

**AdvanceHE**

**+ Terms of  
Reference for UK  
Athena Swan  
Review Panels**

**Equality Charters Team**



# Contents

<b>Contents</b>	<b>2</b>
1. Purpose	4
2. Convening	4
3. Composition	4
4. Panel roles	5
5. Person specifications	7
6. Version Control	9

---



## 1. Purpose

- 1.1. To review Athena Swan award applications, agree outcomes and provide feedback to applicants in line with the criteria and processes of the UK Athena Swan Charter.

## 2. Convening

- 2.1. Athena Swan review panels will be convened dependent on applications received.
- 2.2. Panel members will be required to undertake individual assessment of applications, followed by attendance at a panel meeting. Panel meetings will normally be held virtually.
- 2.3. If, at the panel meeting, the panel identifies conditions the applicant will be required to confirm (within eight weeks of receipt of the panel outcome), for review by Advance HE, how they intend to address the conditions during the award tenure.
- 2.4. If, at the panel meeting, the panel identifies revisions, the applicant will be required to address the revisions and submit (within six months of receipt of the panel outcome) the revised application for assessment by the Lead Reviewer (see para. 4.5.1 below) and the Chair.

## 3. Composition

- 3.1. Panels are normally comprised of a Chair and three to six Reviewers. The number of Reviewers is dependent on the number of applications being considered by the Panel. Panel meetings will be quorate if two Reviewers and the Chair are present.
- 3.2. Panels are supported by an adviser who does not take part in nor influence the panel's decision-making.
- 3.3. Panels reviewing applications from science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine (STEMM) or arts, humanities, social science, business and law (AHSSBL) disciplines include at least one Reviewer with recent experience and/or relevant knowledge relating to STEMM or AHSSBL (as appropriate). Panels reviewing applications from professional, technical and operational (PTO) directorates include at least one Reviewer with recent experience and/or relevant knowledge relating to PTOs. Panels reviewing applications from Research Institutes include at least one Reviewer with recent experience and/or relevant knowledge relating to Research Institutes.
- 3.4. Panels consist of at least one panel member with strong statistical analysis skills (where possible).
- 3.5. Panels are gender-balanced insofar as is possible.

- 3.6. Subject to approval by the Chair, observers may be permitted to attend panels but will not be invited to contribute to the discussion or allowed to influence the outcomes.
- 3.7. Panel members are expected to act with impartiality and to be open, fair and unbiased when making decisions. Panel members are expected to disclose conflicts of interest (e.g., as a result of direct or indirect personal, academic, financial or working relationships) to Advance HE. Advance HE will collect conflicts of interests prior to scheduling panels and will allocate chairs/reviewers/observers/advisers to panels in which there are no declared conflicts. Conflicts of interest include:
- + current employment;
  - + previous employment or study at a department or institution within the last 10 years;
  - + paid consultancy at a department or institution within the last five years;
  - + providing feedback on a draft of the applicant's application;
  - + being a relative of, or having close personal friendships or relationships (including PhD supervision) with, individuals at a department or institution;
  - + any interest (financial or otherwise) from the outcome of a specific application (e.g., paid consultancy work or the prospect of future employment / an unpaid appointment).

Chairs/reviewers/observers/advisers unsure of what constitutes a conflict of interest are expected to contact the Equality Charters Team to discuss any potential conflicts prior to commencing any work associated with the panel.

- 3.8. If a potential conflict of interest becomes apparent subsequent to confirmation of panel membership, the Head of Athena Swan or the Assistant Director - Equality Charters (or their delegated nominee) will determine the materiality of the conflict. In cases where the conflict is deemed to be material, the conflicted member will either be removed from the panel or their membership will continue and impartiality of decision-making will be ensured through the implementation of mitigating actions.

## 4. Panel roles

- 4.1. Panel members will be required to take part in a minimum of three Athena Swan review panels per year.
- 4.2. Panel members will be appointed by the Athena Swan Governance Committee for a three-year term. Appointments may be renewed once for a further term of up to three years.
- 4.3. All panel members (and observers) will be subject to data protection agreements (and are therefore required to respect the confidentiality of applications and panel discussions) either through, signing a non-disclosure agreement or, for those who take up the honorarium payment (see 4.6 and 4.9 below), agreement with a

confidentiality clause which forms part of the terms and conditions.

- 4.4. All panel members will be required to attend formal training upon appointment, and to attend yearly standardisation training to enable consistency of approach and decision-making.
- 4.5. The Panel Chair is responsible for:
  - 4.5.1. Working with the adviser to agree the agenda for the panel meeting and to nominate a Lead Reviewer to lead the discussion of each application<sup>1</sup>. The Chair will also decide the order in which the other Reviewers will be invited to speak<sup>2</sup>.
  - 4.5.2. Reviewing the independent assessments of the Reviewers prior to the panel meeting to identify any outliers.
  - 4.5.3. Chairing the panel meeting, working with the adviser to ensure effective management of the meeting and review discussions in order to facilitate collective decision-making.
  - 4.5.4. Orchestrating the discussion of each application at the meeting, inviting the Reviewers to make their comments and ensuring that all Reviewers have the opportunity to express their views openly before a decision is made.
  - 4.5.5. Ensuring that outcomes are consistent with the Athena Swan award criteria.
  - 4.5.6. Ensuring that outcomes and key points of feedback are agreed and recorded for each application, identifying any conditions or revisions (for re-submission).
  - 4.5.7. Working with the adviser to record and communicate panel outcomes within 10 working days, ensuring that feedback is clear, appropriately framed and aligned with criteria.
  - 4.5.8. Escalating to Advance HE any concerns or issues with consistency, Reviewer behaviour or panel processes.
- 4.6. An honorarium payment of £200 per panel is available to Panel Chairs.
- 4.7. Panel Chairs will be required to attend a yearly meeting to share good practice, receive updates on procedures and processes, and identify any emerging issues for consideration by the Athena Swan Governance Committee (ASGC).

---

<sup>1</sup> During the meeting, the Lead Reviewer (i) presents a holistic overview, based on all three independent Reviewer assessments, of the key strengths and weaknesses of the application and; (ii) provides an overview of the points, between Reviewers, of agreement and disagreement. In cases where the panel agrees that revisions are required, the Lead Reviewer is the Reviewer who works alongside the Chair to assess the revised application (see para. 2.4).

<sup>2</sup> Those allocated to speak second (and third) are expected to draw the panel's attention only to issues that have not been highlighted by the Lead (and second) Reviewer.

---

- 4.8. Reviewers are responsible for:
- 4.8.1. Reviewing all applications which have been assigned to the panel in line with the criteria and processes of the Athena Swan Charter.
  - 4.8.2. Returning individual feedback on each application to Advance HE in advance of the panel meeting.
  - 4.8.3. Leading the discussion on the applications, as directed by the Panel Chair, with the goal of reaching collective decisions.
  - 4.8.4. Advising the Panel Chair and adviser on appropriate feedback to applicants, including conditions or revisions (for resubmission).
  - 4.8.5. Escalating to the Panel Chair any concerns or issues with consistency, Reviewer behaviour or panel processes.
- 4.9. An honorarium payment of £150 per panel is available to Reviewers.

## 5. Person specifications

- 5.1. Panel Chairs will be able to demonstrate:
- + Experience of chairing decision-making panels or committees within the institution or externally (e.g., funding bodies, professional bodies, school governing bodies, third sector etc.).
  - + Understanding of gender equality in the context of the higher education and research sector.
  - + Understanding of the context and structures of higher education institutions and/or research institutes, including (but not limited to) how it relates to culture, policy-making and implementation, and career development and progression structures for academic and/or PTO staff.
  - + Experience of EDI work in a department, school/faculty or professional directorate, or at institutional level.
  - + Experience of the Athena Swan cycle is desirable.
  - + Strong analytical skills and the ability to lead considered, evidence-based debate.
  - + Strong verbal and written communication skills.
  - + Strong interpersonal skills and the highest level of professional integrity.
-

### 5.2. Reviewers will be able to demonstrate:

- + Understanding of gender equality in the context of the higher education and research sector.
- + Understanding of the context and structures of higher education institutions and/or research institutes, including (but not limited to) how it relates to culture, policy-making and implementation, and career development and progression structures for academic and/or PTO staff.
- + Experience of EDI work in a department, school/faculty or professional directorate, or at institutional level.
- + Experience of contributing to a successful Athena Swan institutional or departmental application.
- + Experience of participating in decision-making panels or committees.
- + Strong analytical skills and ability to engage in considered, evidence-based debate.
- + Statistical analysis skills and experience are desirable
- + Strong verbal and written communication skills.
- + Highest level of professional integrity.

## 6. Version Control

Version	Author	Date approved	Amendments
1.0	Equality Charters	January 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Terms of Reference for UK Athena Swan Review Panels is a new document which was developed:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to implement the recommendations (specifically recommendations 33-34, 36, 38) of the Independent Review of the Athena SWAN Charter (Steering Group report published in March 2020);</li> <li>in partnership with the Athena Swan Transition Group and the Athena Swan Governance Committee.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
1.1	Equality Charters	October 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revisions to reflect changes to award outcomes (including the introduction of 'award with conditions') and concomitant changes to panel processes (paragraphs 2.3-2.4).</li> <li>Revisions to panel composition and quoracy to reflect changes to panel duration.</li> <li>Additions to explain how conflicts of interests are managed (paragraphs 3.7-3.8).</li> </ul>
1.2	Equality Charters	June 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revision to reflect a change to the minimum number of panels (from four to three) Chairs and Reviewers are expected to participate in.</li> </ul>
1.3	Equality Charters	December 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amendment to permit panel appointments to be renewed for a further term.</li> <li>Revisions to align the criteria for what constitutes a conflict of interest with Advance HE's Peer Review Services Conflicts of Interest Policy.</li> </ul>

# Contact us

## All enquiries

Email: [communications@advance-he.ac.uk](mailto:communications@advance-he.ac.uk)

**Advance HE helps HE institutions be the best they can be, by unlocking the potential of their people.**

We are a member-led, sector-owned charity that works with institutions and higher education across the world to improve higher education for staff, students and society. We are experts in higher education with a particular focus on enhancing teaching and learning, effective governance, leadership development and tackling inequalities through our equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) work.

Our strategic goals to enhance confidence and trust in HE, address inequalities, promote inclusion and advance education to meet the evolving needs of students and society, support the work of our members and the HE sector.

We deliver our support through professional development programmes and events, Fellowships, awards, student surveys and research, providing strategic change and consultancy services and through membership (including accreditation of teaching and learning, equality charters, knowledge and resources).

Advance HE is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales no. 04931031. Company limited by guarantee registered in Ireland no. 703150. Registered as a charity in England and Wales no. 1101607. Registered as a charity in Scotland no. SC043946. Registered Office: Advance HE, Innovation Way, York Science Park, Heslington, York, YO10 5BR, United Kingdom.

---

© 2024 Advance HE. All rights reserved.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not necessarily those of Advance HE. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any storage and retrieval system without the written permission of the copyright owner. Such permission will normally be granted for non-commercial, educational purposes provided that due acknowledgement is given. The Advance HE logo should not be used without our permission.

To request copies of this report in large print or in a different format, please contact the Marketing and Communications Team at Advance HE: [communications@advance-he.ac.uk](mailto:communications@advance-he.ac.uk)

**advance-he.ac.uk**

**in X f** @AdvanceHE