



Advance HE's Equality Charters Guide to processes



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About this guide

This guide outlines the processes supporting Advance HE's equality charter awards. It encompasses information on the role of those involved in the charter peer review assessment process and the expectations and responsibilities placed on them. The guide also covers application, review and appeal procedures. It does not cover pilots and trials of other equality charter developments, or other Advance HE activities, whilst Advance HE is undertaking an ongoing process of strategic alignment of its award, recognition and accreditation processes.

Reviews of Athena SWAN and the Race Equality Charter are currently under way, which means that the processes outlined herein are subject to further change in the near future.

This guide was published in November 2020 and replaces previous equality charter Guide to Processes published in May 2019. The only change between the May 2019 and November 2020 guidance is the introduction of a minor revisions process for Athena Swan UK, which replaces additional information requests. Guidance can be found on page 5.

A summary of key information added in May 2019 follows:

- All references to Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) are replaced with references to Advance HE, which was formed by the merger of ECU, the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education and the Higher Education Academy in March 2018.
- Updates to Advance HE staff roles/responsibilities made to reflect the organisational structure.
- New section 1.1 Eligibility to apply for an award, with subsequent sub-sections re-numbered accordingly
- 1.3 requests for award extensions must now come from the head of department of the submitting unit, or the vice-chancellor, director or equivalent.
- 1.3 if an award extension is granted due to exceptional extenuating circumstances, eligibility for a grace period in the event of a subsequent unsuccessful submission will no longer be affected.
- 2 for the Athena SWAN Charter, Advance HE will convene an awards panel but is scoping whether this may necessarily always involve a meeting thereof. If a process is introduced where there is no collective review, such a process will be communicated to applicants (including the basis on which award recommendations will be confirmed)
- 2.1 removed statement that awards panels will usually be made up of five people
- 2.1 confirmed that panel meetings may take place using a remote meeting facility.
- 2.1 confirmed that the role of note-taker may no longer be routinely filled.
- 2.2 specified that panellists are required to return review forms to Advance HE.
- 2.3.3 noted that retention procedures are now outlined in Data Sharing Agreements with applying institutions.
- 2.3.3 removed the requirement for panellists to provide written confirmation to Advance HE that they have deleted panel material (but retained requirement that such deletion takes place, as part of non-disclosure agreements).
- 3.1 clarified that Advance HE will notify the applicant within 10 working days of the appeal deadline whether their appeal has been accepted.
- New section 4 Changes to award holding entities (covering restructures), and following sections

renumbered.

- 5 confirmation that an award holding entity ceasing to exist may result in that award being withdrawn.
- 5 process updated to provide further options to Advance HE and any withdrawal appeal panel that may be convened.

Further information

- Advance HE's Athena SWAN Charter awards handbooks
- Advance HE's Race Equality Charter awards handbook

These handbooks include detailed information on how to submit an application and a question-by- question guide to the application forms.

Frequently asked questions

You can find further information and answers to frequently asked questions online.

Contact Advance HE's equality charter teams:

Advance HE's Athena SWAN Charter:

athena.swan@advance-he.ac.uk Advance HE's Race Equality

Charter: racecharter@advance-he.ac.uk

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Changes to Athena Swan UK November 2020 Round: Minor Revisions Process

Advance HE has begun the developmental work to deliver a holistically transformed Athena Swan UK Charter by early 2021, which means that the following processes are subject to further change in 2021. In the meantime, Advance HE has identified specific, short-term changes which can be made immediately for the benefit of applicants, which includes introducing a minor revisions process for the November 2020 assessment round as outlined below.

For the purpose of Athena Swan UK assessments, the following paragraphs replace sections 2.3 and 2.3.1 of this guide to processes. (REC and Athena SWAN Ireland applicants and panellists should still refer to the processes as outlined in the main document on page 12 onwards).

2.3 Award Panel Recommendation

Panellists may recommend that Advance HE:

- confer or renew the award at the level sought
- confer or renew the award at a lower level
- confer or renew the award at a higher level (this will usually require minor revisions from the applicant)
- request minor revisions are made to the submission and that it is re-submitted to the panel chair within an agreed timescale
- do not confer an award.

Where there is a panel meeting, the panel will seek to reach a unanimous decision, but may decide on the basis of a majority. If there is no majority (where the number of panellists is even) the chair has an additional deciding vote. Panellists may not abstain from voting. The panel must base its decision solely on the material placed before it against the criteria set out in the relevant awards handbook.

2.3.1 Minor Revisions

Where applications narrowly fail to meet the criteria for an award, panellists may request that the application is returned to the applicant in order for minor revisions to be made and for the application to be re-submitted to the panel Chair. When minor revisions are requested, the decision on that particular application will be adjourned. Advance HE will send a request for minor revisions to the applicant; this will include information provided by the panel on which criteria have not yet been met and details of revisions requested by the panel. Individual members of the panel must not contact the applicant. The revised version of the application must normally be provided to Advance HE within 40 working days of the request. If the revised application is not received within 40 working days, the application will be unsuccessful or awarded at lower level (depending on what level the panel assessed the application as meeting in its original form). The re-submitted application will be reviewed by the panel Chair with the expectation that the Chair will recommend that an award is conferred if revisions have been adequately made.

1. Application submission process

1.1 Eligibility to apply for an award

UK institutions (or the parent institution of an applying department) must have chosen the appropriate Advance HE accreditation package (Athena SWAN Charter and/or Race Equality Charter) to be eligible to:

- apply for Athena SWAN and/or Race Equality Charter awards
- access the related Advance HE support and materials.

If the relevant accreditation package is not chosen by an institution that holds an award(s), existing awards remain valid until their expiration.

UK institutions may choose both accreditation packages.

1.2 Notification of intention to apply for an award

For further details see: Guidance on submitting applications in the relevant awards handbook

Application deadlines apply to both charters. Specific dates are published on Advance HE's website.

Applicants should notify Advance HE of their intention to make an award application in advance of the application deadline. The deadline to provide this notification will be no more than two calendar months in advance and will be specified on Advance HE's website. Notification should be provided by following the instructions on Advance HE's website.

Advance HE reserves the right not to accept an application where no intention to submit has been received.

1.3 Award extensions

Where applicants seek to delay their submission and extend any current award validity, a request must be made in writing to Advance HE. The request must come from the head of department of the submitting unit, or the vice-chancellor, director or equivalent. There must be exceptional extenuating circumstances.

The request must be made no less than two calendar months in advance of the relevant submission deadline. A relevant equality charter head or the Assistant Director - Equality Charters will review the request.

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

1.4 Submitting your application

Applicants must submit their application by the relevant deadline and in accordance with the administrative criteria set out in the relevant awards handbook.

An extension may be granted in exceptional circumstances. This will usually be one week. The decision to grant an extension is at Advance HE's discretion. If the request for an extension is refused, Advance HE will provide reasons.

Advance HE will acknowledge each application. If acknowledgment is not received within five working days of the application deadline, the applicant should contact Advance HE by phone.

The application is checked by Advance HE for compliance with the administrative criteria set out in the awards handbooks. If the application is incomplete or does not comply with this criteria Advance HE reserves the right not to review the application. The application fee will still apply.

The applicant will be permitted to resubmit at the next deadline, but must notify Advance HE of their intention to do so (see 1.1).

1.5 Objection to content of award applications

Institutions are required to confirm their commitment to the charter principles to be eligible to apply for Advance HE's equality charter awards.

Applicants are required to confirm that the information presented in an application (including qualitative and quantitative data) is an honest, accurate and true representation of the institution or department.

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

- Information comes to light 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.
- Subsequent to receipt of an application, information comes to light establishing that the applicant no longer satisfies the requirements of the award or has failed to adhere to or uphold the charter principles.

In the above circumstances, the information identified or received must be independently verifiable and/or be received from a credible source. For example, through verified communications from the institution, from a professional association, through nationally verified data (eg the Higher Education Statistics Agency), or a finding by a competent authority (such as a court or tribunal or the Equalities and Human Rights Commission).

Advance HE will not consider information from anonymous sources or which requires further investigation. If requested, Advance HE will not name the source when communicating to the applicant, but anonymity cannot be guaranteed as – depending on the objection – identities may be inferred.

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.

Where any of the above circumstances are brought to Advance HE's attention, a relevant Advance HE equality charter head or the Assistant Director - Equality Charters 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 considers 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. Any representations should be made in writing to Advance HE, must adhere to a limit of 1000 words, and clearly set out the grounds on which the applicant objects to the proposed decision not to assess the application.

If representations are received within the 10 working day period, a relevant Advance HE equality charter head or the Assistant Director - Equality Charters will consider these representations. A final decision will be made within 10 working days of receipt of the applicant's representations.

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

- submit only the original application to the award panel
- share the supporting information and representations received by Advance HE with the award panel along with the application.

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

2. Peer review processes

Advance HE equality charter applications are reviewed by peer review panels. The panel recommends decisions on awards to Advance HE.

2.1 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 five applications.

Panellists are selected from a pool of people who have applied to Advance HE to become a panellist, or who are invited by Advance HE to be a panellist when their involvement in a panel will help achieve a more appropriate balance of panellists.

In constructing the panel Advance HE seeks to achieve appropriate representation, especially considering the gender and ethnicity of panellists for Athena SWAN and the Race Equality Charter respectively, and with attention to the representation of experienced and new panellists. Advance HE draws panellists from the following groups of people:

- academic and technical services staff
- human resources or equality and diversity practitioners with experience of higher education
- other professional services staff with experience of higher education
- specialists (for example industry and research institute representatives, members or employees of learned and professional societies, gender equality and race equality specialists as appropriate)
- students.

Normally (and in every case for the Race Equality Charter), a meeting of the panel will be convened. Where this is the case, the panel will be run by a chair appointed by Advance HE. The chair will have experience of participating in previous panels. The chair will be a voting panellist. The meeting may take place using a remote meeting facility.

All panellists (including the chair) are required to have undertaken training within the two years immediately preceding the submission deadline. In Athena SWAN, at least two panellists will have previously attended an Athena SWAN panel. In the Race Equality Charter, at least two panellists that have previously attended a Race Equality Charter panel will be sought, but not guaranteed because the pool of panellists that have undertaken Race Equality Charter panels is small.

Advance HE is scoping whether Athena SWAN submissions, or a subset thereof, could be assessed through independent, remote review by panellists. If pursued, such a process will be communicated to applicants.

Advance HE staff moderate review panels and may provide a note taker. These are non-voting roles.

There may be panel observers present during an award panel meeting. Observers do not take part in the decision-making process and do not vote.

2.1.1 Conflict of interests

Panellists are expected to act with integrity and impartiality and to be open, fair and unbiased when making decisions. Conflicts of interest must be identified and disclosed to Advance HE.

A conflict of interest is any situation in which personal interests, or loyalties owed to another person or body, may (or may appear to) unduly influence or affect a decision. In the context of the review of award submissions, a conflict of interest might arise as a result of direct or indirect personal, academic, financial or working relationships.

All panellists will submit a conflict of interest form with their application to join Advance HE's pool of panellists and/or in advance of taking part in a panel. All panellists will be asked to review this information in advance of a panel and need to consider potential conflicts for each individual application.

If panellists are in any doubt about whether or not they should review a submission due to a possible conflict of interest, they should contact Advance HE before proceeding with the review. Panellists should raise any potential conflicts as soon as they become apparent during the review process.

Observers must also submit a conflict of interest form in advance of a panel.

If a conflict of interest becomes apparent, a relevant Advance HE equality charter head or the Assistant Director - Equality Charters will determine the materiality of the conflict and decide if it prevents the panellist taking part in the review where the conflict could manifest. If the conflict is not material, the relevant Advance HE equality charter head or the Assistant Director - Equality Charters will decide how to manage it.

Panellists are automatically precluded from reviewing applications from an institution where they are currently employed or studying.

Other conflicts of interest can include:

- 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
- close personal friendships (including PhD supervision) or relationships with individuals at a department or institution
- provision of assistance to the department or institution with their award application (eg by acting as a critical friend)
- involvement in the work that the department or institution proposes to carry out (eg as part of an action plan or as a member of a committee connected with a work programme)
- collaboration on a research project with individuals at a department or institution in the last five years. This is not an exhaustive list.

The Advance HE moderator and note taker will also declare interests. If a conflict of interest is declared, a relevant Advance HE equality charter head or the Assistant Director - Equality Charters 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.

2.1.2 Objections to panel composition

Potential applicants will have access to a list of all potential panellists.

Applicants will not be able to select panellists but can raise objections to particular panellists taking part in the review of their application.

Any objections should be made in writing to Advance HE, with reasons to support the objection, by the submission deadline.

A relevant Advance HE equality charter head or the Assistant Director - Equality Charters will consider any objections to a potential panellist. They will decide whether the potential panellist could participate in the relevant panel. Advance HE will inform the applicant of the decision in writing.

Advance HE's decision is final.

2.2 Awards panel process

Panellists and observers will receive a copy of the application to review. Where applicable, they will also receive feedback that was returned to the applicant on a previous application.

Panellists are required to:

- sign a non-disclosure and confidentiality agreement
- review the application in accordance with guidance set out for applicants in the relevant awards handbook
- review the application independently and complete review forms
- return independently produced review forms to Advance HE
- collectively review the application at the panel meeting, where one is scheduled
- only take into account information included in the application (or any other information that Advance HE deems relevant, see 1.4 for more details).

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

- give structure to the deliberations and move the discussion towards a decision
- ensure any panellist comments that are deemed prejudicial, such as personal opinions unrelated to the application, are disregarded. If necessary they can ask a panellist to leave the panel
- summarise the panel's discussion
- keep discussions on schedule.

The chair and other panellists must not communicate about the awards panel or the applications for review outside of the panel, unless facilitated by Advance HE.

Advance HE will appoint a moderator from its staff, who will have received training prior to becoming a moderator.

The moderator is required to:

- provide assistance and guidance on the application and review process
- ensure the panel comply with the requirements set out in this document
- ensure consistency of panel review and decision-making. If required, the moderator may provide a view on whether the application meets the requirements of the award level applied for
- ensure any panellist comments that are deemed prejudicial, such as personal opinions unrelated to the application, are disregarded
- fulfil the moderation role in the event that a panel requests additional information (see 2.3.1)
- ensure 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.

Advance HE may appoint a note taker. The note taker is required to:

- record the key discussion points of a panel meeting
- request that the panel identify feedback to be provided to the applicant.

In the absence of the note-taker, the moderator will fulfil these roles in addition to their other duties. Neither the note taker nor the moderator vote in the recommendation on awards.

Advance HE will determine the order the submissions will be reviewed in.

2.3 Awards panel recommendation

Panellists may recommend to Advance HE that they:

- confer or renew the award at the level sought
- confer or renew the award at a lower level
- confer or renew the award at a higher level (this will usually require the request of further information from the applicant)
- do not confer an award.

Where there is a panel meeting, the panel will seek to reach a unanimous decision, but may decide on the basis of a majority. If there is no majority (where the number of panellists is even) the chair has an additional deciding vote.

Panellists may not abstain from voting.

The panel must base its decision solely on the material placed before it against the criteria set out in the relevant awards handbook.

2.3.1 Additional information

In exceptional circumstances panellists may seek additional information from the applicant, in order to be able to reach a decision.

When additional information is sought, the decision on that particular application will be adjourned. Advance HE will send a request for additional information to the applicant.

Individual members of the panel must not contact the applicant.

Additional information requested from the applicant must be provided to Advance HE within 10 working days of the request.

If the additional information is not received within 10 working days, the panel will make a decision based on the original available information.

Where additional information is provided it will be distributed by Advance HE to the panellists. Advance HE will arrange to reconvene the awards panel, or undertake further remote review.

A reconvened award panel must be quorate (see 2.1) and may only include those panellists that participated in the initial review.

2.3.2 Moderation and consistency of decision making

In exceptional circumstances, the moderator may refer an application to a relevant Advance HE equality charter head or the Assistant Director - Equality Charters if the moderator believes that the panel's decision:

- does not correspond with the criteria set out in the handbook
- 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.

A relevant Advance HE equality charter head or the Assistant Director - Equality Charters will review the application and assessment and decide whether to refer the application to a new panel for consideration, as per the processes set out in 2.2. This decision will be taken within ten working days of the original 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 (see 2.4).

2.3.3 Panel records

At the conclusion of the awards panel process, all application and review materials relating to the application will be collected by the moderator.

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.

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

2.4 Notification of award decision

Once all applications in a given round have been assessed Advance HE will communicate award decisions to applicants in writing. This communication will include any award validity periods where relevant.

Where an award-holding applicant does not achieve an award that is at least equal to that already held, they may be offered a period of grace.

Advance HE will endeavour to make and communicate award decisions within six calendar months of the closing date for a given applications round. However, this period may be longer depending on the number of applications received, the number of panels convened, and whether further information has been requested from any applicants. See the relevant awards handbook for further information on timelines.

2.5 Providing feedback

Advance HE will provide feedback to each applicant based on the panel discussion. This will include the rationale behind the decision.

Advance HE will endeavour to provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants at the time award outcomes are communicated.

Advance HE will endeavour to provide feedback to applicants whose application receives an award at a lower level within one month of communicating the award outcomes.

Advance HE will endeavour to provide feedback to applicants whose application is successful within two months of communicating the award outcomes.

3. Appeal process

The applicant has 10 working days from the date that the written feedback on their application was communicated in which to appeal. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that post and email is monitored.

An appeal must be sent in writing to the relevant Advance HE equality charter head. It must clearly set out in detail the grounds upon which the appeal is made. A limit of 1000 words applies to all appeals against award decisions.

3.1 Grounds for appeal

The only accepted grounds of appeal are:

- procedural unfairness

ie: substantial failure to comply with the requirements of this procedure which leads to the process being unfair

- the decision was manifestly unreasonable

ie: taking into account irrelevant factors or failing to take account of 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 outside of these grounds. Disagreement with the panel's judgment is not grounds for appeal.

An appeal will be considered by a relevant Advance HE equality charter head or the Assistant Director - Equality Charters to determine whether it has been effectively lodged 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 likely to be delayed (eg due to staff illness or external factors) Advance HE will notify the applicant in writing with the updated timeframe.

3.2 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 as per the processes set out in 2.2, except for the following aspects.

- The panel may be convened outside of the normal round.
- The applicant will not have any further opportunity to object to particular panellists sitting on the panel.
- The panel will be informed that the application was considered previously and the decision has been appealed, but will not be informed of the previous result or reason for 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 the award.

If the review panel reaches a decision that is different to the original awards panel, Advance HE will communicate this in writing to the original panel members. This will include the reasons for the decision.

4. Changes to award holding entities

Institutions sometimes undergo periodic restructuring. This may affect the equality work and Athena SWAN and/or Race Equality Charter action plan of an award holding entity. Applicants are expected to inform Advance HE of prospective restructures, in order that continued award eligibility may be confirmed or otherwise considered.

4.1 Institutional level restructuring

When an institution undergoes significant restructuring, the vice-chancellor, director or equivalent must inform Advance HE in writing, to explain how gender and/or race equality (and gender/race equality initiatives) are being considered in the restructuring process.

In order that Advance HE may determine any impact on the institution's continued award eligibility, the institution must inform Advance HE of the planned changes ahead of the proposed date of a new structure being implemented. If uncertain, the institution should contact a relevant Advance HE equality charter head in advance.

A relevant Advance HE equality charter head or the Assistant Director - Equality Charters will determine any impact on continued award eligibility. Advance HE may require additional information, or set out recommendations or conditions for continued award eligibility.

4.2 Departmental level restructuring

Advance HE is undertaking a pilot of an "Interim award process" to enable departments affected by restructures to retain Athena SWAN awards, if consideration of gender equality (and gender equality initiatives) are apparent in the restructuring process. This applies to cases where departments are split or merged.

The interim award recognises the department's efforts to ensure that gender equality is embedded in the new structure, and the continuation and appropriate modification of its actions to address the key issues identified by the self-assessment and restructuring processes. The department should contact the relevant Advance HE equality charter head in advance of undertaking this process.

After a review of the pilot, a confirmed process will be communicated to Athena SWAN charter members.

5. Withdrawal of award

Institutions are required to confirm their commitment to the charter principles to be eligible to apply for Advance HE's equality charter awards.

Applicants are required to confirm that the information presented in an application (including qualitative and quantitative data) is an honest, accurate and true representation of the institution or department.

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

- Information comes to light 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.
- Subsequent to an award being made, information comes to light establishing that the applicant no longer satisfies the requirements of the award or has failed to adhere to or uphold the charter principles.
- Subsequent to an award being made, an institutional restructure means that an award-holding entity no longer exists.

In the above circumstances, the information identified or received must be independently verifiable and/or be received from a credible source. For example, through verified communications from the institution, from a professional association, through nationally verified data (eg the Higher Education Statistics Agency), or a finding by a competent authority (such as a court or tribunal or the Equalities and Human Rights Commission).

Advance HE will not consider information from anonymous sources or which requires further investigation. If requested, Advance HE will not name the source when communicating to the applicant, but anonymity cannot be guaranteed as – depending on the objection – identities may be inferred.

A limit of 1000 words applies to all requests for the withdrawal of awards.

Where any of the above circumstances are brought to Advance HE's attention, a relevant Advance HE equality charter head or the Assistant Director - Equality Charters will review the impact of the information on the applicant's eligibility for the award.

In cases where Advance HE considers that the information does not impact on the award holder's eligibility for the award no further action will be taken.

If Advance HE considers that the information is likely to affect the award holder's eligibility for the award, Advance HE 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 no longer eligible for the award, and that it may be withdrawn
- provide all supporting information that has been considered by Advance HE
- summarise the grounds for the proposed withdrawal
- invite the award holder to make written representations on the proposed withdrawal.

The award holder will be given a period of 10 working days from the date of the invitation to submit representations on the proposed withdrawal. Any representations should be made in writing to Advance HE, must adhere to a limit of 1000 words, and clearly set out the grounds on which the award holder objects to the proposed withdrawal.

If Advance HE does not receive any representations from the award holder within the 10 working day period, Advance HE will issue a formal written decision to withdraw the award.

If representations are received within the 10 day period, Advance HE will consider whether they are sufficiently explanatory in order to determine that the information does not impact on the award holder's eligibility for the award (eg misleading detail is clearly resolved). Advance HE will issue a written decision to the award holder providing the reasons for maintaining the award.

5.1 Withdrawal appeal panel

If representations are received within the 10 day period and are not deemed sufficiently explanatory, Advance HE will convene a withdrawal appeal panel.

Advance HE will decide what to submit to the withdrawal appeal panel, depending on the nature of the information on which the withdrawal is proposed. This may involve the following being submitted:

- The original application, supporting information and the representations received by Advance HE, and the grounds for the proposed withdrawal of the award.
- 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 2.2, with the following exceptions.

- The panel may be convened outside of the normal round.

- The award holder will not have any further opportunity to object to particular panellists being on the panel.
- The panel will be informed that the application was previously successful but that Advance HE has received information it considers could render the award holder no longer eligible 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 will be maintained or lowered. Where specific conditions are attached, the award holder will be informed of how it should report on these to Advance HE.
- The decision of the panel will be communicated to the applicant within 10 working days of the panel considering the application.
- 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.

6. Definitions and clarifications

Applicant

Refers to applications from institutions and departments.

Awards process

Refers to all stages of the process from application, awards panel review, feedback and award conferment.

Department

A unit within an institution that is eligible to make an application. This can include departments, faculties or schools. Please refer to the relevant award handbook for full details on departments that are eligible.

Advance HE processes

The relevant Advance HE equality charter head will usually run the processes set out here.

If for any reason the equality charter head is unavailable, or there is a conflict of interest, Advance HE's Assistant Director - Equality Charters will assume responsibility for that process.

In writing

This refers to electronic and hard copy mailings.

Institution

May refer to a university, university college of higher education or institute of technology (Ireland) (collectively known as higher education institutions), or a research institute.

UK public holidays

UK public holidays do not include Scottish locally-determined public holidays. Advance HE recognises St Andrew's Day as an additional public holiday for Scotland.

Working day

Working days are the days between and including Monday to Friday and do not include UK public holidays and weekends. If for example, Advance HE requests that something must be received within five working days on a Wednesday, Advance HE expects to receive it by 5pm the following Wednesday unless there are UK public holidays in between.