + processes in place to collect and, where relevant, develop data systems for evaluating equality

Criterion B: Evidence-based recognition of the issues and opportunities facing the applicant

- + collected and analysed required data
- + evaluation of policies, processes and practices
- + evaluation of culture, environments and experiences
- + identified and justified key priorities

Criterion C: Action plan to address identified issues

- + SMART action plan that addresses all priority areas
- + actions that enable the applicant to build and/or develop capacity across the equality grounds in the future

Bronze renewal applicants – Professional units

Criterion A: Structures and process underpin and recognise gender equality work and, where relevant, wider equality work

- + evidence of leadership and senior commitment
- + clear governance structure for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)
- + formal processes for recognition and reward of EDI work
- + self-assessment undertaken by a representative team and informed by staff/students
- + processes in place to collect and, where relevant, develop data systems for evaluating equality

Criterion B: Evidence-based recognition of the issues facing the applicant

- + collected and analysed required data
- + evaluation of policies, processes and practices
- + evaluation of culture, environments and experiences
- + identified and justified key priorities

Criterion C: Action plan to address identified issues

- + SMART action plan that addresses all priority areas
- + actions that enable the applicant to build and/or develop capacity across the equality grounds in the future

Criterion D: Demonstration of progress against the applicant's previously identified priorities

- + the previous Bronze action plan is underway or completed

Silver applicants – Professional units

Criterion A: Structures and process underpin and recognise gender equality work and, where relevant, wider equality work

- + evidence of leadership and senior commitment
- + clear governance structure for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)
- + formal processes for recognition and reward of EDI work
- + self-assessment undertaken by a representative team and informed by staff/students
- + processes in place to collect and, where relevant, develop data systems for evaluating equality

Criterion B: Evidence-based recognition of the issues facing the applicant

- + collected and analysed required data
- + evaluation of policies, processes and practices
- + evaluation of culture, environments and experiences
- + identified and justified key priorities

Criterion C: Action plan to address identified issues

- + SMART action plan that addresses all priority areas
- + actions that enable the applicant to build and/or develop capacity across the equality grounds in the future

Criterion D: Demonstration of progress against the applicant's previously identified priorities

- + the previous Bronze action plan is completed or superseded

Criterion E: Evidence of success addressing gender inequality and, where relevant, wider inequalities

- + evidence of desired outcome/s and impact/s against at least two priorities

Silver renewal applicants – Professional units

Criterion A: Structures and process underpin and recognise gender equality work and, where relevant, wider equality work

- + evidence of leadership and senior commitment
- + clear governance structure for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)
- + formal processes for recognition and reward of EDI work
- + self-assessment undertaken by a representative team and informed by staff/students
- + processes in place to collect and, where relevant, develop data systems for evaluating equality

Criterion B: Evidence-based recognition of the issues facing the applicant

- + collected and analysed required data
- + evaluation of policies, processes and practices
- + evaluation of culture, environments and experiences
- + identified and justified key priorities

Criterion C: Action plan to address identified issues

- + SMART action plan that addresses all priority areas
- + actions that enable the applicant to build and/or develop capacity across the equality grounds in the future

Criterion D: Demonstration of progress against the applicant's previously identified priorities

- + the previous Silver action plan is completed or superseded

Gold applicants – Professional units

Criterion A: Structures and process underpin and recognise gender equality work and, where relevant, wider equality work

- + evidence of leadership and senior commitment
- + clear governance structure for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)
- + formal processes for recognition and reward of EDI work
- + self-assessment undertaken by a representative team and informed by staff/students
- + processes in place to collect and, where relevant, develop data systems for evaluating equality

Criterion B: Evidence-based recognition of the issues facing the applicant

- + collected and analysed required data
- + evaluation of policies, processes and practices
- + evaluation of culture, environments and experiences
- + identified and justified key priorities

Criterion C: Action plan to address identified issues

- + SMART action plan that addresses all priority areas
- + actions that enable the applicant to build and/or develop capacity across the equality grounds in the future

Criterion D: Demonstration of progress against the applicant's previously identified priorities

- + the previous Silver action plan is completed or superseded

Criterion E: Evidence of success addressing gender inequality and, where relevant, wider inequalities

- + evidence of desired outcome/s and impact/s against at least three priorities
- + evidence of longitudinal improvement, over the course of more than one award cycle

Criterion F: Evidence of sector-leading gender equality and, where relevant, wider equality practice and of supporting others to improve

- + evidence of supporting activity and/or good practice in other institutions/departments/professional units/sectors
- + evidence of service to the Athena Swan charter in Ireland or beyond

Gold renewal applicants – Professional units

Criterion A: Structures and process underpin and recognise gender equality work and, where relevant, wider equality work

- + evidence of leadership and senior commitment
- + clear governance structure for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)
- + formal processes for recognition and reward of EDI work
- + self-assessment undertaken by a representative team and informed by staff/students
- + processes in place to collect and, where relevant, develop data systems for evaluating equality

Criterion B: Evidence-based recognition of the issues facing the applicant

- + collected and analysed required data
- + evaluation of policies, processes and practices
- + evaluation of culture, environments and experiences
- + identified and justified key priorities

Criterion C: Action plan to address identified issues

- + SMART action plan that addresses all priority areas
- + actions that enable the applicant to build and/or develop capacity across the equality grounds in the future

Criterion D: Demonstration of progress against the applicant's previously identified priorities

- + the previous Gold action plan is underway or completed

Athena Swan Ireland application materials

Introduction to the award application materials

Participants seeking charter award recognition for commitment to, and achievements in, gender equality, and, where relevant, wider equality work, must complete an Athena Swan Ireland application form. The charter application forms guide applicants through a self-assessment of the professional unit context. By looking at a range of qualitative and quantitative data on key aspects of higher education, participants will develop an understanding of the unit's issues and opportunities and be in a position to develop a targeted action plan. The implementation of this tailored and evidence-based action plan will support the unit to make progress on achieving their equality objectives.

Application forms and award levels

The application forms are designed to be flexible and developmental, supporting applicants to drive and sustain change by moving through the award levels. Award criteria reflect this progressive journey, moving from entry-level (Bronze) work to understand issues and identify appropriate actions to drive change, to the higher award levels where applicants report on success in addressing inequalities (Silver and Gold).

We expect all applicants that do not already hold an Athena Swan Ireland award to apply at Bronze level. Due to the developmental nature of the framework, it is anticipated that applicants will apply for a Silver award after one renewal of their Bronze award. Applicants not in a position to apply for Silver should contact the Athena Swan Ireland team for advice.

Applicants are not obligated to renew their award before applying to upgrade. Applications for award upgrade must be made using the appropriate Silver or Gold application form.

Individual and amalgamated applications from professional units

Advance HE recognises that institutions operate using a range of structures. The term 'professional unit' is used to refer to sub-units of institutions that provide professional services or strategic or operational support to institutional functions (e.g. Library, HR, Finance, IT, Estates, EDI). Institutions may use other terms to describe these units.

An applying unit needs to hold adequate decision-making power to make changes to policy, practice, and culture – this usually means that the head of the applying unit has responsibility for resource allocation, budgets, strategy and policy in the submitting unit – so as to be able to effect the changes set out in the action plan.

Amalgamated applications from several professional units may be made via the professional unit application framework. Professional units considering an amalgamated application should get in touch with the Athena Swan Ireland team to discuss their proposed configuration.

An amalgamated application may be appropriate where units are small (e.g. fewer than 20 staff) and/or are of closely-related functions. The following factors should be considered when deciding whether or not to make an amalgamated professional unit application:

- + The links between units should be evident and the rationale for an amalgamated application needs to be provided in the application.
- + Communication of, and commitment to, the charter principles need to be apparent across all units and should not be driven by one single unit.
- + The application needs to demonstrate clearly that the self-assessment is representative of all units and that issues specific to different functions and/or units have been identified and actioned.
- + Data from all units should be presented in the application. If this is not possible for some data sets, an explanation should be provided.
- + When applying for Silver and Gold awards, applicants will need to demonstrate that progress and success are evident across all units and not driven by an individual unit.

Use of the 2021 charter framework

Participants planning to apply as a professional unit must use the 2021 charter framework application forms.

Signalling intention to submit

If you are intending to apply for an award you will need to notify Advance HE via the electronic “intention to submit” process. This information enables panels to be scheduled in advance of the deadline. Advance HE will notify your institution key contact when the electronic “intention to submit” form is available for the forthcoming assessment round. This notification will also contain information about award deadlines and the process for submitting your application.

There is no penalty for withdrawing your intention to submit if you find that your submission timeline has changed. To assist with planning for assessment, we ask that you email us as soon as possible to withdraw your intention to submit.

Completing the application forms

When putting together your application you should ensure that you complete all fields and questions in the form. Your application must also include the electronic signature of the Head of the unit (or equivalent).

Applicants are not permitted to remove any text from the published application forms. Doing so will invalidate the application. If a question is not relevant, you should indicate 'not applicable (n/a)'.

Each application form has a specified word allocation. You should ensure that your application adheres to the word allocation and further information on text that is included/excluded from the document word count can be found below as well as in the Word Allocation Guidance document. Appendices or hyperlinks to further information are not permitted in applications. Panellists may only review information included in the application form.

Award validity

Athena Swan Ireland awards are valid for four years. This four-year period is calculated from the submission round in which the application receives an award. For example, a unit applying in April 2022 that is successful will hold a valid award until April 2026. If you are an award holder, your existing award will be valid throughout the review process. Existing award holders that are unsuccessful in renewing or upgrading their awards will be offered a grace period of one year to support re-application with an improved submission.

Application results will typically be shared with applicants within 12 weeks of submission.

Please be aware that significant changes to the structure of an award-holding institution/unit during the award period may impact award validity. You will need to contact the Athena Swan Ireland team to discuss the impact of changes. Examples of significant change may include, but are not limited to, merging or splitting of institutions/units or staffing restructure.

Further information on processes that Advance HE may use to manage changes to institution/department structures can be found in the [TU Legacy Awards Process and Departmental Restructure Award Validity Process](#).

Application support

As you prepare to submit your application you can contact the Athena Swan Ireland team for advice and guidance. We have a wealth of strategic and operational experience in gender equality and EDI more broadly and can also connect you with a vast network of participants globally that have made progress and faced challenges in their equality journeys.

You will also find information to help you prepare for your application in the Athena Swan Ireland topic guidance. Topic guidance on the following themes can be found below and is also available for [download on our website](#):

- + [Forming a Self-Assessment Team](#)
- + [Collecting and analysing data](#)
- + [Consulting with your community](#)
- + [Developing and implementing a targeted action plan](#)
- + [Evaluating and evidencing progress and success](#)

As you complete your application you will also find the following resources useful:

- + [Word allocation guidance](#)
- + [Charter framework glossary](#)
- + [Athena Swan Ireland consultation template](#)
- + [EDI literacy glossary](#)

Athena Swan Ireland Bronze application: Professional Units

Section 1: An introduction to the unit's Athena Swan work

In Section 1, applications should evidence how they meet Criterion A:

- + Structures and processes underpin and recognise gender equality work and, where relevant, wider equality work.

Recommended word count: 2,000 words

1. Letter of endorsement from the head of the unit

Insert (with appropriate letterhead) a signed letter of endorsement from the head of the unit. The letter should comment on:

- + the link between the Athena Swan Ireland principles and the unit's strategy;
- + leadership of the head of unit in advancing equality, including any involvement in the self-assessment or specific actions;
- + evidence of how the unit's equality work is led and supported by the senior management of the unit;
- + key priorities, achievements and challenges relating to gender equality as discerned from the self-assessment;
- + where relevant, key priorities, achievements and challenges relating to additional equality grounds, as discerned from the self-assessment;
- + priority actions to address the issues and opportunities identified.

Confirm the following:

The information presented in the application (including qualitative and quantitative data) is an honest, accurate and true representation of the unit.

2. Governance and recognition of equality, diversity and inclusion work

- a Provide a description of the unit's structures to advance equality. This should include:
- + information on where the unit is in the Athena Swan process;
 - + an organigram of the unit's key management and/or committee structures, with headcount by gender, that includes the formal reporting structures in place to carry out and support Athena Swan activity and, if applicable, wider EDI work;
 - + information on the relationship of unit structures with institutional Athena Swan structures and, if applicable, EDI structures, including mechanisms for sharing the findings of self-assessment as well as good practice;
 - + information on support provided by the institution for the application;
 - + information on formal processes in place to resource, distribute, recognise and reward Athena Swan and, where applicable, EDI work, referencing institution-level policies where appropriate;
 - + resource provision for the action plan and associated activities to ensure effective implementation;
 - + any other relevant structure and organisation information, such as the unit's relationship with community partners;
 - + confirmation that staff are recorded as the gender with which they identify in this submission.

3. The self-assessment process

- a Provide information on the preparation and delivery of this application by the unit. This should include:
- + a description of the self-assessment team, including comment on the roles and responsibilities of individuals, and how these were assigned. The gender of SAT members, their professional role in the institution, and their specific role in the SAT should be noted in a table;
 - + information on how the chair was appointed and on what supports or resources the institution and/or unit has given the chair to lead the self-assessment process;
 - + comment on whether the self-assessment team is representative of the unit, including if there is adequate representation of senior staff.
- b Outline the process of self-assessment undertaken in preparation for this application. This section should include:
- + an overview of the approach taken to evidence-gathering and analysis. Details of consultation response rates, disaggregated by gender, should be provided;

- + information on plans for evaluating progress, including action plan implementation, over the coming four-year period. This should make reference to how often the SAT will meet, and how SAT succession and turnover will be planned and managed;
- + information on how the findings and activity of the self-assessment team are, and will continue to be, communicated to senior management and the wider institution.

Section 2: An assessment of the unit's gender equality context and, where relevant, wider equality context

In Section 2, applications should evidence how they meet Criterion B:

- + Evidence-based recognition of the issues and opportunities facing the applicant

Recommended word count: 6,000 words

1. Overview of the unit and its context

- Provide a brief introduction to the unit, including any relevant contextual information. This section should include information on:
 - + the professional areas covered by the unit;
 - + core services provided to the institution;
 - + the total number of staff by gender and category of post, where relevant;
 - + information on location/s.
- Provide data for staff by gender and grade. Analyse and benchmark (where appropriate) the career pipeline.
- Provide data on staff on fixed-term contracts, contracts of indefinite duration/permanent contracts, and hourly-paid contracts by gender and staff category. Outline instances where fixed-term and hourly-paid contract types are used. This should include comment on:
 - + whether or not numbers of fixed-term/hourly paid contracts are representative of a typical year;
 - + the rationale for the use of short-term contracts;
 - + the extent to which hourly-paid staff contribute to core services.
- Comment and reflect on the relationship between the unit's core services and the institution's gender equality, and wider equality, priorities. This should include information on:
 - + unit services, activities, programmes or events that relate, directly or indirectly, to progressing equality;

- + how the unit considers equality and assesses equality impacts in the delivery of its core services to staff, students, or the wider community.

3. Embedding policy, practice and supports to advance unit staff careers

- a Reflecting on recruitment practices in the unit, answer the following:

Recruitment to posts in the unit adheres to institutional policy on recruitment, which includes gender-balanced panels and training for assessors. Yes/No

If you answered 'no', please comment.

- b Provide three years of data on application, shortlist, and appointment rates for recruitment by gender and grade. Where data suggests opportunity for improvement, comment and reflect. Include any other relevant information relating to recruitment processes and practice for staff in the unit.

- c Reflecting on progression in your institution, answer the following:

Career progression opportunities for staff are centrally managed by the institution (e.g. internal vacancy competitions; regrading; promotions pathway). Yes/No

If you answered 'no', please comment on the unit's role in career progression for staff.

- d Reflecting on opportunities for staff development review, answer the following:

The institution operates a development review process, or equivalent, for staff. Yes/No

If you answered 'yes', comment and reflect on the implementation of this institution-level process in the unit. This should include:

- + data on uptake by gender;
- + results from staff consultation presented by gender;
- + information on any additional unit-level opportunities for staff to discuss professional development, where different to above.

If you answered 'no', provide detail on unit-level opportunities for staff to discuss professional development, where different to above, including data on uptake by gender and results from staff consultation presented by gender.

- e Comment and reflect on unit engagement with institution-level supports for staff career progression as well as any unit-level support available, where different from above. This should include results from staff consultation presented by gender.
- f Comment and reflect on how workload is distributed and managed. This should include information on how the breadth of professional, managerial and support roles and responsibilities are captured in workload planning and allocation and results from staff consultation presented by gender.

4. Evaluating culture, inclusion and belonging

- a Provide information on how the unit ensures that culture and practices support inclusion and belonging. This should include, but is not limited to, information on how the unit actively considers gender equality, and EDI more broadly, in:
 - + organisation of meetings and events;
 - + images and text used in unit spaces and on the unit website, where relevant.
- b Comment and reflect on the unit's current understanding of, and capacity to identify and address, issues and opportunities relating to equality grounds in addition to gender, as well as capacity to identify and address intersectional inequalities for staff and students, where relevant.
- c Provide information on the unit's culture as it relates to gender equality and, where relevant, EDI more broadly, by presenting consultation findings by gender and staff category on the following areas:
 - + values and traditions of the unit;
 - + formal and informal structures and interactions that characterise the working environment of the unit, including leadership practices and behaviours;
 - + negative practices and behaviours and how these are managed by the unit;
 - + flexible working opportunities in the unit;
 - + management of, and attitudes towards, family leave in the unit.

Where data suggests opportunity for improvement, comment and reflect. This should include reflection on any gaps between institution-level policy and practice in the unit, including if the institution's approach meets the requirements of unit staff.

5. Unit priorities for future action

- a Identify the unit's key issues relating to gender equality and establish key priorities for action over the next four years:
 - + Select up to five key priority areas where the unit will strive for impact. Selected priorities should be justifiable and based on the quantitative and qualitative evidence presented in Section 2.
 - + Specific action(s) to support progress in priority areas should be identified.
- b Outline how the unit's gender equality priorities align with the institution's Athena Swan action plan and, where relevant, broader EDI initiatives in the institution and/or unit. This should include comment on:

- + key institutional actions that have, or will, support the unit's progress;
- + any gaps in institutional supports for achieving progress and impact in the unit.

Section 3: Action plan

In Section 3, applicants should evidence how they meet Criterion C:

- + Action plan to address identified issues

1. Action plan

Present the action plan in the form of a table (landscape page format).

The plan should cover current initiatives and aspirations for the next four years. Actions, and their measures of success, should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART).

Athena Swan Ireland Silver application: Professional Units

Section 1: An introduction to the unit's Athena Swan work

In Section 1, applications should evidence how they meet Criterion A:

- + Structures and processes underpin and recognise gender equality work and, where relevant, wider equality work.

Recommended word count: 2,000

1. Letter of endorsement from the head of the unit

Insert (with appropriate letterhead) a signed letter of endorsement from the head of the unit. The letter should comment on:

- + the link between the Athena Swan Ireland principles and the unit's strategy;
- + leadership of the head of unit in advancing equality, including any involvement in the self-assessment or specific actions;
- + evidence of how the unit's equality work is led and supported by the senior management of the unit;
- + the key gender equality priorities during the validity of the previous award;
- + where relevant, the key priorities relating to additional equality grounds during the previous award;
- + key achievements (against identified priorities) since the previous unit award;
- + the unit's key priorities for future action, including any remaining priorities from the previous action plan.

Confirm the following:

The information presented in the application (including qualitative and quantitative data) is an honest, accurate and true representation of the unit.

2. Governance and recognition of equality, diversity and inclusion work

- a Provide a description of the unit's structures to advance equality. This should include:
 - + information on where the unit is in the Athena Swan process;
 - + an organigram of the unit's key management and/or committee structures, with headcount by gender, that includes the formal reporting structures in place to carry out and support Athena Swan activity and, if applicable, wider EDI work;

- + information on the relationship of unit structures with institutional Athena Swan structures and, if applicable, EDI structures, including mechanisms for sharing the findings of self-assessment as well as good practice;
- + information on support provided by the institution for the application;
- + information on formal processes in place to resource, distribute, recognise and reward Athena Swan and, where applicable, EDI work, referencing institution-level policies where appropriate;
- + resource provision for the action plan and associated activities to ensure effective implementation;
- + any other relevant structure and organisation information, such as the unit's relationship with community partners;
- + confirmation that staff are recorded as the gender with which they identify in this submission.

3. The self-assessment process

- a Provide information on the preparation and delivery of this application by the unit. This should include:
 - + a description of the self-assessment team, including comment on the roles and responsibilities of individuals, and how these were assigned. The gender of SAT members, their professional role in the institution, and their specific role in the SAT should be noted in a table;
 - + information on how the chair was appointed and on what supports or resources the institution and/or unit has given the chair to lead the self-assessment process;
 - + comment on whether the self-assessment team is representative of the unit, including if there is adequate representation of senior staff.
- b Outline the process of self-assessment undertaken in preparation for this application. This section should include:
 - + an overview of the approach taken to evidence-gathering and analysis. Details of consultation response rates, disaggregated by gender, should be provided;
 - + information on plans for evaluating progress, including action plan implementation, over the coming four-year period. This should make reference to how often the SAT will meet, and how SAT succession and turnover will be planned and managed;
 - + information on how the findings and activity of the self-assessment team are, and will continue to be, communicated to senior management and the wider institution.

Section 2: An assessment of the unit's gender equality context and, where relevant, wider equality context

In Section 2, applications should evidence how they meet Criterion B:

- + Evidence-based recognition of the issues and opportunities facing the applicant.

Recommended word count: 6,000

1. Overview of the unit and its context

- Provide a brief introduction to the unit, including any relevant contextual information. This section should include information on:
 - + the professional areas covered by the unit;
 - + core services provided to the institution;
 - + the total number of staff by gender and category of post, where relevant;
 - + information on location/s.
- Provide data for staff by gender and grade. Analyse and benchmark (where appropriate) the career pipeline.
- Provide data on staff on fixed-term contracts, contracts of indefinite duration/permanent contracts, and hourly-paid contracts by gender and staff category. Outline instances where fixed-term and hourly-paid contract types are used. This should include comment on:
 - + whether or not numbers of fixed-term/hourly-paid contracts are representative of a typical year;
 - + the rationale for the use of short-term contracts;
 - + the extent to which hourly-paid staff contribute to core services.
- Comment and reflect on the relationship between the unit's core services and the institution's gender equality, and wider equality, priorities. This should include information on:
 - + unit services, activities, programmes or events that relate, directly or indirectly, to progressing equality;
 - + how the unit considers equality and assesses equality impacts in the delivery of its core services to staff, students, or the wider community.

2. Embedding policy, practice and supports to advance unit staff careers

- a Reflecting on recruitment practices in the unit, answer the following:

Recruitment to posts in the unit adheres to institutional policy on recruitment, which includes gender-balanced panels and training for assessors. Yes/No

If you answered 'no', please comment.

- b Provide three years of data on application, shortlist, and appointment rates for recruitment by gender and grade. Where data suggests opportunity for improvement, comment and reflect. Include any other relevant information relating to recruitment processes and practice for staff in the unit

- c Reflecting on progression in your institution, answer the following:

Career progression opportunities for staff are centrally managed by the institution (e.g. internal vacancy competitions; regrading; promotions pathway). Yes/No

If you answered 'no', please comment on the unit's role in career progression for staff.

- d Reflecting on opportunities for staff development review, answer the following:

The institution operates a development review process, or equivalent, for staff. Yes/No

If you answered 'yes', comment and reflect on the implementation of this institution-level process in the unit. This should include:

- + data on uptake by gender;
- + results from staff consultation presented by gender;
- + information on any additional unit-level opportunities for staff to discuss professional development, where different to above.

If you answered 'no', provide detail on unit-level opportunities for staff to discuss professional development, where different to above, including data on uptake by gender and results from staff consultation presented by gender.

- e Comment and reflect on unit engagement with institution-level supports for staff career progression as well as any unit-level support available, where different from above. This should include results from staff consultation presented by gender.
- f Comment and reflect on how workload is distributed and managed. This should include information on how the breadth of professional, managerial and support roles and responsibilities are captured in workload planning and allocation and results from staff consultation presented by gender

3. Evaluating culture, inclusion and belonging

- a Provide information on how the unit ensures that culture and practices support inclusion and belonging. This should include, but is not limited to, information on how the unit actively considers gender equality, and EDI more broadly, in:
 - + organisation of meetings and events;
 - + images and text used in unit spaces and on the unit website, where relevant.
- b Comment and reflect on the unit's current understanding of, and capacity to identify and address, issues and opportunities relating to equality grounds in addition to gender, as well as capacity to identify and address intersectional inequalities for staff and students, where relevant.
- c Provide information on the unit's culture as it relates to gender equality and, where relevant, EDI more broadly, by presenting consultation findings by gender and staff category on the following areas:
 - + values and traditions of the unit;
 - + formal and informal structures and interactions that characterise the working environment of the unit, including leadership practices and behaviours;
 - + negative practices and behaviours and how these are managed by the unit;
 - + flexible working opportunities in the unit;
 - + management of, and attitudes towards, family leave in the unit.

Where data suggests opportunity for improvement, comment and reflect. This should include reflection on any gaps between institution-level policy and practice in the unit, including if the institution's approach meets the requirements of unit staff.

4. Unit priorities for future action

- a Identify the unit's key issues relating to gender equality and establish key priorities for action over the next four years:
 - + Select up to five key priority areas where the unit will strive for impact. Selected priorities should be justifiable and based on the quantitative and qualitative evidence presented in Section 2.
 - + Specific action(s) to support progress in priority areas should be identified.
- b Outline how the unit's gender equality priorities align with the institution's Athena Swan action plan and, where relevant, broader EDI initiatives in the institution and/or unit. This should include comment on:

- + key institutional actions that have, or will, support the unit's progress;
- + any gaps in institutional supports for achieving progress and impact in the unit.

Section 3: An evaluation of the unit's progress and success

In Section 3, applications should evidence how they meet Criterion D and E:

- + Demonstration of progress against the applicant's previously identified priorities;
- + Evidence of success addressing gender inequality and, where relevant, wider inequalities.

Recommended word count: 2,000

1. Evaluating progress against the previous action plan

- Insert the most recent iteration of the action plan associated with the previous unit award. The action plan should be 'RAG' rated (rated 'red,' 'amber' or 'green') depending on progress.
- Comment and reflect on the unit's most recent action plan. This should include information on:
 - + the methodology of action implementation, evaluation and iteration;
 - + factors (internal or external to the institution) that acted as barriers or facilitators to the implementation of actions and meeting of success measures. Where relevant, make reference to actions from the previous action plan that have been rated as amber or red, and any actions that were removed over the course of the award. Where challenges to successful implementation are noted, outline the steps taken to respond to these, and how the action plan was adjusted;
 - + learning and outcomes from the evaluation of the action plan and how learning can be applied to improve implementation, outcomes, or impacts of the future action plan.

2. Evaluating success against key priorities

- Provide information on the unit's key achievements in gender equality. This should include:
 - + evidence of how the unit has achieved the desired outcome/s and impact/s in relation to at least two previously identified key priorities;
 - + qualitative and quantitative data to evidence statements;
 - + reflection on the main facilitators or factors that supported success;
 - + identification of whether there are any aspects that could be translated to other areas to support success against the unit's key priorities.

- b Where relevant, provide information on any key achievements on equality grounds in addition to gender. This should include:
 - + qualitative and quantitative data to evidence statements;
 - + reflection on the main facilitators or factors that supported success;
 - + identification of whether there are any aspects that could be translated to other areas to support success against the institution's key priorities.

Section 4: Action Plan

In Section 4, applicants should evidence how they meet Criterion C:

- + Action Plan to address identified issues

1. Action Plan

Present the action plan in the form of a table (landscape page format).

The plan should cover current initiatives and aspirations for the next four years. Actions, and their measures of success, should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART).

Athena Swan Ireland Gold application: Professional Units

Section 1: An introduction to the unit's Athena Swan work

In Section 1, applications should evidence how they meet Criterion A:

- + Structures and processes underpin and recognise gender equality work and, where relevant, wider equality work.

Recommended word count: 2,000 words

1. Letter of endorsement from the head of the unit

Insert (with appropriate letterhead) a signed letter of endorsement from the head of the unit, or equivalent. The letter should comment on:

- + the link between the Athena Swan Ireland principles and the unit's strategy;
- + leadership of the head of unit in advancing equality, including any involvement in the self-assessment or specific actions;
- + evidence of how the unit's equality work is led and supported by the senior management of the unit;
- + the key gender equality priorities during the validity of the previous award;
- + where relevant, the key priorities relating to additional equality grounds during the previous award;
- + key achievements (against identified priorities) since the previous unit award;
- + the unit's key priorities for future action, including any remaining priorities from the previous action plan.

Confirm the following:

The information presented in the application (including qualitative and quantitative data) is an honest, accurate and true representation of the unit.

2. Governance and recognition of equality, diversity and inclusion work

- a Provide a description of the unit's structures to advance equality. This should include:
- + information on where the unit is in the Athena Swan process;
 - + an organigram of the unit's key management and/or committee structures, with headcount by gender, that includes the formal reporting structures in place to carry out and support Athena Swan activity and, if applicable, wider EDI work;
 - + information on the relationship of unit structures with institutional Athena Swan structures and, if applicable, EDI structures, including mechanisms for sharing the findings of self-assessment as well as good practice;
 - + information on support provided by the institution for the application;
 - + information on formal processes in place to resource, distribute, recognise and reward Athena Swan and, where applicable, EDI work, referencing institution-level policies where appropriate;
 - + resource provision for the action plan and associated activities to ensure effective implementation;
 - + any other relevant structure and organisation information, such as the unit's relationship with community partners;
 - + confirmation that staff are recorded as the gender with which they identify in this submission.

3. The self-assessment process

- a Provide information on the preparation and delivery of this application by the unit. This should include:
- + a description of the self-assessment team, including comment on the roles and responsibilities of individuals, and how these were assigned. The gender of SAT members, their professional role in the institution, and their specific role in the SAT should be noted in a table;
 - + information on how the chair was appointed and on what supports or resources the institution and/or unit has given the chair to lead the self-assessment process;
 - + comment on whether the self-assessment team is representative of the unit, including if there is adequate representation of senior staff.

- b** Outline the process of self-assessment undertaken in preparation for this application. This section should include:
- + an overview of the approach taken to evidence-gathering and analysis. Details of consultation response rates, disaggregated by gender, should be provided;
 - + information on plans for evaluating progress, including action plan implementation, over the coming four-year period. This should make reference to how often the SAT will meet, and how SAT succession and turnover will be planned and managed;
 - + information on how the findings and activity of the self-assessment team are, and will continue to be, communicated to senior management and the wider institution.

Section 2: An assessment of the unit's gender equality context and, where relevant, wider equality context

In Section 2, applications should evidence how they meet Criterion B:

- + Evidence-based recognition of the issues and opportunities facing the applicant

Recommended word count: 6,000

1. Overview of the institution and its context

- a** Provide a brief introduction to the unit, including any relevant contextual information. This section should include information on:
- + the professional areas covered by the unit;
 - + core services provided to the institution;
 - + the total number of staff by gender and category of post, where relevant;
 - + information on location/s.
- b** Provide data for staff by gender and grade. Analyse and benchmark (where appropriate) the career pipeline.
- c** Provide data on staff on fixed-term, contracts of indefinite duration/permanent, and hourly-paid contracts by gender and staff category. Outline instances where fixed-term and hourly-paid contract types are used. This should include comment on:
- + whether or not numbers of fixed-term/hourly-paid contracts are representative of a typical year;
 - + the rationale for the use of short-term contracts;
 - + the extent to which hourly-paid staff contribute to core services.

- d Comment and reflect on the relationship between the unit's core services and the institution's gender equality, and wider equality, priorities. This should include information on:
 - + unit services, activities, programmes or events that relate, directly or indirectly, to progressing equality;
 - + how the unit considers equality and assesses equality impacts in the delivery of its core services to staff, students, or the wider community.

2. Embedding policy, practice and supports to advance unit staff careers

- a Reflecting on recruitment practices in the unit, answer the following:

Recruitment to posts in the unit adheres to institutional policy on recruitment, which includes gender-balanced panels and training for assessors. Yes/No

If you answered 'no', please comment.

- b Provide three years of data on application, shortlist, and appointment rates for recruitment by gender and grade. Where data suggests opportunity for improvement, comment and reflect. Include any other relevant information relating to recruitment processes and practice for staff in the unit

- c Reflecting on progression in your institution, answer the following:

Career progression opportunities for staff are centrally managed by the institution (e.g. internal vacancy competitions; regrading; promotions pathway). Yes/No

If you answered 'no', please comment on the unit's role in career progression for staff.

- d Reflecting on opportunities for staff development review, answer the following:

The institution operates a development review process, or equivalent, for staff. Yes/No

If you answered 'yes', comment and reflect on the implementation of this institution-level process in the unit. This should include:

- + data on uptake by gender;
- + results from staff consultation presented by gender;
- + information on any additional unit-level opportunities for staff to discuss professional development, where different to above.

If you answered 'no', provide detail on unit-level opportunities for staff to discuss professional development, where different to above, including data on uptake by gender and results from staff consultation presented by gender.

- e eComment and reflect on unit engagement with institution-level supports for staff career progression as well as any unit-level support available, where different from above. This should include results from staff consultation presented by gender.
- f Comment and reflect on how workload is distributed and managed. This should include information on how the breadth of professional, managerial and support roles and responsibilities are captured in workload planning and allocation and results from staff consultation presented by gender.

3. Evaluating culture, inclusion and belonging

- a Provide information on how the unit ensures that culture and practices support inclusion and belonging. This should include, but is not limited to, information on how the unit actively considers gender equality, and EDI more broadly, in:
 - + organisation of meetings and events;
 - + images and text used in unit spaces and on the unit website, where relevant.
- b Comment and reflect on the unit's current understanding of, and capacity to identify and address, issues and opportunities relating to equality grounds in addition to gender, as well as capacity to identify and address intersectional inequalities for staff and students, where relevant.
- c Provide information on the unit's culture as it relates to gender equality and, where relevant, EDI more broadly, by presenting consultation findings by gender and staff category on the following areas:
 - + values and traditions of the unit;
 - + formal and informal structures and interactions that characterise the working environment of the unit, including leadership practices and behaviours;
 - + negative practices and behaviours and how these are managed by the unit;
 - + flexible working opportunities in the unit;
 - + management of, and attitudes towards, family leave in the unit.

Where data suggests opportunity for improvement, comment and reflect. This should include reflection on any gaps between institution-level policy and practice in the unit, including if the institution's approach meets the requirements of unit staff.

4. Unit priorities for future action

- a Identify the unit's key issues relating to gender equality and establish key priorities for action over the next four years:
 - + Select up to five key priority areas where the unit will strive for impact. Selected priorities should be justifiable and based on the quantitative and qualitative evidence presented in Section 2.
 - + Specific action(s) to support progress in priority areas should be identified.
- b Outline how the unit's gender equality priorities align with the institution's Athena Swan action plan and, where relevant, broader EDI initiatives in the institution and/or unit. This should include comment on:
 - + key institutional actions that have, or will, support the unit's progress;
 - + any gaps in institutional supports for achieving progress and impact in the unit.

Section 3: An evaluation of the unit's progress and success

In Section 3, applications should evidence how they meet Criterion D and E:

- + Demonstration of progress against the applicant's previously identified priorities
- + Evidence of success addressing gender inequality and, where relevant, wider inequalities

Recommended word count: 2,000

1. Evaluating progress against the previous action plan

- a Insert the most recent iteration of the action plan associated with the previous unit award. The action plan should be 'RAG' rated (rated 'red,' 'amber' or 'green') depending on progress.
- b Comment and reflect on the unit's most recent action plan. This should include information on:
 - + the methodology of action implementation, evaluation and iteration;
 - + factors (internal or external to the institution) that acted as barriers or facilitators to the implementation of actions and meeting of success measures. Where relevant, make reference to actions from the previous action plan that have been rated as amber or red, and any actions that were removed over the course of the award. Where challenges to successful implementation are noted, outline the steps taken to respond to these, and how the action plan was adjusted;
 - + learning and outcomes from the evaluation of the action plan and how learning can be applied to improve implementation, outcomes, or impacts of the future action plan.

2. Evaluating success against key priorities

- a Provide information on the unit's key achievements in gender equality. This should include:
 - + evidence of how the unit has achieved the desired outcome/s and impact/s in relation to at least two previously identified key priorities;
 - + qualitative and quantitative data to evidence statements;
 - + reflection on the main facilitators or factors that supported success;
 - + identification of whether there are any aspects that could be translated to other areas to support success against the unit's key priorities.
- b Where relevant, provide information on any key achievements on equality grounds in addition to gender. This should include:
 - + qualitative and quantitative data to evidence statements;
 - + reflection on the main facilitators or factors that supported success;
 - + identification of whether there are any aspects that could be translated to other areas to support success against the institution's key priorities.

Section 4: An evaluation of the unit's sector-leading activity

In Section 4, applicants should evidence how they meet Criterion C and F:

- + Evidence of sector-leading gender equality and, where relevant, wider equality practice, and of supporting others to improve.

Recommended word count: 1,000

1. Maintaining good practice and innovation

- a Provide information on exemplars of good practice and/or beacon activities that demonstrate that the unit is, and strives to remain, sector-leading. This should include examples of how the unit has been innovative in its gender equality work and, where relevant, wider equality work

2. Supporting others to improve

- a Provide information on how the unit has supported others to achieve success in gender equality work and, where relevant, wider equality initiatives. This should include:
 - + evidence of how the unit has supported others to improve or to develop good practice. This may include the unit's influence on, mentorship of, and support for others outside the unit (e.g. other professional units, academic departments, organisations, industry partners, professional bodies);
 - + evidence of service to the Athena Swan charter in Ireland or beyond (e.g. staff participation in peer-review assessment processes; leadership at networks or events).

Section 5: Action Plan

In Section 5, applicants should evidence how they meet Criterion C:

- + Action Plan to address identified issues.

1. Action Plan

Present the action plan in the form of a table (landscape page format).

The plan should cover current initiatives and aspirations for the next four years. Actions, and their measures of success, should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART).

Athena Swan Ireland renewal application form: Professional Units

Section 1: An overview of the unit and its Athena Swan work

In Section 1, applications should evidence how they meet Criterion A:

- + Structures and processes underpin and recognise gender equality work and, where relevant, wider equality work.

Recommended word count: 2,500 words

1. Letter of endorsement from the head of the unit

Insert (with appropriate letterhead) a signed letter of endorsement from the head of unit, or equivalent. The letter should comment on:

- + the link between the Athena SWAN Ireland principles and the unit's strategy;
- + leadership of the head of unit in advancing equality, including any involvement in the self-assessment or specific actions;
- + evidence of how the unit's gender equality work is led and supported by the senior management of the unit;
- + key priorities, achievements, and challenges relating to gender equality as discerned from the self-assessment;
- + where relevant, key priorities, achievements and challenges relating to additional equality grounds, as discerned from the self-assessment;
- + priority actions to address the issues and opportunities identified.

Confirm the following:

The information presented in the application (including qualitative and quantitative data) is an honest, accurate and true representation of the unit.

2. Description of the unit

Provide a brief introduction to the unit, including any relevant contextual information. This should include information on:

- + the professional areas covered by the unit;
- + core services provided to the institution;
- + the total number of staff by gender and category of post, where relevant;

- + information on location/s;
- + any changes to the unit's context since the previous award (e.g. structural changes, significant expansions).

3. Governance and recognition of equality, diversity and inclusion work

- a Provide a description of the unit's structures to advance equality. This should include:
 - + an organigram of the unit's key management and/or committee structures, with headcount by gender, that includes the formal reporting structures in place to carry out and support Athena Swan activity and, if applicable, wider EDI work;
 - + information on the relationship of unit structures with institutional Athena Swan structures and, if applicable, EDI structures, including mechanisms for sharing the findings of self-assessment as well as good practice;
 - + information on support provided by the institution for the application;
 - + information on formal processes in place to resource, distribute, recognise and reward Athena Swan and, where applicable, EDI work, referencing institution-level policies where appropriate;
 - + resource provision for the action plan and associated activities to ensure effective implementation.

4. The self-assessment process

- a Provide information on the preparation and delivery of this application by the unit. This should include:
 - + a description of the self-assessment team, including comment on the roles and responsibilities of individuals, and how these were assigned. The gender of SAT members, their professional/student role in the institution, and their specific role in the SAT should be noted in a table;
 - + information on how the chair was appointed and on what supports or resources the institution and/or unit has given the chair to lead the self-assessment process;
 - + comment on whether the self-assessment team is representative of the unit, including if there is adequate representation of senior staff.
- b Outline the process of self-assessment undertaken in preparation for this application. This section should include:
 - + an overview of the approach taken to evidence-gathering and analysis. Details of consultation response rates, disaggregated by gender, should be provided;

- + information on plans for evaluating progress, including action plan implementation, over the coming four-year period. This should make reference to how often the SAT will meet, and how SAT succession and turnover will be planned and managed;
- + information on how the findings and activity of the self-assessment team are, and will continue to be, communicated to senior management and the wider institution.

Section 2: An evaluation of the unit's progress, opportunities, and issues

In Section 2, applicants should evidence how they meet Criterion B and D:

- + Evidence-based recognition of the issues and opportunities facing the applicant
- + Demonstration of progress against the applicant's previously identified priorities

Recommended word count: 3,500 words

1. Evaluating progress against the previous action plan

- Insert the most recent iteration of the action plan associated with the previous unit award. The action plan should be 'RAG' rated (rated 'red,' 'amber' or 'green') depending on progress.
- Comment and reflect on the progress achieved through implementation of the unit's most recent action plan. This should include:
 - + direct reference to the previous action plan, and, where appropriate, future action plan;
 - + qualitative and quantitative data to evidence the evaluation of progress;
 - + information on the methodology of action implementation, evaluation, and iteration;
 - + comment on factors (internal or external to the institution) that acted as barriers or facilitators to the implementation of actions and meeting of success measures. Where relevant, make reference to actions from the previous action plan that have been rated as amber or red, and any actions that were removed over the course of the award. Where challenges to successful implementation are noted, outline the steps taken to respond to these, and how the action plan was adjusted;
 - + description of the main learnings and outcomes from the evaluation of the action plan and how learning can be applied to improve implementation, outcomes, or impacts of the future action plan;
 - + information, where relevant, on how panel feedback on the previous unit application has been actioned over the course of the award.

2. Identifying issues and priorities for future action

- a Reflecting on the self-assessment undertaken to support this application, consider the following:

The self-assessment has addressed the areas covered by the charter framework for professional units, including analysis of necessary data sets and evaluation of policies, processes, practices, and culture. Yes/No

If you answered 'no', please comment.

- b Based on the self-assessment undertaken, comment and reflect on the unit's key issues relating to gender equality and explain key priorities for action over the next four years. This should include:
- + consideration of how the unit's issues have changed since the previous award, drawing on quantitative and quantitative data sets to evidence statements. Where appropriate, reference past and future action plans;
 - + selection of up to five priority areas where the unit will strive for impact. Selected priorities should be justifiable and make reference to quantitative and qualitative evidence. Specific action(s) to support progress in priority areas should be identified.
 - + reference to previously identified key priorities. If applicable, applicants may carry previously identified key priorities into the upcoming award period; where previously identified priorities are adjusted or edited for incorporation in the coming award period, the rationale for these changes should be presented.
- c Outline how the unit's gender equality priorities align with the institution's Athena Swan action plan and, where relevant, broader EDI initiatives in the institution and/or unit. This should include comment on:
- + key institutional actions that have, or will, support the unit's progress;
 - + any gaps in institutional supports for achieving progress and impact in the unit.

Section 3: Action Plan

In Section 3, applicants should evidence how they meet Criterion C:

- + Action Plan to address identified issues

1. Action plan

Present the action plan in the form of a table (landscape format).

The plan should cover current initiatives and aspirations for the next four years. Actions, and their measures of success, should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART).

Guidance on preparing your application

Forming a Self-Assessment Team

The Athena Swan Ireland charter framework depends on assuming a collective responsibility for addressing systemic inequalities and embedding inclusive cultures in higher education.

The criteria for all award levels require structures and processes that underpin and recognise gender equality work and, where relevant, wider equality work. As part of this, all applicants undergo a self-assessment, led by a representative team and informed by staff and student communities.

SAT members should develop understanding of the charter framework and principles. The SAT is responsible for:

- + Collecting and analysing data.
- + Consulting with the community.
- + Developing and evaluating actions.
- + Communicating findings, activity, progress, and impact.

The topic guidance on 'Forming a Self-Assessment Team' will provide you will information on the following:

- + The structure of the SAT
- + SAT membership
- + The SAT chair
- + SAT activities
- + Future-proofing the SAT

The structure of the SAT

How the SAT may be best structured depends on the submitting unit – the SAT may operate as an independent committee that feeds into wider organisational structures, or it may be a subgroup of a broader committee.

You may have a large SAT with smaller sub-groups to focus on specific activity, or a SAT that undertakes everything together. To ensure effectiveness, while also maintaining adequate representation, a more complex structure might be appropriate; for example, a smaller team and a larger working group.

The reporting line will also be important but unique to your institution/sub-unit. The SAT is not a review group. They should have authority to make decisions that will drive equality work. Their reporting line should reflect this status.

Ensuring the SAT has this status will partially be driven by who is on the team, who is appointed chair, and how they were chosen.

SAT Membership

An open call for members is encouraged, but it is likely that the submitting unit may also have a number of ex-officio roles to consider (e.g. VP for EDI, staff equality network leads, certain Deans or Directors, equality officers, etc.), particularly when forming an institutional-level SAT.

The team should include people from a variety of backgrounds and with different experiences. It should include a proportion of members that reflects the profile of the institution/unit, with consideration of the equality grounds enshrined in Irish legislation, as well as intersectionality. It is essential that the composition of the SAT does not lead to a disproportionate burden on underrepresented groups.

It is likely that you will also need to select particular people for certain roles. They might represent a certain department or discipline, a group of staff or students, or they might have relevant skills or knowledge. When determining membership of a SAT the following should be considered:

- + SATs should be representative of the submitting unit, in terms of staff and student roles, levels and grades.
- + For an institutional SAT, the team might include at least one person from each of the institution's faculties, colleges, or other high-level groupings.
- + For departmental or professional unit SATs, selection of members may depend on the level of centralised support you have; for example, if there is a particular person that provides data reporting, conducts consultation on behalf of the SAT, etc.

The aim is for each of the main areas of the submitting unit to have a representative on the SAT.

A variety of skillsets will also be welcome on a SAT. This may include:

- + Knowledge and experience in advancing equality. This may be a mix of both lived experience and that gained through research and scholarship. SATs may also rely on external expertise to complement the team where there are gaps.
- + Understanding of qualitative and quantitative analysis.
- + Experience of project management project evaluation.
- + Reflective writing.
- + Action planning.

It is likely that some SAT members will be involved because of their experience and knowledge of equality, and others will be there because of their role, or experience and knowledge in other areas. For this reason, it may be useful for SAT members to undertake training or facilitated discussions around equality, diversity and inclusion.

As with any committee or team, it can be difficult to determine the optimal number of members for effective discussions, decision making, and workload distribution. Athena Swan Ireland is not prescriptive regarding the size of the SAT, as this will vary depending on the requirements of individual units.

The SAT chair

The chair's role is crucial as they are publicly stating their commitment to equality. They should be someone who understands the issues and meaning behind the Athena Swan Ireland principles. The chair is responsible for:

- + Being an ambassador and advocate of the SAT.
- + Driving momentum and encouraging people through the charter framework.
- + Ensuring that all members of the SAT take responsibility for completing tasks and are given proportionate responsibility.
- + Maintaining the power balance within the SAT, ensuring that everyone is able to have their say, and that stronger voices and hierarchy do not overpower discussions and decisions.

SAT activity

The SAT must meet over the course of the self-assessment processes, as well as in implementation and evaluation phases. However, frequency will depend on a number of factors, such as support and information already available to the SAT.

Meetings can take a range of forms and may happen online or in person. Additionally, SAT activity may include attendance at relevant trainings and events, taking part in consultation activity, or other internal or external initiatives that help drive equality activity.

Athena Swan Ireland is not prescriptive about the number of meetings a SAT must have, and submitting units will have their own norms and guidance on committee activity. SATs should have enough meetings to ensure they have sufficient momentum to drive equality work, but not meet so frequently that members are overburdened.

Additional activities and considerations

There are further considerations that will support the effectiveness of the SAT and ensure it functions in an inclusive manner.

There are logistical considerations, such as:

- + How many meetings or related activities will you have, when and where will they be, and for how long?
- + Who will decide the agenda for SAT meetings, especially the first meeting?
- + Will SAT meetings be minuted? Who will have responsibility for that? How will the secretariat of the meetings be supported?
- + How will the SAT communicate the work and progress of the SAT to the institution/unit's wider community, including senior management teams and committees?

As per the charter principles, the adoption of robust, transparent, and accountable processes for Athena Swan Ireland work also warrants consideration. Applicants and SATs may wish to consider:

- + How contributions to the SAT are formally recognised and rewarded; for example, via staff development reviews, or in progression and promotion opportunities and processes.
- + What resourcing will be available to SAT members; for example, formal workload allocation (via a workload model or similar), or access to dedicated staff support.
- + Methods of public recognition and acknowledgement of SAT members.

Future-proofing the SAT

It is also important to consider how the SAT will evolve over time, balancing refreshment of membership with assurance of continuity. It may be helpful to rotate membership so that others have an opportunity to become members of the SAT. You will also need to consider how collective knowledge will be maintained; for example, it may help to stagger the rotation of roles, or have a cross over or shadowing period.

When thinking about future proofing self-assessment activity you should determine mechanisms and governance structures for implementation and evaluation of the action plan over the four years of your award. This should consider who will be held accountable for the successful implementation and evaluation of the action plan, as well as responsibility for overall operationalisation of actions.

Further guidance on establishing an effective SAT can be accessed via the [Athena Swan Ireland website](#) or by [contacting the Ireland team](#).

Collecting and analysing data

The Athena Swan Ireland framework requires applicants to undertake transparent self-assessment processes to ensure priorities, interventions, and actions are evidenced-based and inform continuous development. These processes are integral to meeting the criteria for an award.

Evidence-based recognition of the issues and opportunities facing applicants requires the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. As part of this, applicants collect equality monitoring data to measure, understand, and report on challenges and progress.

The topic guidance on ‘Collecting and analysing data’ will provide you with information on the following:

- + The rationale for collecting equality data
- + Collecting equality data
- + Encouraging disclosure
- + Analysing and reflecting on equality data
- + Presenting data

The rationale for collecting equality data

Firstly, “all public bodies in Ireland have responsibility to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. This is a legal obligation, called the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, and it originated in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014”¹

Effective implementation of the Duty – like effective implementation of the Athena Swan Ireland charter framework – requires an evidence-based approach. This involves identifying and collating relevant data and information related to the grounds in equality legislation.²

In order to address inequalities in the higher education community we must identify and understand them. Collecting data can help us get to know the inequalities within our institutions better. It can highlight different experiences and help us to target support and resources. Data helps us to recognise existing barriers and can help to identify information gaps. It is through collecting and analysing data that we can fully understand the current picture of our institution and identify what needs to change.

After identifying what needs to change, data can then help us to evaluate the impact of interventions and monitor equality progress. This in turn creates a record of the history of equalities within our institution.

¹ www.ihrec.ie/our-work/public-sector-duty/

² For further information see www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2020/09/IHREC-Tool-for-an-Evidence-Based-Assessment-of-Equality-and-Human-Rights-Issues.pdf

Collecting equality data

The data requirements are outlined in the relevant applications forms and are underpinned by the Athena Swan Ireland charter principles. By participating in the Ireland charter framework, participants strive for impactful and sustainable gender equality work and seek to build capacity in evidence-based equality interventions across the equality grounds enshrined in Irish legislation. Additionally, intersectional inequalities must be accounted for in the development of effective equality analysis and actions.

The Ireland charter framework requires the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data.³

Quantitative data is expressed through numbers. Institutions will typically be collecting quantitative data on a large scale. For example, institutions often produce data through HR systems, staff surveys, admissions forms, and student evaluations.

Qualitative data is expressed through words. Methods of qualitative data collection include interviews, focus groups, or questionnaires, and generally this information would be presented as quotes, case studies, or in narrative.⁴

Different types of data are generally used for different purposes. Each is valuable in its own way. Quantitative data can be used to show trends, prevalence, and patterns. As it can include a large sample number, quantitative data can provide a strong representation of the population you are looking at. In contrast, qualitative data can provide a nuanced and detailed look at your environment and communities. It can be used to explore concepts, experiences or opinions.

It is important for applicants to understand that improving quantitative numbers is crucial for promoting equality, visibility, and equal representation and opportunity. However, parity alone will not necessarily remove the systemic barriers to gender equality. Qualitative data is a key tool for investigating if barriers exist and what actions could be introduced to address them. It also can provide important insights into contexts where there is gender balance or parity.

It may be appropriate to vary the methods and approaches you use to collect data on different equality grounds, particularly when small numbers are involved, or if there are concerns about anonymity. Some data may be collected as part of HR systems and processes, whereas other data may be collected as part of staff consultation. For example, you might collect data on all staff through self-reporting in institutional data systems to understand representation across roles and grades. You may also explore the experiences and perceptions of particular staff cohorts through consultation exercises. Guidance on data derived from consultation requirements can be found in [Topic Guide 3: Consulting with your community](#).

³ Further guidance and tools to help you gather and analyse equality data can be found here: www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/using-data-and-evidence/working-data

⁴ More information on analysing qualitative data can be found here: www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/analysing-qualitative-data

Remember that language relating to a lot of identities is evolving. You will likely need to review the language used in data collection regularly to ensure it is up to date. Open approaches that allow people to self-identify may be advisable.

Alignment with Higher Education Authority (HEA) data

The [Higher Education Institutional Staff Profiles by Gender](#) collate gender-disaggregated data from the higher education sector in Ireland. These profiles provide information on key indicators that contribute to the assessment of gender equality in Irish institutions. The HEA has also taken steps to collect data on staff ethnicity. Institutions may wish to align their Athena Swan Ireland application data with their returns to the HEA, where appropriate.

Future data collection

The purpose of data collection is to inform change and ongoing work on equalities. Continuing data collection is an important part of assessing the impact of interventions. While you might initially be collecting data to inform an Athena Swan Ireland application it is important to look to the future with your data collection. Ask yourself the following questions:

- + Is this data collection replicable if it needs to be revisited?
- + Can follow-ups be put in place to assess the impact of any changes?
- + Is the data being used to inform changes effectively?

Continued data collection will allow the success of your equality initiatives to be measured.

Encouraging disclosure

Collecting data on equality grounds can be a sensitive issue and return rates may be low initially. However, over time, in a safe and supportive environment, return rates are likely to increase, and the quality and validity of the data will improve.

Institutions and departments should take steps when necessary to support and encourage disclosure. Several factors can influence an individual's decision to disclose equality information, including:

- + Understanding the relevance of the information sought to the organisation.
- + Availability of information on the purpose, usage and confidentiality of equality information collected.
- + Opportunities to disclose information on an ongoing basis.
- + Understanding the relevance of disclosure for their work or study.
- + The culture of the institution – whether it is perceived to be open and inclusive, or if there are concerns regarding bias or discrimination (direct or indirect), or the transparency of processes and practices.

- + Whether individuals relate to the categories and themes available on equality monitoring forms.
- Staff and students are more likely to engage with an equality, diversity and inclusion exercise if they see it as an integrated part of an institution's strategy for promoting inclusivity and increasing accessibility. Institutions and departments can take a number of practical steps to increase disclosure:
- + Ensure visible and active support from senior management and trade unions.
 - + Make equality, diversity and inclusion commitments visible on campus and in communications via images and text used, and in public forums and events.
 - + Share examples of how the equality information collected has informed action and helped to remove barriers for staff and students.
 - + Celebrate achievements to ensure that staff and students feel positive about equality monitoring and confident that it will be of benefit.
 - + Include questions that demonstrate the institution's commitment to understanding the issues affecting particular groups. This may persuade staff of the benefits of disclosure. For example: 'How well does the institution enable you to meet your religious obligations while at work?'; 'We want our workplace to be inclusive and welcoming of all staff – is there more we could do to improve your experience?'
 - + Explain clearly why the data is being collected, how it will be used, and who will have access to it, to build a culture of trust and understanding.
 - + Provide reassurance that the institution will follow guidelines on data collection, storage and use – including complying with data protection legislation – as some people may be concerned that information could disadvantage them, or encourage discrimination or harassment.⁵
 - + Communicate if individuals will be identifiable from the data, if the information will be stored separately from personal details, and if disclosure will lead to further contact from the institution; for example, sharing information about support services or events related to an equality ground.

Analysing and reflecting on equality data

Initial high-level analysis of your data may provide you with an overview of the equality context in your institution. However, in the majority of cases, more complex analysis will be needed. This deeper analysis will reveal more about the nuances of equalities and it is important to approach your data with a critical lens.

For example, an initial analysis might show that fewer women hold senior positions than men. It may not reveal why this is the case. If there is a "why" with no answer, then follow up data collection may need to occur. For this reason, it is useful to plan for multiple layers of staged data collection.

⁵ GDPR allows for the processing of equality data.

Benchmarking

Advance HE recognises that each institution and department has different equality challenges and development priorities, and that these priorities should be developed based on an understanding of the local evidence-base and national and global equality challenges in higher education.

To support this contextualisation, the Athena Swan Ireland application forms note when data should be compared with relevant external benchmarking data. Benchmarking with appropriate comparators will provide you with understanding of the scale of the issues and opportunities the institution/department is facing.

The benchmarks used will depend on the institutional and departmental context. Example benchmarks include:

- + Sector-wide data from the [Higher Education Authority](#).
- + International data, for example from individual institutions or departments, or from sector agencies such as the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency.
- + Discipline-specific data, such as those acquired from a professional body, society, or research organisation.
- + Discipline-specific benchmarks collected from similar departments or units in higher education institutions in Ireland or abroad.
- + Data presented in publicly available Athena Swan applications.
- + Irish census data.

Some applicants may find it particularly challenging to identify appropriate external benchmarking data. For example, departments that focus on interdisciplinary research, for which there are very few comparators. In these cases, benchmarking should still be attempted, and it should be explained in the submission why particular benchmarks have been used.

Disaggregation

You will be expected to disaggregate and analyse data in a number of ways. Expectations are detailed in the relevant application form. For example, data may be disaggregated by a combination of:

- + Equality grounds, e.g. by gender, presented by male, female and non-binary staff and students, or ethnicity, presented by categories aligned to the [Irish census](#).

Alongside information on:

- + Category of post, e.g. by academic, research, or professional managerial and support staff. Further disaggregation within category of post may be necessary; for example, to capture differences between clinical versus non-clinical staff, or among teaching-only (e.g. fixed-term; hourly paid) staff to understand occupational segregation;

- + Grade, e.g. by postdoctoral researcher, lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor, professor to understand the academic career pipeline
- + Programme type, e.g. by undergraduate, postgraduate taught, postgraduate research, to understand the student pipeline;
- + By discipline, e.g. looking at differences across degree programmes to understand unequal representation.

Working with small numbers

Dealing with equality data often involves small numbers of individuals. This may be because a group isn't well represented in your institution or department, or because your institution or department itself is quite small. It is possible to get meaningful results from small samples. You may decide to aggregate some data sets to draw out trends without losing the equality emphasis of the framework. It may also be necessary to choose more qualitative methods to identify issues and opportunities, such as one-to-one interviews or focus groups.

Presenting data

Data should be presented in whichever way applicants feel is most explanatory and appropriate (e.g. tables or graphs), as long as the chosen format clearly highlights trends and these are drawn out in the narrative:

- + Percentages and raw numbers should be presented for all quantitative data (both in figures and within the narrative).
- + Qualitative data should provide relevant detail on the respondent to support analysis (e.g. gender and category of post), while being cognisant of where individuals could be identifiable. Where this is the case, applicants may choose to limit or redact some details.
- + Where data is used to inform a particular action point, the rationale and the actual action point should be embedded in the narrative and cross-referenced to the full action plan.
- + Where data is not available, this should be explained with reasons given (and, in most cases, a relevant action). Applications will not be penalised for only presenting the minimum number of years of data. Check each section of the relevant application form for the exact data requirements for that section.
- + Consider the accessibility of data presentation in terms of the size of the figures and texts, as well as the contrast in chosen colours.

Consulting with your community

Purpose of consultation

Advance HE recognises that each institution and sub-unit has different equality challenges and priorities, and that these priorities should be developed based on an understanding of the local evidence-base. Consulting with various staff and student communities is necessary for understanding their perceptions, views, and experiences, and is required for successful implementation of the Ireland charter framework. Continued, iterative consultation should be integrated into equality, diversity and inclusion strategies and visibly supported by senior leadership.

Consultation findings should be used to:

- + Inform the self-assessment and identify where there are issues and opportunities.
- + Support the development and rationale for particular actions and activities.
- + Track improvements against previously identified challenges through evaluation of the outcome(s) and impact(s) of the action plan.

The topic guidance on 'Consulting with your community' will provide you with information on the following:

- + Methods and types of consultation
- + Facilitating consultation activities
- + Consulting with particular groups
- + Required areas of consultation
- + Capturing and analysing responses
- +

Methods and types of consultation

It is important to choose consultation methods that are realistic and will be possible within the parameters of working with your target populations. Applicants may employ both quantitative and qualitative methods of consultation.

Potential consultation activities include, but are not limited to:

- + Surveys, including pulse surveys
- + Questionnaires
- + Focus groups
- + Structured or semi-structured one-to-one interviews

- + Liaising with networks and unions
- + Roundtable discussions
- + Town hall meetings

The type of consultation carried out will be dependent on the size of the submitting unit, and not every approach will be suitable for every group. Large scale quantitative data might be useful for a large institution to collect but a smaller sub-unit might struggle to get sufficient responses for that approach to be valid. Therefore, a smaller sub-unit may decide that relying on qualitative methods of consultation is more appropriate. You may also need to take extra steps to ensure confidentiality, such as employing external facilitators, or making sure surveys ask questions in a way that ensures anonymity.

Facilitating consultation activities

The self-assessment team (SAT) provides a formal structure to lead and coordinate consultation activities. Depending on factors such as the size of a submitting unit and availability of resources, applicants may seek support inside or outside of the SAT for conducting and analysing consultation activities. Some example approaches are detailed below:

- + An institution might use an EDI office or other centralised department to conduct consultation activities.
- + Sub-units could run their own consultation activities with support from an EDI role or an external consultant.
- + An institution might agree to run centralised surveys that departmental and professional unit applicants can draw upon.
- + Submitting units could harness their own professional and academic expertise to lead on consultation, particularly if those individuals are SAT members.

It is not expected nor appropriate for an entire SAT to have access to a raw data set. Safeguards should be put in place to ensure confidentiality is maintained.⁶ For example, a facilitator may provide a report to the self-assessment team following a series of focus groups, or access to full survey results may be restricted to a particular member of the SAT, or other role in an institution or department. The approach should be made clear to your community from the outset.

Depending on topics and themes covered, information on policies and procedures (and relevant training, where necessary) should be provided to facilitators, as sensitive issues may arise during consultation.

⁷ Applicants should work with their own institutions to ensure they are following the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and any relevant ethics-related policies.

Consulting with particular groups

The Athena Swan Ireland charter framework applies to all staff and students working and studying in higher education institutions. When determining who to consult with, applicants should ensure they are communicating with all staff that contribute to, and are affected by, the culture of the institution/department. This usually includes all staff that are directly employed by an institution.⁸ A department may wish to consult with enrolled students. Other groups may be included, such as occasional students.

Some examples of consultation with particular groups, drawing upon the example consultation methods noted above, are:

- + EDI surveys circulated to all staff and students.
- + A pulse survey with all staff (or a particular cohort) following completion of staff development reviews.
- + An online qualitative questionnaire with all department staff on the working environment of the department.
- + A focus group with staff that have returned from family leave in the previous year.
- + One-to-one interviews with staff exploring flexible working needs.
- + Liaising with an equality network or society in the institution to capture staff or student feedback related to particular equality grounds.
- + A roundtable discussion that captures key recommendations on incorporating EDI in student curricula, pedagogy, and assessment.
- + A town hall style meeting seeking feedback on a draft EDI action plan.

The types and breadth of consultation carried out will depend on the particular part of the community you are consulting with and what you are trying to assess. In any case, consultation activities must be careful not to use a deficit model approach. That is, the questions and themes used should not assume that communities are responsible for any challenges or inequalities they face. Rather, the consultation should aim to unpack the effects of structural inequalities and social injustices, which manifest as differential experiences and outcomes for staff and students.

⁷ Institutions/departments may wish to consider how they ensure that insourced staff are from organisations that align with the Athena Swan Ireland principles.

It is important to communicate with those who are contributing information and consult with them on whether the chosen methods of data collection are working. It is also important to revisit equality issues regularly as the population and their needs may change.

You will find it useful to evaluate your data collection throughout the consultation process. At times, methods need to be revised or amended. To determine this, ask yourself:

- + Who is missing from the discussion?
- + Are the chosen methods letting everyone be heard?
- + Are they accessible to everyone?
- + Are they effective and reliable?

You should also remember that certain groups may have different accessibility needs. Ensure that consultation methods take these into account, and provide accessible options for providing information. For example, some staff may not be desk-based or have easy access to IT and may need access to paper surveys or a digital kiosk in a common area.

Required areas of consultation

The charter framework requires applicants to consult with their communities on specific topics and themes, which are noted in the relevant application forms. These include:

- + Promotion and/or progression
- + Career development, including development reviews
- + Workload
- + Bullying and harassment
- + Sexual harassment and sexual violence
- + Informal and formal flexible working arrangements
- + Timing of meetings and social gatherings
- + Family leave and caring responsibilities
- + Values and traditions
- + Leadership practices and behaviours
- + Negative practices and behaviours

You should consult the [Athena Swan Ireland Consultation Template](#) for example questions related to these areas and for further guidance.

Capturing and analysing responses

When consulting with staff and students through an “EDI lens”, you might opt to ask directly about specific topics (e.g. asking how supports for family leave can be more LGBT+ inclusive), or you might ask everyone the same question and analyse findings disaggregated by a particular equality ground or characteristic (e.g. asking staff about support for applying for promotion and disaggregating findings by gender or ethnicity).

When taking the latter approach, you’ll want to consider if cohorts are large enough to enable meaningful analysis as well as ensure confidentiality. Additionally, you should plan how you will capture response rates by cohort, where possible. For example, you may be able to capture the response rate to a staff survey by gender and category of post if the circulation list is tied to an HR system that already captures this information. However, if you do not have a baseline for this information, you may not be able to provide a definitive response rate. You should take steps to determine if your consultation is representative of the population of your institution or sub-unit.

Remember that the language around a lot of identities is evolving and language used in data collection will need to be reviewed regularly as it may become outdated quickly. More open approaches can be useful, such as open-ended questions or text boxes in surveys, which will allow people to self-identify.

An honest appraisal of consultation findings is essential. An effective approach to the charter framework requires critical self-reflection and actions in response. Guidance on developing appropriate interventions can be found in [Topic Guide 4: Developing and implementing a targeted action plan](#).

As you plan consultation activities, we encourage you to map existing opportunities to gather information and input from your communities – this will help you to mitigate ‘consultation fatigue’. For example, you may be collecting relevant evidence already through existing staff and student surveys, or decide to append EDI themes to a survey that already garners a high response rate.

You should have a full communications plan surrounding your consultation process. Staff and students will need to understand the point of the consultation activity, and the charter framework, in order to engage meaningfully. Ensuring individuals understand the benefits of consultations will support them to feel secure in responding. It is also important that respondents trust the SAT to utilise the results appropriately. This will also help you to maximise your response rates and the overall quality of captured data.

Consider too the capacity of those who you are hoping to gather data from. For example, you may be better waiting until after the exam period to consult with students or staff involved in student assessment. Methods may need to be adjusted or tailored to participants depending on their role, such as clinical academics on differing sites, or students who are studying remotely.

The long-term effectiveness of engagement with consultation activities can be enhanced by ensuring there is an appropriate balance between how often the community is consulted with, and the time and resourcing needed to implement proactive actions and initiatives in response.

It is important to be mindful that participants are taking the time to share personal information and stories about their experiences. You should also take steps to keep your community informed of successes and challenges along the way, to ensure that they are aware of how their responses have been considered and responded to.

Further resources

You will find further guidance to support robust consultation methods and analysis in these [Advance HE data resources](#).

Developing and implementing a targeted action plan

The Athena Swan Ireland charter framework supports applicants to drive change through the development of targeted action plans. You are ready to begin the process of action plan development when you have considered the framework data sets and have a clear understanding of areas that require change or improvement in your institution/unit. Based on analysis of the findings of the self-assessment you should also have an understanding of priority areas for intervention. With this understanding of your context, you can begin to identify actions that will drive progress.

The topic guidance on 'Developing and implementing a targeted action plan' will provide you with information on:

- + Common areas for action
- + Establishing priorities for action
- + Developing targeted actions
- + Implementing your action plan

Understanding common areas for action

Actions vary across applications and you should aim to develop a responsive plan based on your institution/unit's priorities and context. While each applicant's action plan will be unique, there are common areas for intervention:

1 *Developing infrastructure*

It is common to find actions, or groups of actions, aimed at improving the systems and structures that are needed to advance equality, diversity and inclusion. This might involve activities related to resource management (e.g. staff levels, systems for recognising and rewarding EDI work), or to governance structures, committees, or reporting lines. Improvements in infrastructure also regularly involve technological solutions to support equality monitoring (e.g. centralisation/expansion of databases), or involve physical space development and management.

2 *Increasing representation*

These kinds of interventions work to address underrepresentation. Actions will be targeted at improving gender balance (e.g. in particular staff categories or grades, or among students/staff in specific discipline areas) and may seek to drive progress in relation to other underrepresented groups. Actions can involve activities to ensure that recruitment, marketing, course packaging, and outreach is designed in a way that encourages a diverse range of applicants. Actions may also involve work to ensure that processes and practices relating to recruitment and career progression are fair and transparent so as not to disadvantage any particular group.

3 *Improving outcomes and experiences*

These actions target improvements in the outcomes and experiences of staff and students. Interventions may seek to address student awarding gaps through activities to revise assessment modes and methods, seek improvements in completion rates by improving supports, or improve experience through training or networks. Initiatives related to staff outcomes and experience are also common, such as activities to manage workload equitably, to enhance and encourage staff development (e.g. mentorship/sponsorship schemes, supports for research grant success, annual staff development reviews), or to support staff with caring responsibilities, including those returning from family-related leave. Work in this area may also involve recognising good practice or efforts to celebrate or sustain effective and impactful interventions.

4 *Fostering inclusive cultures*

Actions to drive improvement in representation or staff/student outcomes and experience will likely also rely on initiatives designed to foster an inclusive culture. This may involve taking proactive steps to create a safe and respectful environment and eliminate unacceptable behaviour (e.g. bullying, sexual harassment), activities to promote social cohesion and community (e.g. networks, events, core hours), and initiatives to celebrate diversity.

Establishing priorities for action

Establishing priority areas for action will enable you to focus your action planning and funnel resources to the area of greatest need. Identification of priorities should be tied to the findings of your self-assessment. Your priorities should therefore be:

- + Evidence-based
- + Specific and detailed
- + Appropriate and tailored to your context
- + Have measurable outcomes

The Athena Swan Ireland framework will prompt you to identify key priorities for action. You will report on your progress in relation to these priorities when you renew your award. When upgrading your award, you will need to demonstrate achievement in relation to the priority areas you identify.⁸

Priorities can be addressed through multiple actions in the action plan and may have short, medium, and long-term targets for success. Examples of specific priorities can be found in the table below.

A: Broad priorities	B: Specific priorities
Tackle bullying and harassment	Reduce incidences of disrespect towards professional services staff from students
Increase the number of women at senior academic grades	Improve the success rate of women achieving promotion at Senior Lecturer and Professor grades
Grow engagement with the local community	Work with community partners to increase the proportion of male school-leavers from the area enrolling at courses in the department

⁹ To meet the criteria for a Silver award, you must be able to demonstrate impact in two priority areas. For Gold, impact in three priority areas must be shown.

Developing targeted actions

When developing actions you will need to be aware of the resources available, including available budget and staff time to support implementation, and whether or not additional external expertise will be needed to deliver specific actions, or to support progress on priority areas. You may also want to consider any other institution/unit projects, outputs, or commitments scheduled for delivery in the four-year period covered by the plan.

To ensure that your action plan offers your institution/unit a sufficiently targeted strategy to drive progress during the award period, the Athena Swan Ireland framework requires actions, and action plans, that adhere to the SMART action planning principles:

- + Specific
- + Measurable
- + Achievable
- + Relevant
- + Time bound

In applying the SMART action planning principles to the development of actions you will:

Be Specific: what are you going to do?

An action/action plan should make clear to anyone who reads it exactly what you are going to do over the next four years. This means that you will need to include a specific description of a specific action that will take place. When deciding this, consider who the action is aimed at and how it will be implemented. You may need to consider sub actions for initiatives seeking to address large objectives.

Ensure relevance: why are you undertaking this action?

Your action plan should make the rationale for actions clear, demonstrating how the action emerges from the evidence uncovered during your self-assessment. You will need to include information that indicates why the action is necessary for your institution/department. This necessitates citing baseline data, for example from a survey or focus group, to demonstrate why you are undertaking the proposed intervention.

Determine timelines: when will the action start and finish?

Timeframes for actions should be included in your plan. These timeframes should provide a clear picture of when the action will be implemented and reviewed. If the action will have various outputs, or if sub-actions have been included, you may wish to include milestones to check on action progress.

Safeguard achievability: who will ensure action implementation?

You will need to assign responsibility for action/s to appropriate and suitably influential roles in your institution/unit as this will ensure the action is achievable. You will also find it helpful to differentiate between those who are responsible for action completion and those who are responsible for the action's implementation. By identifying specific roles, you can ensure action completion if roles change or rotate. In assigning responsibility for actions you should take care not to overburden members of underrepresented groups. Your action plan should attest to the fact that you understand that driving change is everyone's responsibility.

Identify indicators of success: how will you measure the success of your action?

In order to support your evaluation of progress over four years you will need to identify markers of action success. These success measures should demonstrate the influence or effectiveness of the action on the issues or opportunities identified, not just that activities of the action were undertaken. When choosing success measures, remember that action completion is not necessarily a marker of success. Instead, the success measure should directly relate to what the action is aiming to effect. You will find it helpful to consider your baseline data (i.e. measurements before actions have begun) when choosing success measures for actions.

Distinguishing between action outputs, outcomes, and impacts

When determining your success measures you will likely find it helpful to understand, and distinguish between, action outputs, outcomes, and impacts. A common pitfall of action planning is selecting an output of your action as a measure of success. An action output is typically a milestone or indicator of an action in progress (e.g. report was written, handbook updated, focus group organised, policy developed, appraisal template created; staff network established). In contrast, an action outcome enables you to evaluate how well an action is working and impact describes the positive effect of the action on the issue you have been aiming to address. Outcomes and impact are always closely tied to the rationale for undertaking actions and offer evidence of the success of the action plan in addressing your equality priorities.

Action outputs: the initiatives and activities that make up your action plan will produce action outputs. An action output is typically an indicator or a milestone of an action in progress. An action output is generally straightforward to report on as you should be able to easily identify whether or not it happened.

Action outcomes: action outcomes enable you to evaluate if your actions are working appropriately. The outcome of an action is an indicator of whether or not your intervention will be impactful over time. For example, action outcomes may offer evidence of awareness of engagement with action outputs (e.g. uptake/application rates).

Action Impacts: action impact describes the positive effect or change that occurs in your institution/unit as a result of a well-executed action. Impact demonstrates that your action/action plan is helping to achieve your gender equality and wider equality objectives.

Below you will find some examples of the differences between action outputs, outcomes, and impacts.

Example One: action outputs, outcomes, impacts

An institution establishes a parents' and carers' network in response to finding that staff with caring responsibilities report feeling isolated. The outputs, outcomes, and impacts of this action may be defined as follows:

Output: parents' and carers' staff network is established

Outcome: evidence of network activity and staff engagement (e.g. uptake of activities)

Impact: evidence of staff reporting that the institution is a supportive environment for staff with caring responsibilities (i.e. improvement against baseline data from the staff survey)

Example Two: action outputs, outcomes, impacts

A unit takes steps to formalise its staff development review process (i.e. introduction of annual meetings and use of new review meeting discussion template) as review meetings are held irregularly and early career staff report receiving limited support for career development.

Output: review meeting discussion template developed; timeframe for annual meetings agreed.

Outcome: evidence that staff are participating in annual review meetings (i.e. uptake rates)

Impact: evidence of staff reporting that they are receiving support for career development (i.e. improvement against baseline data from the staff survey)

Example Three: action outputs, outcomes, impacts

An institution overhauls its promotion process (i.e. reviews and revises policies relating to eligibility and criteria, introduces training requirements for assessors, launches briefing sessions for eligible staff) due to an underrepresentation of women at senior academic grades and associated low application rates for promotion from eligible staff, particularly women. Baseline data also indicates that low numbers of staff perceive the process to be transparent and fair.

Outputs: new policies and guidance developed; assessor training and board composition requirements in place; annual briefing held.

Outcomes: evidence of positive improvement in staff feedback on new policies and guidance; all assessors (including external panel members) complete required training; high staff uptake of the annual briefing; positive feedback on the usefulness of the briefing; a greater proportion of eligible staff are applying for promotion, including more applications from women.

Impact: evidence of improvement in staff perceptions of promotion process as fair and transparent (i.e. improvement against baseline data from staff survey); evidence of improving success rates for women applying for promotion / improving representation at Senior Lecturer level (i.e. improvement against baseline promotion data).

Choosing an action plan template

You will need to choose an action plan template that supports SMART action planning. The Athena Swan Ireland framework is not prescriptive about the format of action plans but applicants are encouraged to choose an action planning format that is accessible and user-friendly as this will support action implementation and evaluation.

An example of a SMART action planning template can be found below.

Priority area or objective	Planned action	Rationale	Key outputs and/or milestones	Timeframe (start and end dates)	Roles responsible	Success indicators: outcomes and impacts sought

Actions presented in the action plan will be embedded and cross-referenced throughout the application narrative demonstrating the link between your data, analysis, and activities to drive progress. You should include the headline text of actions, as well as the action number, in your response to application questions. Embedded action text is not counted within the word allocation (see [Word Allocation Guidance](#)). You can find examples of how to embed actions below.

Example 1: Embedding actions

The institutional staff survey revealed that 72% (n307) of all staff report that they often work outside their contracted hours. The figure for academic staff is 87% (n.193), 47% (n.64) for PMSS and 94% (n32) for Senior Managers. From a gender perspective, more males report often working outside their contract hours across all groups. Managing work-life balance was also raised in the remote working survey. Complementing action 5.17, a specific work-life balance policy will be developed to address gender specific issues raised in both surveys (Action 5.29). Given that both surveys also indicated increasing demands of staff, the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) Work Positive programme and audit tools will be adopted to measure progress in this area (Action 5.30).

Action 5.29	Develop and implement a work-life balance policy across the institute
Action 5.30	Implement the HSA Work Positive Programme

Example 2: Embedding actions

In our unit staff survey we asked about awareness of the new institutional policy on core meeting hours and gathered feedback on whether events and social gatherings were scheduled to support staff attendance.

	M	F	A&R	PMS
Are you aware of the core meeting hours policy? i.e. core meetings should take place between 9.00-17.00?	86%	95%	83%	100%
Overall, meetings, seminars and other events are scheduled to commence and end at reasonable times in the working day to maximise my ability to attend.	85%	90%	92%	83%
Organised/formal social activities are scheduled at times that make it feasible for me to attend.	100%	58%	63%	100%

Female staff and academic staff in particular noted that social activities can be less feasible to attend. *We will implement a departmental core hours policy to be 10:00-16:00 for both department and formal social activities (AP 5.6.8).*

Implementing your targeted action plan

By developing your action plan according to the SMART action planning principles you will have laid the foundation for successful implementation – your actions will be specific and measurable but also realistic as they have been developed for your context. Additionally, the prioritisation of your actions will make clear what actions need to occur for progress to be made on the institution/unit's most important issues.

As you move into the implementation phase of your Athena Swan journey you may find it helpful to undertake the practical steps listed below:

1 *Recognise and celebrate award attainment*

The completion of the application phase of your Athena Swan journey is the culmination of a lot of work. Celebrating this milestone and recognising the work of those involved in the application demonstrates that this activity is valued by the institution/unit. Marking the attainment of your award is also an opportunity to stimulate momentum and generate wider awareness of the actions the institution/unit will implement over the next four years.

2 *Reflect on panel feedback*

It is important to take some time to reflect on the written feedback provided by the assessment panel and undertake any changes that are recommended. Feedback will note areas for development or key next steps and it is useful for the SAT to consider these recommendations and determine if any further action is needed to support successful implementation. For example, a panel may offer advice relating to prioritisation of actions, or indicate that some action success measures need to be amended to support your evaluation of progress. When renewing your award, you will be asked to reflect on your response to the panel feedback so it is helpful to do this early in the implementation phase.

3 *Take the action plan "live"*

You will need to treat the action plan as a "live" document that will need to be updated and modified over the course of your award period. The SAT will work with the action plan regularly and will likely find it useful to RAG-rate actions from the outset of implementation (see [Topic Guide 5: Evaluating and evidencing progress and success](#)). You may also find it beneficial to re-share your action plan with your institution/unit. You should also post the action plan on your website so that staff, students, and other stakeholders can understand the institution/professional unit's equality objectives and how these will be achieved.⁹

⁹ To comply with the Horizon Europe Gender Equality Plan (GEP) eligibility criterion, a GEP must be a formal document published on the institution's website, signed by the top management and actively communicated within the institution'. See https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/strategy/strategy-2020-2024/democracy-and-rights/gender-equality-research-and-innovation_en

4 *Plan review points*

If you haven't already done so it is helpful to pinpoint formal points for reviewing action plan progress over the four years of your award. It is particularly important to review action implementation against baseline data, as this will enable you to identify emerging areas of progress, and to identify and refresh ineffective or stalled actions. It is inevitable that elements of your action plan will need to be revised and updated over the course of your award. A methodical approach to action plan review will ensure your action plan remains current.

5 *Communicate*

In tandem with the formal reviews of your progress you should plan to communicate updates on progress or changes to the action plan to your community. This may be via town halls, social media, newsletters, standing updates on key committees, or via formal communications from senior leadership. In general, taking a "you said, we did" approach is helpful in demonstrating the institution/unit's ongoing understanding of issues and opportunities, and of raising awareness of initiatives to drive progress.

Analysing action effectiveness

During the implementation phase you will need to evaluate whether or not actions are having their intended effects. Evaluating your actions will also enable you to make adjustments to activities when needed, optimise resources, and observe progress and celebrate successes. As you monitor and evaluate implementation during the award period you may find the following questions helpful:

- + Have scheduled actions taken place? If not, why not?
- + Are there any emerging barriers or facilitators to action implementation?
- + Do we need any additional expertise in order to support the action? If so, who might be best suited for this?
- + Is the action yielding the desired outputs and outcomes? If not, why not?
- + Are any changes required to complete this action, or achieve the desired outcome and impact? If so, who will be responsible for these changes?

Analysing the effectiveness of your action plan throughout the implementation will also support your continued engagement with the Athena Swan Ireland framework:

- + To renew your award, you will be asked to demonstrate progress against the priorities you identified during your self-assessment. This will involve reflecting on the delivery of key outputs and evaluating action outcomes.
- + To upgrade your award (to Silver or Gold) you will be asked to present evidence of success against the priorities you identified previously. This will involve demonstrating the impact of your actions on the issues and opportunities identified during previous self-assessment.

You can find further information on evaluating and evidencing success in [Topic Guide 5: Evaluating and evidencing progress and success](#). You can also contact the Athena Swan Ireland team for further advice and guidance on developing and implementing targeted actions.

Evaluating and evidencing progress and success

The Athena Swan Ireland framework is designed to support applicants to drive change and sustain their success. This means that after achieving your initial award, you will need to demonstrate progress in order to achieve award renewal and success to upgrade to Silver and Gold. If your actions are measurable and well-managed, evaluating progress and success over time will be straightforward. To support this process, you will find it useful to RAG (Red, Amber, Green) rate your action plan from the outset of implementation. RAG-rating your plan will enable you to track and respond to action progress over time but it will also prepare you for award renewal/upgrade.

The topic guidance on 'Evaluating and evidencing progress and success' will provide you with information on:

- + RAG-rating and award renewal/upgrade
- + Understanding RAG-rating in Athena Swan
- + Understanding impact in Athena Swan
- + Reporting on success for Silver
- + Reporting on success for Gold

RAG-rating and award renewal/upgrade

The application framework for award renewals supports applicants to evaluate their previous activities by submitting a 'RAG' (Red, Amber, Green) rated action plan.¹⁰ Submission of a RAG-rated action plan is also required if you are seeking to upgrade your award to Silver or Gold.

As action plans are live documents that are adapted and modified over the course of an award period, applicants should RAG-rate the most recent iteration of the action plan for the submission. It is normal for an action plan to need to be revised over four years and typical changes include revision to capture changes in action responsibility, perhaps to reflect staff turnover, and modified timeframes or targets in response to panel feedback. Some actions may also have been edited on the basis of new evidence.

¹⁰ The award renewals process may be used by institutions/departments that hold an expanded charter award and seek to renew their award at the same level. The renewal application framework may only be used one.

While changes such as these are part of ensuring the action plan remains current, more extensive amendments need to be scrutinised. You should reflect on actions that change significantly or those that are removed entirely from your original action plan. The renewal application framework will ask you to report on the rationale for significant changes such as these.

Understanding RAG-rating for Athena Swan

The application of RAG ratings can be subject to different definitions. For the purpose of Athena Swan Ireland, the following definitions apply:

Red: No progress	
R	<ul style="list-style-type: none">+ The action was never undertaken+ Action was started but was discontinued+ Further work is needed to begin the action or revise the approach
Amber: Partial progress	
A	<ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Action has begun but is incomplete+ Action was completed but the outcomes or impacts were not as predicted/desired+ Further work is needed to complete the action or to obtain the desired outcome or impact.
Green Good progress	
G	<ul style="list-style-type: none">+ Action was implemented leading to the desired outcome or impact as (or close to) predicted/desired+ No further work needed on this action

As mentioned, RAG-rating your action plan is encouraged from the outset of implementation as this will enable you to track progress at every stage of your Athena Swan journey. It is not uncommon to have many amber-rated actions for long periods. Complex actions take time to implement. You may also have issues achieving the outcomes you had hoped for and adjustments may be needed.

When you come to renew your award, you may have some actions that are rated red. It is important to capture and report on 'red' actions as this will enable you to identify barriers to progress and plan for future improvement.

It is important to remember that progress and success will look different in different contexts. The consultation activities you engage in during your award period should provide you with new data points that enable you to evaluate the success of your actions. By comparing data from before and after an intervention takes place, you can evaluate and report on your progress. Over time, you are aiming to see evidence of impactful activities, meaning your interventions have been successful in addressing the equality priorities you identified.

Understanding impact in Athena Swan

The term impact has a broad range of uses in higher education and has become a focus for many elements of academic life. Impact evaluation is used in the realm of policy and research, as well as in an equality and diversity context. For the purpose of Athena Swan Ireland, impact describes the positive effect of an activity or action on a previously identified equality issue or opportunity.

Evaluating impact is an important part of the Athena Swan Ireland framework. This is because evaluating the impact of an EDI initiative is the only way to determine the effect of interventions. Impact evaluations also provide invaluable insight into whether EDI initiatives can be improved upon (e.g. made more cost efficient), or applied in other contexts (e.g. in other sub-units or institutions, or different equality areas and target groups). In essence, impact evaluations ensure better targeting, effectiveness, and efficiency of initiatives to address inequalities.

Effective evaluation of the impact of an initiative goes beyond monitoring (i.e. the ongoing process of systematically collecting data on an outcome to check an action has been implemented correctly). Evaluating impact involves the systematic assessment of an initiative, its design, implementation and results. Evaluation is concerned with an initiative's effectiveness (i.e. did it do what it intended to do?) and efficiency (i.e. did it do this well?) to assess its impact and sustainability.

Achieving and evidencing impact therefore requires measurable actions, well-managed implementation, and a strategic approach to evaluation of consultation data after interventions have begun.¹¹

Reporting on success for Silver

Within the application framework for Silver you will be asked to present information on the institution/unit's key achievements. Specifically, you will need to present evidence of how the institution/unit has achieved the desired outcome/s and impact/s in relation to at least two previously identified key priorities. The evidence you present should clearly identify the following:

- + The previous priority addressed
- + Actions implemented to achieve success
- + Qualitative and quantitative evidence to demonstrate success

¹¹ For further information on these areas, see Topic Guides 2-4 as well as Advance HE's [Research and Data Briefing: Monitoring and Evaluating Impact](#).

There are many ways to present evidence of your key achievements and you may find it helpful to use tables to highlight key information in relation to your achievements. You will also find it useful to cross-reference the data presented across your application as well as your previous action plan. Examples of how you could do this can be found below.

Example 1

An institution that has been working to address female underrepresentation at senior grades reflects on activities and actions undertaken during the award period. The narrative references evidence of success against baseline data in a number of areas (e.g. training uptake, application rates, success rates, staff perception and experience). As part of this narrative presentation of evidence, the applicant includes the following table to highlight how specific initiatives have led to success:

Priority 1: Overview of Key Achievements

Previous priority (AS app. 2017)	To address the underrepresentation of women at senior academic grades
Actions taken	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Introduction of a new criterion-referenced academic promotions scheme for SL and Professor grades (AS 2017: 4:9) + New commitment to two promotion calls annually (AS 2017: 4:9) + Introduction of a system for applying a “discount” for outputs relative to opportunity, e.g. recognition of “time out” (e.g. family/carer’s leave) (AS 2017: 4:9) + Introduction of a promotion pathway based on Teaching & Learning (AS 2017: 4:10) + Removal of the requirement to have reached the top of the SL salary to apply for promotion to PP (AS 2017: 4.11). + Promotion Committee is gender balanced (50%F/50%M) and is required to undertake unconscious bias training as well as training to support equality considerations during assessment (AS 2017: 4:12)
Impact	<p>As per figure 4.4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Improved female representation at SL: 33%F (2016) to 47%F (2020). + Improved female representation at Personal Professor: 16%F to 28%F (2020)

Example 2

A department reports on initiatives undertaken to improve the underrepresentation of women in Physics. The narrative points to a range of outreach activity designed to improve the pipeline of female Physicists over time. This includes initiatives at second level to encourage female students to take Physics as a Leaving Certificate subject and subsequently study Physics at third level, and the introduction of a Professional Diploma in Teaching Physics to provide more female Physics teachers as role models at second level.

Priority 1: Overview of Key Achievements

Previous priority (AS app. 2017)	To improve the representation of women in Physics
Key objective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Encourage female second-level junior cycle students to choose Physics for senior cycle by developing an outreach programme for schools promoting Physics. + Improve visibility of female Physicists in secondary schools via the introduction of Professional Diploma in Teaching Physics
Action outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Outreach programme (AS 2018: 3.8) developed with the following key project outputs delivered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Annual School visit programme – Student Physics competition – Teacher showcase event + Interactive website for parents, teachers and students, with curriculum-linked activities, and blog + Professional Diploma in Teaching Physics introduced (AS 2018: 3:11).
Key outcomes and impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Number of female-only schools participating in Physics Leaving Certificate revision labs increased: 5 (2017) to 8 (2019). Numbers of co-educational schools participating increased from 13 (2017) to 22 (2019) (See Table 4.4.) + The department has seen an associated increase in female undergraduates from 37% to 54%, particularly due to higher numbers of women taking education courses (72%F). (See Table 4.2, 4.3) + Survey data supports the positive impact of the dept. outreach programme on student representation showing that 35% (30%F) of UGs chose to study Physics because they had participated in outreach activities (See Figure 4.2)

Reporting on Success for Gold

Like applicants for Silver, Gold applicants will be seeking to present evidence of their key achievements. Gold applicants will be asked to demonstrate how the institution/unit has achieved the desired outcome/s and impact/s in relation to three previously identified priorities as well as evidence of longitudinal improvement. A similar approach to that recommended above can be used to present evidence.

The criteria for Gold also requires 'evidence of sector-leading gender equality and, where relevant, wider equality practice, and of supporting others to improve'. Gold awardees will be able to point to innovative or sector-leading good-practice or beacon activities but they will also have evidence of supporting others to achieve success in gender equality work and, where relevant, wider equality initiatives. This support may include influence on, mentorship of, and support for others outside the institution (e.g. other institutions, professional units, organisations, industry partners, professional bodies) and evidence of evidence of service to the Athena Swan charter in Ireland or beyond (e.g. staff participation in peer-review assessment processes; leadership at networks or events).

Word allocation guidance

Each application form has an overall word allocation (see below). Word allocations are limited in order to help applicants focus on what is important and to support peer-reviewers who may assess up to four applications per assessment panel.

	Bronze	Silver	Gold	Renewal
Institution	12,500	15,000	16,000	7,000
Department	10,000	12,000	13,000	6,000
Professional unit	8,000	10,000	11,000	6,000

The application forms also provide recommended word allocations for each section of the application form. These section allocations are purely for guidance and applicants have flexibility to use the overall word allocation across the application as they deem appropriate.

Applicants should provide section word counts in the application form as well as on the word allocation table inserted at the beginning of each form.

Example word allocation table: Silver application form for institutions

Section	Words used
Section 1: An introduction to the institution's Athena Swan work	/2,000
Section 2: An assessment of the institution's gender equality context and, where relevant, wider equality context	/10,500
Section 3: An evaluation of the institution's progress and success	/2,500
Section 4: Action Plan	N/A
Overall word count	/15,000

Excluded from word allocation

The word allocation excludes the following aspects of your application:

- + Details of the members of your self-assessment team, presented as a table, using a maximum of 30 words for each team member.
- + Glossary of terms or abbreviations used in the application.
- + Tables and graphs with data, providing they do not include standalone text or prose.
- + Qualitative quotations, provided that individual quotations do not exceed 50 words and no more

than 25 quotations are used across the application.

- + Embedded action points, including cross references to action points.
- + The action plan. The action plan provides a summary of actions referenced across the application, complete with information on ownership and timeframes. It should not include any additional commentary.

Included in word allocation

Aside from the exclusions noted above, the word allocation includes all other aspects of the application. For example, the following text would be included in the allocation:

- + Readable words in screenshots.
- + Standalone text or prose included in tables, graphs, footnotes or references.
- + Qualitative quotations that exceed 50 words.
- + Additional qualitative quotations beyond the 25 excluded from the word allocation.

Any application found to have exceeded the word allowance may be rejected and not assessed by the peer-review panel.

Additional word allocation

The overall word allocation for an application may be increased in certain circumstances. The process relating to some common circumstances where additional words may be justifiable are listed below:

Organisational restructure

If an organisational restructure has recently taken place, applicants may avail of an extension to reflect on the impact of the restructure on the institution/unit's equality work in the application (e.g. arising from changes to their staff or student demographic profile, policies, or context). Applicants should email the Athena Swan Ireland team no less than one month prior to the application submission date to request this additional word allowance and ensure it is noted in Advance HE's records.

Exceptional circumstances

Requests for additional word allowance to account for exceptional circumstances are considered on a case-by-case basis. Any increase in the word allowance should always be used to explain how the special circumstances have impacted on, or been taken into account in relation to, the applicant's equality context or activity. Applicants should email the Athena Swan Ireland team no less than two months prior to the application submission date to explain any exceptional circumstances and request related additional word allowance.

Small size

An application from an institution/unit with a small population may need to take a more qualitative approach to self-assessment. In these circumstances, an increase in the number of qualitative quotations or the overall application word count may be justified. Applicants applying from small units should email the Athena Swan Ireland team early in the self-assessment process with information on their population size and proposed approach to self-assessment.

Clinical and non-clinical staff

Department applicants with clinical and non-clinical staff are automatically eligible for an additional word allowance of 1000 words. These applicants must present data for clinical and non-clinical staff separately, and the additional word allowance is granted to allow analysis and reflection on any differences between the two staff groups.

Where an institution has both clinical and non-clinical staff, additional word allocation is not automatically granted but awarded on a case-by-case basis. Applicants should contact the Athena Swan Ireland team.

Faculty/multi-discipline applications

Faculty applicants are eligible for an additional word allowance of up to 1000 words. These applicants must present data for their component departments separately, and the additional word allowance is granted to allow the unit to analyse and reflect on department and discipline-specific differences, to demonstrate how Athena Swan principles are embedded in each constituent unit, and, for Silver and Gold applications, to evidence key achievements in sub-units.

Applications from units comprised of multiple disciplines may also be eligible for additional words to support exploration of discipline specific challenges and opportunities. Faculty/multi-discipline applicants should email the Athena Swan Ireland team no less than two months prior to the application submission date to request additional word allocation.

Requesting additional word allocation

Requests for additional word allocation should be made in writing to the Athena Swan Ireland team. All requests are considered on a case-by-case basis. In your email you should outline the number of words you require. Where additional words are granted, the increased allowance will be at the discretion of Advance HE, usually to a maximum of 1000 words.

If approved, additional words can be used across the application document but word counts should be included at the end of each section as well as in the word allocation table at the beginning of the application form. You must also include the approval email received from the Athena Swan Ireland Team at the beginning of the submission document.

Additional information

The assessment panel will only consider the information provided in the application form and will not take into account any additional information. This means that appendices and hyperlinks are not permitted. All relevant information should be included in the application form.

Further information can be found in the [Word Allocation Guidance](#) document. You may also find the information in our [Writing Crisp Prose](#) resource useful.

Charter framework glossary

Across different institutions terminology may be used in different ways, with differing names given to units or practices. To support your engagement with the Athena Swan Ireland charter we have provided definitions for some of the terms used in the framework. You may also find our [EDI literacy glossary](#) useful.

Applicants are encouraged to include their own glossary of terms in their applications, which may include acronyms or institution-specific terminology used across the application.

If you are unsure about any terminology used in this document or the Athena Swan Ireland framework more generally, please don't hesitate to get in touch with the Ireland team for advice.

Term	Definition
Academic and research staff	Staff responsible for the planning, direction and/or undertaking of academic teaching and/or research. This includes staff with teaching-only, research-only, and teaching and research contract functions.
Beacon activity	Activity which disseminates and promotes the uptake of innovative and impactful good practice to others.
Benchmark data	Refers to data that is used to contextualise applicant data. Benchmarking with external data is a requirement of the application framework. The process of data comparison can provide insight into the scale of the issues an applicant is facing. Appropriate comparators should be chosen for benchmarking and applicants may look to national or international data, data from analogous institutions/sub-units, or data from professional bodies, learned societies, or industries that align with the unit specialism.
Career break	A career break is a period of time out from employment or career. Career breaks are often taken by parents and carers but may also be used to provide time for personal or professional development.
Caring responsibilities	Describes a commitment to providing unpaid care to a dependant, or other family member, or a friend who could not cope without their support. A caring responsibility may be short or long term. Understanding the unpaid caring responsibilities of individuals can inform work to address barriers to participation in higher education and research that may exist.

Term	Definition
Category of post	Refers to the division of staff into the broad categories of academic, research/specialist academic, and professional managerial and support (PMS). Applicants provide high-level equality data by 'category of post'.
Charter principle	The commitments that underpin the Athena Swan Ireland charter and set out shared goals that all participants agree to uphold.
Clinical staff	Staff who normally undertake clinical duties in addition to teaching and/or research activities. This includes academic Clinical Fellows, academic Clinical Lecturers, health professionals employed directly by your institution/sub-unit, academic staff employed directly by your institution/sub-unit who also carry out programmed activities outside the institution in a medical or healthcare setting.
Completion rate	The proportion of a student cohort successfully completing their studies. This is a useful dataset for analysis, particularly for programmes that do not award classifications upon completion, for example PhD programmes.
Consultation	Refers to the process of engaging with your community to understand their perceptions, attitudes and experiences of the institution/sub-unit. Consultation can take many forms (e.g. surveys, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups) provided that it includes a mechanism to capture the number of participants and their relevant equality characteristics.
Contract type	The type of contract a staff member is employed on, including permanent/contract of indefinite duration, fixed term, hourly paid.
Degree attainment	The awarding of degree classifications to students; for example, first-class honours, upper second-class honours, lower second-class honours, third-class honours/pass.
Degree programme	Refers to a denominated area of study within a Programme Type (see below); for instance, Bachelor of Engineering in Electronic and Electrical Engineering, Bachelor of Arts in English Studies, Master of Arts in Politics, Master of Science, Strategic Management Accounting.

Term	Definition
Department	A sub-unit within an institution that normally aligns with a particular academic discipline. Institutions may use other terms to describe these units, such as 'School'. Department is the term used by Advance HE to refer to academic sub-units eligible to apply for an Athena Swan award.
Disclosure & disclosure rates	Refers to the process of individuals providing equality-related information about themselves to the institution for the purposes of equality monitoring. Disclosure rates describe the proportion of staff electing to provide equality information.
Discipline	Describes a field of study or branch of specialist knowledge that is taught and researched. Departments may comprise a single discipline (e.g. English) or multiple disciplines (e.g. Humanities), and sub-disciplines are common (Engineering – chemical, civil, electrical, mechanical). The Athena Swan Ireland framework requires applicants to be attentive to disciplinary trends and differences as social and cultural factors affect individuals' study and work choices. Understanding disciplinary traditions and trends can inform work to address barriers to recruitment and retention.
Enrolments	Refers to all undergraduate and postgraduate students in the institution/unit. Includes students studying part-time and remotely (e.g. e-learning), as well as full-time students.
Equality grounds	Refers to the nine equal status grounds enshrined in equality legislation in Ireland (The Equal Status Acts 2000-2018). These are gender, marital status, family status, age, disability, sexual orientation, race, religion, and membership of the Traveller community.
Equality monitoring	The collection of data about staff and student identity characteristics to provide insights into the demographic diversity of a population.
Faculty	A group of sub-units, often called departments, in related academic fields that are managed through an over-arching decision-making body or governance structure. Institutions may use other terms to describe these groupings, for example 'College'. Faculty is the term used by Advance HE to refer to groups of academic sub-units eligible to apply for an Athena Swan award. Faculty applicants use the same application materials as departments but should note additional considerations in the departmental guidance.

Term	Definition
Family leave	A period of absence from work or study relating to a person's family responsibilities. This includes maternity leave, adoption leave, paternity leave, shared parental leave, parental leave, time off for dependants.
Flexible working	A working arrangement that gives some flexibility on how long, where, when, and at what times employees work. Flexible working includes part-time working, term-time working, compressed hours, annual hours, flexitime, and working remotely on a regular basis.
Gender balance	Organisations define gender balance in different ways but, for the purposes of Athena Swan Ireland reporting, gender balance may be understood as a ratio of 60/40 or 40/60 women and men.
Gender pay gap reporting	The gender pay gap is the difference in the average hourly wage of men and women across a workforce. It compares the pay of all working men and women; not just those in similar jobs, with similar working pattern, or with similar competencies, qualifications or experience. In Ireland, the Gender Pay Gap Information Act 2021 requires employers to report on the pay differences, including any bonuses.
Governance structure	The key management and committee structures, and other formal structures in place to carry out and support the organisation's activity.
Grace period	Refers to the twelve months offered to existing award holders that are unsuccessful in renewing/upgrading their awards to re-apply with an improved submission.
Grade	Grade may describe staff job roles or pay scales. In the Athena Swan Ireland framework, consideration of equality data by grade for academic and research staff refers to job role (e.g. Assistant Lecturer, Lecturer, Senior Lecturer (1-3), Senior Research Fellow, Professor). For professional, managerial and support staff, applicants are encouraged to use pay grade, in line with the HEA Gender Profiles .
Impact	The term impact has a broad range of uses in higher education and has become a focus for many elements of academic life. In the context of the Athena Swan Ireland framework, impact describes the positive effect of an activity or action on a previously identified equality issue or opportunity.

Term	Definition
Institution	An organisation, often made up of academic, research, and professional, managerial and support sub-units. Institution is the term used by Advance HE to describe the organisational-level units eligible to apply for an Athena Swan Ireland award, namely universities, technological universities, institutes of technology, and colleges.
Intersectionality and intersectional inequality	Intersectionality is the understanding that social inequalities are not just summative, they are mutually constituting. For example, the disadvantage experienced by a Black woman is compounded by the inequalities she faces as a woman and as a Black person, and is distinct from the experiences of a Black man or a White woman. Applicants are encouraged to reflect on and address how their staff and students experience intersectional inequalities.
Non-binary	An umbrella term for gender identities that fall outside of the binary of man or woman and thus do not conform to traditional gender roles. This includes a wide variety of gender identities, including genderfluid, bigender, pangender, agender, non-gendered, genderqueer.
Occupational segregation	The underrepresentation of certain groups (e.g. based on gender) in particular occupations or sectors. For example, the predominance of men in Estates roles and women in Catering roles, or the predominance of men in Computing and women in Education disciplines.
Professional, managerial and support (PMS) staff	PMS staff may include administrators, technical staff, professionals, maintenance staff, or any other staff employed by the institution whose primary contract function does not relate to the delivery of academic teaching and research.
Professional unit	Refers to sub-units of institutions that provide professional services or strategic or operational support to institutional functions (e.g. Library, HR, Finance, IT, Estates, EDI). Professional unit is the term used by Advance HE to refer to sub-units eligible to apply for an Athena Swan award.
Progress	A pillar of the award criteria, applicants are expected to demonstrate progress against previously identified priorities in order to renew their award. Within an evaluation of progress during the previous award period, applicants apply a 'RAG'-rating system to assess individual actions (i.e. no progress; partial progress; good progress – see 'RAG-rating').

Term	Definition
Progression	A process or processes through which existing members of staff can move to a higher job grade, sometimes involving the submission of a successful application to an advertised vacancy. Professional, managerial and support members of staff are often subject to progression pathways that differ from academic promotion.
Promotion	A formal process for existing members of staff to move to a higher job grade usually within a defined career track. In some institutions, academic members of staff can progress through a promotion pathway; for example, academic promotion between Lecturer and Senior Lecturer roles. Professional, technical and operational staff are often subject to different progression pathways (see Progression).
Qualitative data	Non-numerical information often related to characteristics and qualities rather than trends and statistics. It can be collected using questionnaires, interviews, or observation, and is often presented in narrative form.
Quantitative data	Numerical information describing measurements or counts, often related to trends and statistics. It can be collected using census exercises, monitoring processes, such as recruitment or promotion, or surveys featuring a rating scale. Quantitative data is often presented in graphical or tabular format.
RAG rating	<p>A rating system wherein items are rated ‘red’, ‘amber’ or ‘green’ dependent on progress. Advance HE recognises that the application of RAG ratings can be subject to different definitions. For the purpose of presenting the previous action plan in the Athena Swan Ireland framework, the following definitions apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Red: no progress was made on this action. For example: the action was never undertaken; the action was started but discontinued; further work is needed to begin the action or to revise the approach. + Amber: partial progress was made on this action. For example: the action has begun but is incomplete; the action was completed but the outcomes or impacts were not as predicted/desired; further work is needed to complete the action or to obtain the desired outcome or impact. + Green: good progress was made on this action. For example: the action was implemented leading to the desired outcome or impact as (or close to) predicted/desired; no further work needed on this action.

Term	Definition
Recognition	The Athena Swan Ireland framework asks applicants to consider how equality work is recognised. Recognition refers to how this work is formally acknowledged and accounted for through processes, such as those relating to workload allocation, staff development review, and progression/promotion.
Revisions request	Refers to a charter process through which an application deemed not to meet the award criteria may be invited to resubmit with revisions that respond to assessment panel feedback. Applications offered revisions will have discreet areas that require improvement and institutions/ sub-units have 12 weeks to undertake changes. Revised applications are reviewed by assessment panel chairs.
Reward	The Athena Swan Ireland framework asks applicants to consider how equality work is rewarded. This refers to how appreciation is formally shown through processes, such as those relating to professional development review, progression/promotion, and pay.
Self-assessment Team (SAT)	The term used by Advance HE for a team made up of staff and student (where relevant) members, who are representative of the unit applying for an Athena Swan Ireland award. The SAT is responsible for carrying out an assessment of the unit's equality context, issues and priorities, and for planning and evaluating future action.
SMART	In developing plans for future action, applicants are encouraged to include actions and measures of success which are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound) in nature.
Social injustice	Disparity and injustice in relation to the distribution of and access to wealth, health and well-being, opportunities, and privileges within a society.
Staff development review	Staff development review (sometimes called appraisal or professional review) is a process that provides a formal opportunity for constructive dialogue, support, and feedback on an individual's work, effectiveness, and development.
Sub-units	Sub-units describe academic departments and professional units within an institution.

Term	Definition
Transgender/ Trans	Umbrella terms for people whose gender identity and/or gender expression differs from the sex assigned to them at birth. The term may include, but is not limited to, trans men and women, non-binary people and dual role people. Not all people that can be included in the term will associate with it.
Uptake	Refers to the number or proportion of staff or students participating in or completing a particular initiative (e.g. training, event attendance, etc.).
Whole-life balance	The ability for workers to enjoy a reasonable balance between all aspects of their lives, so that the demands of work do not pose a challenge to gaining satisfaction from their life outside work, and aspects of their personal life do not pose a challenge to being successful in their work or career.
Workload allocation model	A tool or process used to ensure the allocation of work among staff is fair, reasonable, and equitable.



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