

Athena SWAN Award Submission Feedback – November 2012

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

Name of institution	University of Sussex
Name of department (if applicable)	
Level of award applied for	Bronze
Letter of endorsement	
<p>The panel did not feel this was a particularly strong endorsement. They felt that it gave a good outline of the institution’s achievements but they felt there was a little too much focus on the past with insufficient intent for the future, or focus on STEMM subjects.</p>	
The self-assessment process	
<p>The panel felt the description of the Self Assessment Team was a little thin, and they would have liked to have seen more detail about the members and their actions more specifically described. However the panel were pleased to see that the SAT had quite a diversity of staff from different career levels including a research student, and members who could feed into different committees. The panel also commended the involvement of the Pro Vice Chancellor, which showed commitment to the process at a high level.</p> <p>The panel noted that the self assessment was clearly at its early stages, but answered most of the demands placed upon it by the criteria. They felt that it would be an improvement to have a formal reporting mechanism.</p>	
Description of the university or department	
<p>The panel felt that the pen picture provided could have been more specific and more detailed in its execution; however they were pleased to see the SAT’s recognition of the level of disparity between the subjects. Though the panel welcomed the use of tables to display the data, and commented that the information provided was good, they noted that it was difficult to assimilate easily.</p> <p>The panel noted that the graph presented was hard to understand, and would have liked to have seen more than just description of the content, as comment and analysis here was minimal. The panel also expressed their concerns about the conclusions drawn about the RAE/REF exclusions.</p>	
Supporting and advancing women’s careers	
<p>The panel were pleased to note that the institution had acknowledged the need to increase appointments of women, but also commented that at present turnover is low. The panel commended the commitment to encourage women to apply for research funding and the appointment of an employed consultant to explore and investigate women’s needs within the university.</p> <p>The panel noted that it would be useful to know the numbers of male to female employees eligible for promotion, in order to consider the proportions more thoroughly. They were concerned that there seems to be a focus on giving people skills to survive a difficult culture, rather than changing the culture itself. The panel commented that they would like to see more a more detailed investigation into where the leak in the</p>	

<p>pipeline is, though this is addressed to some extent in the action plan.</p> <p>The panel were pleased to see improvements in the working hours and a good flexible working scheme. They felt there were some indications of good practice, around organisation and culture, however they would have liked to have seen some detail and examples as to what these were. The panel also commented that they would have liked to have been provided with more detail on the maternity and returner's schemes and some information about the outsourcing of the nursery.</p> <p>The panel felt that cross-referencing to action points would have helped them to feel more confident that the acknowledged issues are being addressed. It appeared that a lot of the good practice and statistics are coming from BSMS. However, the panel were encouraged by the SAT's recognition that the data provided isn't wholly useful or accurate and has aims to improve this.</p>	
Any other comments	
N/A	
Case studies (for silver/gold submissions)	
N/A	
Action plan	
<p>The panel felt that generally the actions outlined were vague. Responsibility is allocated but there is little evidence of reporting or accountability. There is also no evidence for the justification of why departments often feel unsupported. The panel commented that the action plan felt relatively front-loaded, and was not very SMART.</p> <p>However, the panel were pleased that the areas to focus on have been identified by the university and by their aims to address these issues. The panel commented that they would like to be provided with some commentary about how the data collected will be used.</p>	
Final comments	Decision
The university appears to have a committed Self Assessment Team, but lacks engagement from the rest of the university staff, and could benefit from more senior level support.	Bronze award.
Noteworthy good practice	
Pregnant staff have a choice of two maternity leave and pay schemes offering up to 18 weeks' leave on full salary.	