

“AdvanceHE

+ Guide to Processes

Athena Swan Ireland



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1 About this guide

This guide outlines the processes supporting the Athena Swan Ireland charter framework. It replaces:

- + The previous Guide to Processes published in May 2021.
- + The Departmental Restructures and Award-holding Units guidance published January 2021.

The processes outlined herein are subject to further change in the future.

2 Membership and eligibility

2.1 Eligibility to participate in Athena Swan Ireland

A list of institutions eligible to participate in Athena Swan Ireland through Advance HE's agreement with the Higher Education Authority is available in the [Athena Swan Ireland Programme of Support 2024-2029](#) document, on page 8. Other institutions, including higher education institutions and research institutes, that would like to take part may do so through membership options provided by Advance HE. Please [contact us](#) if you would like more details on either pathway.

Access to an Athena Swan Ireland academic department award through a reciprocal agreement (including, but not limited to, converting an award from the Institute of Physics Inclusion Award) is only available to those who access Athena Swan Ireland through the arrangement with the Higher Education Authority.

All institutions eligible to participate in Athena Swan Ireland can access a range of supports, outlined [here](#).

2.2 Termination of services or Advance HE membership

Athena Swan Ireland awards operate within a progressive framework. Applicants develop an action plan to cover the duration of their award and are expected to evaluate progress against this plan in order to renew or upgrade their award. Participants also commit to upholding the Athena Swan Ireland principles, which are published on the Advance HE website.

If an institution does not participate in Athena Swan Ireland through the Higher Education Authority arrangement, and either terminates its Advance HE membership or opts not to include Athena Swan in its membership package, it will be considered to have ended its commitment to reporting progress on its action plan and to upholding the Charter principles. As a result, once membership ends (typically at the close of the financial year), all awards held by the institution will cease to be current (regardless of their original expiration dates).

In addition, the following will apply once membership has ended:

- + The institution and its staff will no longer have access to associated member benefits.
- + The institution will no longer be permitted to use the award logos.
- + The institution's Charter-related work will no longer be promoted by Advance HE.
- + The institution will no longer be eligible to apply for new awards.

3 Applying for an award

3.1 Eligibility to apply for an award

Higher Education Institutions or Research Institutes wishing to apply for an Athena Swan Ireland award must:

- + Sign up to the Athena Swan Ireland principles.
- + Ensure all membership fees are up to date, if not participating through the Higher Education Authority arrangement.
- + Notify Advance HE of their intention to apply, following the process outlined on the Advance HE website.

Sub-units wishing to apply for an Athena Swan award must:

- + Sign up to the Athena Swan Ireland principles.
- + Belong to an institution that has signed up to the Charter principles, holds a valid Athena Swan Ireland award, and has no outstanding membership fees if not participating through the Higher Education Authority arrangement.
- + Notify Advance HE of their intention to apply, following the process outlined on the Advance HE website.

Sub-units may choose to apply for an award in the same submission round as their parent institution's first institutional award application. However, applicants should note that if the institution is unsuccessful, the sub-unit will also be ineligible for an award.

If a parent institution loses its award (i.e., is unsuccessful in renewing it), any sub-unit awards will remain valid until their expiration date. However, no renewals or new awards will be granted until the institution successfully applies for an award.

No single sub-unit can be covered by more than one award. A sub-unit award will be invalidated if it is subsequently included in a successful submission for another sub-unit. For example:

- + A departmental award will be invalidated if the department is later included in a successful faculty submission.
- + A faculty award will be invalidated if a department included in the faculty submission successfully applies individually.

3.2 Submitting your application

Applicants must submit their application by the relevant deadline and in accordance with the information received following acknowledgement of their Intention to Submit.

Extensions to the application deadline may be granted only in exceptional circumstances, typically for up to one week. The decision to grant an extension is at the discretion of Advance HE.

Advance HE will acknowledge receipt of each application. If acknowledgment is not received within five working days, applicants should contact the Athena Swan Ireland team by [email](#).

3.3 Award validity

Awards conferred under the most recent iteration of the Charter framework¹ are valid for five years (provided access through the Higher Education Authority or Advance HE membership is maintained throughout this period). After five years, a further application is required.

3.4 Extensions to award validity

If an applicant wishes to delay their submission and extend the validity of their current award, a written request must be submitted to Advance HE.

- + The request must come from the head of department of the submitting unit, or the institution's president (or equivalent).
- + Requests must be based on exceptional, extenuating circumstances.
- + Requests must be submitted at least two calendar months in advance of the relevant submission deadline.

The Head of Athena Swan Ireland, or another appropriate member of the Athena Swan Ireland team, will review the request.

If an extension is granted, the applicant's eligibility for a grace period in the event of a subsequent unsuccessful submission will remain unaffected.

¹ This refers to the 2021 charter framework. Awards conferred prior to use of this framework are valid for four years.

4 Peer review process

4.1 Our approach to peer review

Advance HE equality charter applications are reviewed by peer review panels. These panels recommend award decisions to Advance HE.

The charter framework supports higher education institutions and research institutes in addressing systemic inequalities for staff and students. This guides our approach to peer review, which is intended to be developmental in order to best support the sector's progress.

4.2 Panel composition

Advance HE will convene an awards panel to review applications. The quorum for a panel is that the views of three panellists are considered. Panellists will usually be asked to review up to two applications.

Panellists are selected from a pool of individuals who have either applied to Advance HE to become a panellist or who have been invited by Advance HE when their involvement would help achieve a more appropriate balance. In constructing panels, Advance HE seeks appropriate representation, paying particular attention to gender balance and a mix of experienced and new panellists. Panellists are drawn from the following groups:

- + Academic, research and technical services staff
- + Human resources or equality and diversity practitioners with higher education experience
- + Other professional services staff with higher education experience
- + Sector specialists (e.g. higher education representatives, members or employees of learned and professional societies, equality specialists)
- + Students

Each panel is chaired by an individual appointed by Advance HE, who has prior experience serving on panels. The chair is a voting panellist. Panel meetings are held remotely.

All Panellists (including the Chair) are required to have watched the panel training video provided within the two years immediately preceding the panel meeting.

At least two Panellists will have previously served on an Athena Swan panel.

Advance HE staff moderate review panels in a non-voting capacity.

Panel observers may be present during meetings. Observers do not participate in decision-making and do not vote.

4.2.1 Conflicts of interest

Panellists are expected to act with integrity, impartiality, and fairness. Any conflicts of interest must be disclosed to Advance HE.

A conflict of interest is any situation in which personal interests or loyalties to another person or organization may (or may appear to) unduly influence a decision. In the context of reviewing award submissions, conflicts may arise from personal, academic, financial, or working relationships.

All Panellists must submit a conflict of interest form when joining Advance HE's panellist pool and/or before taking part in a panel. Panellists must also review potential conflicts for each application they are assigned. If there is any doubt, Panellists should contact Advance HE before proceeding. Conflicts that arise during the review process must be reported immediately.

Observers must also confirm any conflicts of interest in advance of a panel.

If a conflict of interest arises, the Head of Athena Swan Ireland (or another designated team member) will determine whether the conflict is material. If it is, the Panellist will not participate in the relevant review. If the conflict is not material, the Head (or delegate) will decide how to manage it.

Panellists are automatically excluded from reviewing applications from institutions where they are currently employed or studying. Other potential conflicts include:

- + Employment or study at the institution or department in the past 10 years
- + Paid consultancy with the institution or department in the past five years
- + Close personal friendships and relationships, with individuals at an institution or department, including PhD supervision
- + Assistance with the application of a department or institution (e.g. as a critical friend)
- + Involvement in the work that the department or institution proposes to carry out (e.g. as part of an action plan or as a member of a committee connected with a work programme)
- + Research collaborations with individuals at a department or institution in the past five years

Note: This is not an exhaustive list.

The Advance HE Moderators and note takers will also declare conflict of interests. If one is declared, the Head of Athena Swan Ireland or another relevant member of the Athena Swan Ireland team will decide if this prevents them from participating in certain panels. Advance HE will hold declarations securely.

Should an individual inform Advance HE that they no longer wish to be considered as a Panellist, their conflict of interest information will be destroyed one year after notification of withdrawal.

4.3 Panel process

Panellists and Observers will receive a copy of the application to review.

Panellists are required to:

- + Sign a non-disclosure and confidentiality agreement
- + Review the application in line with the guidance set out for applicants in the relevant information pack
- + Review the application and complete Panellist feedback forms independently
- + Return the independently produced feedback forms to Advance HE
- + Collectively review the application at the panel meeting, where one is scheduled
- + Base evaluations solely on the content of the application (or any additional information deemed relevant by Advance HE)

The Chair of a panel meeting is appointed by Advance HE. In addition to their role as a panellist, the Chair is required to:

- + Structure the discussion and guide the panel to a decision
- + Ensure prejudicial or irrelevant comments, such as personal opinions unrelated to the application, are disregarded (and removing panellists if necessary)
- + Summarise the panel's discussion
- + Keep discussions on schedule
- + Where revisions have been requested, the Chair has additional duties

The Chair and Panellists must not discuss panel matters or applications outside the panel, unless facilitated by Advance HE.

Advance HE will appoint a trained staff member to act as Moderator. Their responsibilities include:

- + Providing guidance on the application and review process
 - + Ensuring compliance with this document's requirements
 - + Ensuring consistency in reviews and decisions. If required, the Moderator may provide a view on whether the application meets the requirements of the award level applied for
 - + Ensure prejudicial or irrelevant comments, such as personal opinions unrelated to the application, are disregarded (and removing panellists if necessary)
-

- + Supporting panels with relevant additional information, if requested
- + Ensuring feedback to applicants is relevant and coherent, using the notes from a panel meeting, the application, review forms from the Panellists and their own notes

The Moderator does not vote on award recommendations. Advance HE will determine the order the submissions will be reviewed in consultation with the Chair.

4.4 Panel recommendation

Panels must base their decisions solely on the materials provided, against the criteria in the relevant information pack.

When completing their independent assessments, Panellists give applicants a score of 1 to 4 for each criterion, using the rubric provided below. The rubric is also provided on the feedback forms. Final scores for each criterion are agreed at the panel meeting. The scores agreed by the panel determine the award outcome (as described below) using the mode.

Panels aim for unanimous decisions but may proceed by majority vote. If no majority exists (in the case of an even number of panellists), the Chair holds an additional deciding vote.

Panellists may not abstain from voting.

4.4.1 Scoring rubric

Score	Available actions
1 – Not satisfied. The application does not satisfy the award criterion.	No award. Areas requiring improvement are captured via the panel's written feedback. The applicant will be supported to reapply in a future award round.
2 – Partially satisfied. The application partially satisfies the criterion but there are weaknesses and therefore areas requiring improvement .	Revisions requested. Areas requiring improvement are captured in the panel's feedback via a revisions request. Applicants may use the revisions request process to resubmit the revised application within 12 weeks, for approval by the Chair's action.
3 – Satisfied. The criterion is addressed satisfactorily. Some shortcomings or areas requiring development may be identified.	Award conferred. Areas for development are captured in the panel's feedback to help the applicant strengthen their future work.
4 – Fully satisfied.	Award conferred.

The application fully addresses the criterion. Any shortcomings are minor.	Where appropriate, the panel's feedback includes advice on translating good practice or working towards higher-level awards.
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4.4.2 Award outcomes

Panels may recommend to:

- + Confer or renew the award at the level sought
- + Confer or renew the award at a lower level
- + Request revisions
- + Not confer an award

For an award to be recommended immediately, the application must receive a score of at least 3 for each award criterion.

Where an immediate recommendation is not possible, a panel may recommend revisions if the application receives a score of 2 in any criterion. In such cases, the panel will identify the revisions required to satisfactorily address the criteria. Applicants must address the identified areas for improvement and resubmit the application within twelve weeks for assessment by the Chair.

If applicants have met the criteria for a lower-level award, they may choose to accept the lower-level award and not undertake revisions.

If an application receives a score of 1 in any criterion, no award will be conferred. Applicants will receive written feedback and be offered a feedback meeting to support them in reapplying for a future awards round.

4.5 Consistency of decision making

In exceptional circumstances, the Moderator may refer an application to the Head of Athena Swan Ireland or another relevant member of the Athena Swan Ireland team if the Moderator believes that the panel's decision:

- + Does not correspond with the criteria set out in the relevant information pack and guidance
- + Is not consistent with other decisions made by panels in the current assessment round
- + Is not based solely on the material presented to the panel

The Head of Athena Swan Ireland or another relevant member of the Athena Swan Ireland team will review the application and assessment and determine whether to refer the

application to a new panel for consideration. This decision will be taken within ten working days of the original panel decision.

If an application is referred to a new awards panel, the original Panellists will be informed in writing of this decision and provided with reasons for the review.

The applicant will not be informed that their application is being reviewed by a second panel, unless the additional review will result in them receiving a decision on their application later than other award applicants in that round.

4.6 Notification of award decision

Advance HE will communicate award decisions to applicants in writing. This communication will include information on the award validity period. Where an award-holding applicant does not achieve an award that is at least equal to the one already held, they may be offered a period of grace.

Advance HE will endeavour to make and communicate award decisions within a maximum of twelve weeks from the closing date for a given award round. However, this period may be shorter or longer depending on the number of applications received and the number of panels convened.

4.6.1 Providing feedback

Advance HE will provide feedback to each applicant based on the panel's discussion. This will include the rationale behind the decision. Advance HE will aim to provide this feedback to applicants at the time award outcomes are communicated.

4.7 Panel records

Advance HE will retain copies of the application in accordance with the Data Sharing Agreements that participating institutions are requested to sign, which are counter-signed by Advance HE.

Upon fulfilling their duties and in accordance with Advance HE's non-disclosure and confidentiality agreement, Panellists must delete or destroy (as appropriate) all copies of submissions, feedback and any additional information, and will not retain any copies or records.

5 Appeal process

An applicant has 10 working days from the date the written feedback on their application was communicated to appeal a decision. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that their email is monitored. An appeal must be sent in writing to the Head of Athena Swan Ireland. It must clearly detail the grounds upon which the appeal is made. A limit of 1000 words applies to all appeals against award decisions, and the relevant template must be used.

5.1.1 Grounds for appeal

The only accepted grounds of appeal are:

- + **Procedural unfairness:** That is, a substantial failure to comply with the requirements of this procedure, which results in the process being unfair
- + **Manifestly unreasonable decision:** That is, a decision which takes into account irrelevant factors or fails to consider relevant ones. For example, if the panel rejects an application on the basis that particular data are omitted when they are, in fact, included

An appeal will not be considered on any grounds other than those listed above.

Disagreement with the panel's judgment is not a valid ground for appeal.

An appeal will be reviewed by the Head of Athena Swan Ireland or another relevant member of the Athena Swan Ireland team. They will determine whether the appeal has been submitted within the stipulated time limit and meets the permitted grounds. Advance HE will notify the applicant in writing within 10 working days of the appeal deadline whether the appeal has been accepted for review by an appeals review panel. If this decision is expected to be delayed (e.g., due to staff illness or external factors), Advance HE will notify the applicant in writing with an updated timeframe.

5.1.2 Appeals review panel

Any successful appeal will result in the original application being submitted for review by a differently constituted panel. The panel will be convened and run following the processes set out in section 4, "Peer review process" (outlined above), with the following modifications:

- + The panel may be convened outside the normal round
- + The panel will be informed that the application was previously considered and that the decision has been appealed, but will not be given the previous result or the reasons for the appeal

The decision of the panel will be communicated to the applicant. If an award is granted by the panel, the validity period of this award will be as if the original panel had conferred it. If the review panel reaches a decision different from that of the original awards panel, Advance HE will communicate this in writing to the original panel members. This will include the reasons for the decision.

6 Objection process

Advance HE reserves the right not to assess an application if, following the submission deadline, any of the following occurs:

- + Information comes to light indicating that the application contains false or misleading information or statements that are material to the applicant's case for the award. This may include the deliberate omission of information
- + Information subsequently emerges, after the receipt of an application, establishing that the applicant no longer satisfies the award requirements or has failed to adhere to or uphold the charter principles

In such circumstances, the information must be independently verifiable and/or received from a credible source (e.g., verified communications from the institution, a professional association, nationally verified data such as that from the Higher Education Authority, or a finding by a competent authority like a court or tribunal). Advance HE will not consider information from anonymous sources or information that requires further investigation. If requested, Advance HE will not name the source when communicating with the applicant, but anonymity cannot be guaranteed, as identities may be inferred depending on the objection.

All objections to the assessment of award applications must be received within 10 working days of the submission deadline for the round in which the application is made. A limit of 1000 words applies to objections and the relevant template must be used.

Where any of the above circumstances are brought to Advance HE's attention, the Head of Athena Swan Ireland or another relevant member of the Athena Swan Ireland team will review the impact of the information on the applicant's eligibility for an award. If Advance HE considers that the information is relevant and likely to impact on a panel's award recommendation, Advance HE will send a formal written notice to the applicant that will:

- + Provide notice that Advance HE has received information it deems important for the fair assessment of an application and that it may not be submitted to a panel for review
- + Provide all supporting information that has been considered by Advance HE
- + State that the applicant may make written representations on the information

The applicant will be given a period of 10 working days from the date of the notice to submit representations on the proposed information, in writing to Advance HE. Representations must adhere to a 1000-word limit and clearly outline the grounds on which the applicant objects to the proposed decision not to assess the application. If representations are received within the 10 working days, the Head of Athena Swan Ireland or another relevant member of the Athena Swan Ireland team will consider them. A final decision will be made within 10 working days of receiving the applicant's representations.

If the decision is to proceed with assessing the application, Advance HE will decide whether to:

- + Submit only the original application to the award panel, or
- + Share the supporting information and representations received along with the application

Advance HE will notify the applicant of its decision in writing, providing the reasons for that decision. Advance HE's decision is final.

7 Withdrawal of an award

Advance HE reserves the right to withdraw an award under the following circumstances:

- + If information comes to light that the application contained false or misleading information or statements that were material to the applicant's case for the award (this may include deliberate omission of information)
- + If, subsequent to an award being made, information emerges establishing that the applicant no longer satisfies the award requirements or has failed to adhere to or uphold the charter principles
- + If, subsequent to an award being made, an institutional restructure results in the award-holding entity no longer existing

In such cases, the information must be independently verifiable and/or received from a credible source (e.g., verified communications from the institution, a professional association, nationally verified data like that from the Higher Education Authority, or a finding by a competent authority such as a court or tribunal). Advance HE will not consider information from anonymous sources or information that requires further investigation. If requested, Advance HE will not disclose the source when communicating with the applicant, though anonymity cannot be guaranteed as identities may be inferred depending on the objection. A limit of 1000 words applies to all requests for the withdrawal of awards, and the relevant template must be used.

When such circumstances are raised with the Head of Athena Swan Ireland or another relevant team member, Advance HE staff will review the impact of the information on the applicant's eligibility for the award. If Advance HE determines that the information does not affect the award holder's eligibility, no further action will be taken.

If Advance HE considers that the information is likely to affect the award holder's eligibility, it will send a formal written communication to the award holder that will:

- + Provide notice that Advance HE has received information it considers could render the award holder ineligible for the award, and that the award may be withdrawn
- + Provide all the supporting information that has been considered
- + Summarise the grounds for the proposed withdrawal
- + Invite the award holder to make written representations on the proposed withdrawal.

The award holder will have 10 working days from the date of the invitation to submit, in writing, representations on the proposed withdrawal. Any representations must adhere to a 1000-word limit and clearly outline the grounds for objecting to the proposed withdrawal. If no representations are received within the 10 working days, Advance HE will issue a formal written decision to withdraw the award. If representations are received within the 10 working days, Advance HE will assess whether they sufficiently explain the circumstances to

determine that the information does not impact the award holder's eligibility for the award (e.g. misleading detail is clearly resolved).

Advance HE will issue a written decision to the award holder providing the reasons for maintaining the award.

7.1 Withdrawal appeal panel

If representations are received within the 10-day period but are not deemed sufficiently explanatory, Advance HE will convene a withdrawal appeal panel. Advance HE will decide what to submit to the panel based on the nature of the information prompting the proposed withdrawal. This may include submission of either:

- + The original application, along with supporting information and the representations received by Advance HE, and the grounds for the proposed withdrawal of the award
or
- + The supporting information and the representations received by Advance HE, and the grounds for the proposed withdrawal of the award. In this case, due consideration will be given to whether the information may be anonymised

The panel will be convened and run as per the processes set out in section 4, "Peer review process" (outlined above), with the following exceptions:

- + The panel may be convened outside the normal round
- + The panel will be informed that the application was previously successful but that Advance HE has received information that could render the award holder ineligible for the award, and that it may be withdrawn.
- + The panel may decide to maintain, lower or withdraw the award, or attach specific conditions to an award that is maintained or lowered.
- + If specific conditions are attached, the award holder will be informed of how to report on these to Advance HE.
- + The decision of the panel will be communicated to the applicant within 10 working days of the panel meeting.

Advance HE will issue a written decision to the award holder, providing the reasons for maintaining, lowering or withdrawing the award. Advance HE's decision is final.

8 Restructures and changes to award holders

8.1 Background

Advance HE recognises that changes to the structure of an institution's colleges, faculties, schools, departments or professional units is a normal part of the higher education landscape. Such restructures may result in the formation of new units or in the merging of existing ones, and changes like these can impact Athena Swan applications that are underway as well as the action plans of award holders.

The Departmental Restructure Award Validity Process (hereafter referred to as the Award Validity Process) is designed to put in place a procedure that recognises the work undertaken by award-holding units while maintaining the rigor of the Athena Swan assessment process.

The Award Validity Process encourages restructured units to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion is embedded in the new structure and that actions are continued or appropriately modified to facilitate progress with gender equality work and to build capacity across additional equality areas in the new department.

As the scale and timeline of restructures vary, award holders and Athena Swan applicants impacted by restructuring must consult with Advance HE to determine eligibility to use the Award Validity Process.

8.2 Terminology

Department: Advance HE uses the term 'department' to refer to a range of units that sit below institution-level awards (e.g. faculty, college, school, department, etc.). In this section, 'department' refers to the newly restructured entity seeking to use the Award Validity Process.

Unit: 'Unit' is used in this section to refer to a previous entity which may have held an Athena Swan award and now forms part or all of the new department.

8.3 Purpose

The Award Validity Process is designed to:

- + provide a mechanism for newly established departments to achieve recognition for the gender equality work undertaken by award-holding units
- + provide information that will allow an institution and its departments to determine whether to progress with an Athena Swan department-level application if a restructure is planned

8.4 Overview of the Award Validity Process

8.4.1 Application tracks

The Award Validity Process has two application tracks:

Award Transfer

Award transfer describes the conferral of an award to the newly formed department. The department is classified by Advance HE as a department award holder and may therefore use the Bronze/Silver award logo.

Legacy Award

A legacy award describes an award held by a unit or institution that no longer formally exists as a result of restructure or merger.

A legacy award logo is used to publicly recognise the gender equality work of individual units and the future commitment of the department to the Athena swan charter framework.

Departments that are given permission to use legacy award logos are not Athena Swan award holders, but their legacy award status is noted in lists of charter participants in Ireland.

8.5 Determining eligibility

The Head of Athena Swan Ireland will first determine if a department is eligible to use the Award Validity Process based on a discussion with the Head of Department (or equivalent) and Self-Assessment Team Chair. This meeting will also be used to determine whether a department should apply to Track 1 (Award Transfer) or to Track 2 (Legacy Award) of the process.

After meeting with the department Advance HE will advise the department in writing of the following:

- + Eligibility to use the Award Validity Process
- + The Validity Process track (i.e. Award Transfer or Legacy Award).

Please note: Award Transfer will not be considered by Advance HE where the scale of the restructuring is such that policies, practices and structures previously evaluated by the Athena Swan peer-review process are unrecognisable in the restructured department.

8.6 Guiding principles of eligibility

Eligibility will be determined by Advance HE on a case-by-case basis after a meeting with the department. However, to enable institutions and departments to weigh the impact of restructures on award holders, some broad guiding principles are set out via a series of hypothetical scenarios.

Scenario 1: A department is formed from the merger of three constituent units, all of which held valid Bronze awards. The department is eligible to use the Award Validity Process and to apply for Award Transfer. If the process requirements are met, the department will hold a Bronze award.

Scenario 2: Two departments are formed from the splitting of one previous unit which held a Silver award. Both departments are eligible to use the Award Validity Process and to apply for Award Transfer. If the process requirements are met, both departments will hold Silver awards.

Scenario 3: A department is formed from the merger of two constituent units, one of which held a Silver Athena Swan award and one of which held a Bronze Athena Swan award. The department is eligible to use the Award Validity Process and to apply for Award Transfer. If the process requirements are met, the department will hold a Bronze award.²

Scenario 4: A department is formed from the merger of three constituent units, two of which held Bronze awards. The third unit did not hold an Athena Swan award and is smaller than the award-holding units. The department is eligible to use the Award Validity Process and to apply for Award Transfer. If the process requirements are met, the department will hold a Bronze award.

Scenario 5: A department is formed from the merger of two constituent units, one of which held a Bronze Athena Swan award. The second unit does not hold an Athena Swan award. The new department is eligible to use the Award Validity Process. After a meeting with the department, Advance HE will determine whether the department is eligible for Award Transfer or a Legacy Award logo. In making this determination, Advance HE will consider the size of the constituent units and current or recent work towards an Athena Swan application.

² In exceptional circumstances, for example where a large Silver award holding unit merges with a smaller Bronze-award holding unit, Advance HE will consider transferring an award at Silver level.

Scenario 6: A department is formed from the merger of three or more constituent units, only one of which held a Bronze Athena Swan award. The new department is eligible to use the Award Validity Process to receive permission to use a legacy logo.³

Scenario 7: A department is formed from the merger of three constituent units, two of which held Bronze Athena Swan awards. The third unit, which is significantly larger than the award-holding units does not hold an award. The new department is eligible to use the Award Validity Process to receive permission to use a legacy logo.

As noted, these scenarios are only intended as a guide. Eligibility will be determined by Advance HE after a meeting with the department.

8.7 Timeline for applying

Award-holding units that are restructured must formally notify Advance HE within 12 weeks of the restructure. An application by a department to the Award Validity Process must be made within 24 weeks of a department's formation.

Where Advance HE confers an award on a department, or grants permission for the department to use a Legacy Award logo, the transferred award/legacy logo will be valid for five years, commencing from the assessment round in which the department received its results letter.

After this period lapses, the department must apply for an award using the standard application process. For example, a department that received its results letter in the April 2022 assessment round must apply no later than the April 2027 assessment round, while a department that received its results letter in the November 2022 assessment round must apply no later than the November 2027 assessment round.

The department may continue to use the award/legacy award logo until the release of award results in the round applied.

8.8 Outcome

Information submitted to Advance HE as part of the Award Validity Process will be reviewed by two Advance HE staff members, one of whom will be the Head of Athena Swan Ireland or equivalent.

For both application tracks, Advance HE will consider if the department has ensured:

- + That changes to the structure of the original award-holding unit(s) do not adversely impact equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives in the department
- + That action has been taken to ensure gender equality is embedded in the new structure

³ Where the award holding unit is significantly larger than the other units combined, it may be possible to apply for an Award Transfer. This will be determined in the meeting with Advance HE.

- + The continuation and appropriate modification of actions

Departments will receive the outcome within 6-8 weeks of submitting the required documents to Advance HE.

Outcomes are tied to application track:

Track 1: Award Transfer - Applicants that fulfil the requirements will be formally notified of the transfer of the award to the new department and will be permitted to use the Athena Swan award logo.

Track 2: Legacy Award - Applicants that fulfil the requirements will be granted legacy award status and will be granted permission to use the Legacy Award logo. In exceptional circumstances, Advance HE may contact the department for additional information in order to make a determination.

8.9 Requirements of the Award Validity Process

8.9.1 Track One: Award Transfer

In order to apply for Award Transfer to the department, the following documents should be submitted⁴:

1. A letter of endorsement (650 words max) from the new Head of Department (or equivalent)

This letter should demonstrate the support, commitment and investment of the Head of the Department and the department as a whole. The letter should also comment on the following:

- + Consideration given to gender equality impacts during the restructure
- + Department priorities and/or key challenges or opportunities in the new unit, as determined by self-assessment and/or subsequent initiatives of the new department
- + Resourcing (financial; human) and recognition of equality, diversity and inclusion work within the department.

2. Description of the Self-Assessment team (SAT) (300 words max)

This paragraph should indicate how the department's self-assessment team was constructed (e.g. open call; SAT members from pre-existing units) and identify the Chair. It should also comment on meeting frequency and on how work will be shared, such as monitoring progress of the action plan.

3. An updated or merged SMART action plan

⁴ Advance HE may require additional information from a unit that includes awards held under the original charter framework.

An updated action plan for the restructured department should be provided. The action plan should present prioritised actions to address the issues identified by previous self-assessment process(es) and any issues identified during restructuring. Actions, and their measures of success, should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART). Actions from the action plans of pre-existing units may be modified as appropriate.

8.9.2 Track Two: Legacy Award

In order to apply for a Legacy Award, the following documents should be submitted⁵:

1. A letter of endorsement (650 words max) from the new Head of Department (or equivalent)

This letter should demonstrate the support, commitment and investment of the Head of the Department and the department as a whole. The letter should also comment on the following:

- + Consideration given to gender equality impacts during the restructure
- + Department priorities and/or key challenges or opportunities in the new unit, as determined by self-assessment and/or subsequent initiatives of the new department
- + Resourcing (financial; human) and recognition of equality, diversity and inclusion work within the department.

2. A written overview of the status of gender equality initiatives in the department (1000 words max)

The overview should include comments on:

- + Plans to support the implementation of the action plan(s) of the award-holding units, with comment on the extent to which such action plans may be applied across the department
- + The execution of specific actions and initiatives in the legacy action plan(s) in the new department context
- + Information on the status of the legacy Self-Assessment Team(s) (SAT), and preliminary plans for the recruitment of an SAT that will reflect the department.

8.10 Submission of documents

Documents relating to the Award Validity Process should be sent in one email to the [Athena Swan Ireland Team](#).

8.11 Further information

⁵ Advance HE may require additional information from a unit that includes awards held under the original charter framework.

Departments that choose not to avail of the Award Validity Process may not use the Athena Swan award logos in any branding or merchandising.

A department may publish the Athena Swan applications of units on the new department website as deemed appropriate and without prior permission from Advance HE.

9 Reciprocal agreement between Advance HE and the Institute of Physics

There is a reciprocal agreement between Advance HE and the Institute of Physics that allows Institute of Physics Inclusion Awards to be converted to Athena Swan Ireland department awards at the equivalent level and vice versa.

Project Juno was the Institute of Physics flagship gender equality award for physics departments and schools. A reciprocal agreement existed between Project Juno and Athena Swan from the early days of both awards to ensure that physics departments could benefit from both discipline-specific and sector-wide recognition.

The Institute of Physics has now retired Project Juno in favour of a new Physics Inclusion Award that was launched in April 2024. The reciprocal arrangement has been updated and extended so that both organisations can continue to recognise and support physics departments' equality, diversity, and inclusion efforts.

9.1 Converting from an Inclusion Award to an Athena Swan Award

To be eligible to convert an Institute of Physics Inclusion award to an Athena Swan Ireland award, departments must belong to an institution that is funded to participate in Athena Swan Ireland by the Higher Education Authority and holds a valid institutional award.

A Level 1 Inclusion Award holder will be eligible for a Bronze Athena Swan Ireland award and a Level 2 Inclusion Award holder will be eligible for a Silver Athena Swan Ireland award.

If you are planning to convert a Level 2 Inclusion Award to an Athena Swan Ireland award, please ensure that you include at least two case studies of success (at least one of which is relevant to gender equality) when you apply for your Inclusion Award.

Successful Inclusion Award holders can request an Athena Swan award any time in the 12 months following your Inclusion Award result.

To request a conversion to Athena Swan Ireland, please write to Advance HE at athenaswanireland@advance-he.ie with:

- + A commitment to the Athena Swan Ireland principles from your Head of Department
- + A copy of your Inclusion award result letter from the Institute of Physics
- + If you are converting a Level 2 award to a Silver award, please also include a copy of your case studies of success from your Inclusion Award.

The Athena Swan Ireland team will write to you (usually within one month) confirming your award and providing you with a certificate, which will be valid for the duration of your Inclusion Award.

10 Version control

Version	Published	Amendments
1.0	15 April 2025	This is a new document designed to explain the processes that guide the Athena Swan Ireland charter framework.
1.2	20 August 2025	Updates made to the “Overview of the Award Validity Process” section for clarity.
1.3	9 February 2026	Section 9 added to explain reciprocal agreement between Advance HE and the Institute of Physics that allows Institute of Physics Inclusion Awards to be converted to Athena Swan Ireland department awards.

Contact us

All enquiries

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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).

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