

Athena SWAN Ireland: departmental restructures and award-holding units

Prepared for Athena SWAN Ireland participants

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

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

This document, which details 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 gender equality 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 gender equality is embedded in the new structure, and the continuation and appropriate modification of actions to facilitate progress with gender equality work 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's Athena SWAN Ireland staff to determine eligibility to use the Award Validity Process.

1.1 Terminology

Department: Advance HE uses the term 'department' to apply to a range of units that sit below institution-level awards (e.g. faculty, college, school, department). Where 'department' is used in this document it refers to the newly restructured entity seeking to use the Award Validity Process.

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

1.2 Purpose

The Award Validity Process is designed to:

1. provide a mechanism for newly established departments to achieve recognition for the gender equality work undertaken by award-holding units;
2. provide information that will allow an institution and its departments to determine whether or not to progress with an Athena SWAN department-level application if a restructure is planned.¹

¹ Please note the Athena SWAN peer-review process cannot review an application from a unit/s that do not exist at the point of submission. The Award Validity Process is designed to manage restructures that occur post-award.

2. Overview of the Award Validity Process

2.1 Application tracks

The Award Validity Process has two application tracks: 1) Award Transfer; 2) Legacy Award:

1. 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.

2. 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.² A legacy award logo is used to recognise publically the gender equality work of individual units and the future commitment of the department to the Athena SWAN charter. 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.³

2.1 Determining eligibility

Advance HE's Athena SWAN Ireland staff 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:

1. Eligibility to use the Award Validity Process
2. 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 that were previously evaluated by the Athena SWAN peer-review assessment process are unrecognisable in the restructured department (see 2.2 below).

2.2 Guiding principles of eligibility

Eligibility will be determined by Advance HE on a case-by-case basis after a meeting with the department (see Section 2.1). However, to enable institutions and departments to weigh

² Legacy awards are also conferred on institutions via the TU Legacy Award Process.

³ For the purposes of meeting institutional prerequisites for Silver, institutions may include legacy awards in determining whether the majority of departments hold awards.

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.⁴

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, determination will be made by Advance HE on 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.

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.⁵

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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

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

2.1 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 four years from the date of department formation.⁶ After this period lapses, the department must apply for an award using the standard application process.

This means that a unit formed Feb-July 2021 would be required to apply for an award no later than the April 2025 assessment round, and a unit formed August 2021-January 2022 would be required to apply no later than the November 2025 assessment round.

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

2.2 Outcome

Information submitted to Advance HE as part of the Award Validity Process will be reviewed by two members of Advance HE staff, one of which will include the Head of Athena SWAN Ireland or the Assistant Director for International Charters.

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) does/do not adversely impact on gender equality or gender equality initiatives in the department.
- that action has been taken to ensure gender equality is embedded in the new structure;
- the continuation and appropriate modification of actions.

Departments will receive the outcome within 6-8 weeks of submitting the required documents (see Section 3) 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.

⁶ This timeline will enable newly formed departments to provide the required three years of quantitative data in their next Athena SWAN application. A future application may also reference data from pre-existing units and make reference to historical actions and gender equality initiatives.

- **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.

3. Requirements of the Award Validity Process

3.1 Track One: Award Transfer

In order to apply for Award Transfer to the department, the following documents should be submitted⁷:

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 gender equality 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 gender equality 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. Comment should also be made 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

An updated action plan for the restructured department should be provided. The action plan should present prioritised actions to address the issues identified by the 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-

⁷ Advance HE may require additional information from a unit that includes awards held under the original charter framework.

bound (SMART). Actions from the action plans of pre-existing units may be modified as appropriate.

3.2 Track Two: Legacy Award

In order to apply for a Legacy Award, the following documents should be submitted⁸:

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 gender equality 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 gender equality work within the department.

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

The written overview should include comment on:

- plans to support the implementation of the action plan/s of the award-holding units, with comment on the extent to which 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.

3.3 Submission of documents

Documents relating to the Award Validity Process should be sent in one email to athenaswanireland@advance-he.ac.uk. Please indicate 'Department Restructure Award Validity Process' in the subject line.

⁸ Advance HE may require additional information from a unit that includes awards held under the original charter framework.

4. Further information

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.

Queries about the Award Validity Process should be directed to Athena SWAN Ireland staff: athenaswanireland@advance-he.ac.uk.



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