Top tips for Athena SWAN applications

Athena SWAN Biosciences Best Practice Workshop
11 December 2015 - Charles Darwin House, London, UK

Data

= If any data required by the Athena SWAN application is unavailable, explain why you do not have it, and put an action in place to ensure it is collected in the future.

= Reflect and analyse – do not just describe the data.

= Plot the full staff pipeline and identify problematic career transition points. Put actions in place to address them.

= Benchmark where possible. Monitoring your institutional equality data and comparing it against others can help your institution or department identify areas of underrepresentation or disadvantage and to plan actions. ECU provides benchmarking data that can be used in Athena SWAN applications.

= Use clear and well-labelled graphs or tables. Ensure that the presentation allows the reader to easily identify trends.

= Include both numbers and percentages.

= Target support – not all initiatives will suit everyone. Consult staff to find out their needs.

= Consultation through surveys and focus groups allows your staff (and students) to be included in the process and adds additional layers of analysis. You can show a panel that you are seeking the opinions of the whole department, rather than basing the application and action plan solely on the experiences and opinions of the Self-Assessment Team.

= Staff consultation can help you measure and demonstrate impact of previous actions. Find out if staff report higher levels of satisfaction or are better informed about a particular issue. In addition to survey results, consider including quotes in your Athena SWAN submission.

= If you can, use external researchers for focus groups (e.g. through the consultancy day or other services offered to members of ECU). This way participation is confidential and create a space where people are able to speak freely.

= Think creatively if a focus group is not an option. You can use different ways of capturing feedback. You can ask for suggestions for improving an area of policy of practice at a staff meeting, ask everyone to jot something down on a piece of paper, and then collect these at the end of the meeting. Or hold an informal lunch for a specific group, and a member of the SAT could attend and ask people about their experiences. You could email all staff recruited in the past year and ask 3 questions about their experience of the recruitment process. If numbers are very small, it might be that one-to-one interviews are most appropriate.

= Always include details on response rates and the gender breakdown of staff consultation in your application.

Action Plans

= Action plans should always be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).

= Refer to actions throughout application. When an issue has been identified by your data and analysis, put an action in place to address it. Cross-reference these action points to the action plan. Putting an action point (in a box, clearly highlighted) within the narrative of the application doesn't count towards word count, and it is helpful for panellists reading your application.

= Ensure there are clearly defined responsibilities. Consider including a person/role responsible for taking the action forward, as well as someone from the Self-Assessment Team who can "check in" and ensure milestones are met. Actions should not fall heavily on one person or role, but be spread across your department and institution.

= Actions should not be front-loaded, but spread out over the three years. Include milestones and start and end dates.

= Actions should be specific to issues faced by the department. Always consider your own context.

= Aim to move beyond monitoring (which remains important). Consider what you will learn from and implement in response to the data you will monitor and collect.

= Targets should be set for significant improvement but remain realistic.

= Outcomes and successes should be quantifiable and numerical so that you can measure progress and impact.

= There is an Action Plan template in the [Athena SWAN May 2015 Award Handbook](#) that you may choose to use, or you are welcome to present your actions in your own way. Many applicants have successfully used a variety of alternative formats of their choosing.

Other things to keep in mind:

= Get someone external to read your Athena SWAN application.

= Panellists will have up to six Athena SWAN submissions to read before a panel assessment. It takes 2–3 hours for a panellist to read a submission thoroughly. Make things easy for panels to find and assimilate the information they want – use page numbers, don't use too many acronyms, consider font sizes and orientation of graphs.

= Do not assume that each of an institution's submissions will be seen by the same panel. Panellists can only come to a decision about a submission based on the information provided in the application.

= Consider becoming a panellist or observing the panel assessment process. Additional details and a form to sign up are [here](#).

= Read submissions from other Athena SWAN applicants. Successful submissions are regularly published online (check an institution's Athena SWAN page for their latest applications), but keep in mind that you don't know which parts a panel thought were good and which needed improvement.

= From 1 January 2016, Higher Education Institutions in England and Northern Ireland need to subscribe directly to ECU to access our services, including applying for a charter mark. Details on the subscription model are [online](#).

For more Athena SWAN resources, visit http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/athena-swan-resources/

Answers to frequently asked questions can be found here
http://www.ecu.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-swan/athena-swan-faqs/

For additional support, subscribing institutions can get in touch with their dedicated ECU account manager. If you do not already have this information from your institution's key contact, you can call us on 020 7438 1010 or email the Athena SWAN team at athenaswan@ecu.ac.uk.