


# How to get an Athena SWAN Silver<sup>1</sup>

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2nd August 2018

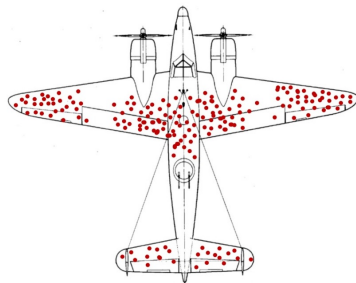
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<sup>1</sup>Thanks to Caroline McKinnon (Biochemistry) for input 

# How to get an Athena SWAN Silver

▶ I don't know.

# Survivorship bias



- ▶ I can tell you some things I think we avoided.
- ▶ There are probably some serious things I haven't noticed.
- ▶ Anything like this is a matter of luck.
- ▶ I don't have any guaranteed solutions.
- ▶ I've never been on a SWAN panel ... you should though!

# First steps

- ▶ Go back in time, and do some really good things 3 years ago.
- ▶ There are some things you can't polish ... though you can roll them in glitter.
- ▶ If data isn't good enough, can't make a story out of nothing.
- ▶ Can't go for Silver:
  - ▶ ...just because you want to
  - ▶ ...because you've been on Bronze for a while
  - ▶ ...because someone has told you to.
- ▶ So, what can you do?

## Make sure you read the exam question

### **5. Vote Leave not being recognised as the official Out campaign.**

Richard Howell, known as Ricardo to his colleagues, was helping to draw up Vote Leave's application to be the official Out campaign when he noticed a problem. At 10.30 p.m. on the day before the deadline Howell read the criteria the Electoral Commission would use to decide the designation. He told colleagues: 'We haven't answered any of them, and all our material in this section's irrelevant, and it's worth 12 out of 50 points.' Howell and Victoria Woodcock stayed up until 3.30 a.m. rewriting. They got the final document in at 11.40 p.m. the following night, 20 minutes before the deadline.

## Don't underestimate the amount of work

- ▶ Our submission was 64 pages.
- ▶ Comparable to (or worse than) writing a **really big** grant.
- ▶ Took best part of a year.
- ▶ Need to get it out of the 'Important/Not Urgent' quadrant.
- ▶ Worth planning ahead, having milestones, getting impartial reviewers lined up.
- ▶ Don't expect to stick to any of that.
- ▶ Use external reviewers, involve non-data experts.
- ▶ We'd have been sunk without Mock Panel.
- ▶ You can't do it all by yourself.
- ▶ Shared folders, email groups etc.

## Building a team

- ▶ I don't think panels like too-junior staff leading SWAN applications.
- ▶ Need to be **credibly** able to speak truth to power.
- ▶ If panel might think HoD won't listen to you, draft in some muscle to SAT.
- ▶ Need balanced, diverse team (gender, seniority, ethnicity etc).
- ▶ Key is that you (collectively) look like you can deliver Actions.

## Who else?

- ▶ Good administrator worth their weight in gold (you knew that already though!)
- ▶ Someone who can navigate HR systems a bonus.
- ▶ Delegate sections in first draft (e.g. admissions, postgrad, administrators, maternity).
- ▶ Look for someone who can do diagrams/graphs/data viz.



## Do data and descriptive parts first

- ▶ Some sections need to be there, probably won't change.
- ▶ Get descriptive sections down early.
- ▶ Will spark thoughts on Actions.
- ▶ Will also show up where you need to do surveys.
- ▶ Don't expect data to be internally consistent though.
- ▶ You can spin, but within reason.
- ▶ Do make data clear (consistent % vs absolute # etc).
- ▶ Data will be compared to subject standards, so benchmark.
- ▶ Can develop own context (e.g. Further Maths).
- ▶ Remember most universities not Russell Group (research-intensive different).
- ▶ Don't forget wider Faculty/University context . . . but distinguish Department actions.
- ▶ Now's a good time to re-read the exam question.

## Build out into Actions

- ▶ If something is good or improved . . . need to tie it to an explicit past action.
- ▶ (Our feedback said to distinguish implementation and impact).
- ▶ Need to make impact clear somehow.
- ▶ If something is bad or declining . . . need to tie it to an explicit future action.
- ▶ Can get away with some failure, if you reflect on it.
- ▶ 'We tried A, it failed, here's why, so now we'll try B'
- ▶ Actions need to be SMART.
- ▶ Can't 'monitor' for Silver.
- ▶ Can do things now, though!

## Some of our things the panel liked

- ▶ Women and non-binary people lunches.
- ▶ Women in Maths postgraduate event.
- ▶ Explicit targets for seminar speakers.
- ▶ Spreading ownership of Actions.
- ▶ Having spotted issues and responded to them.

## Tricks that look good in general?

1. Photos (of SAT, events) make you look human.
2. Word limit, but no page limit ... so let it breathe (bullet points, **boldface**)
3. Scientists don't like qualitative things ... but they work.
4. Good case stories are worth huge amounts (help authors).
5. Department culture important ... core hours, balancing representation and committee overload etc.
6. GANTT chart for actions?

# This isn't just for you

- ▶ SWAN document is a statement on behalf of department.
- ▶ Circulate as widely as possible for comment, buy-in.
- ▶ Make sure HoD endorses Action Plan (no blank cheque)  
... because their letter is crucial.
- ▶ May need to go through several rounds of discussion.
- ▶ Don't forget to re-read the exam question.

## How to finish

- ▶ You personally have to own final draft.
- ▶ Don't take feedback personally – can seem harsh.
- ▶ Put down a hard deadline and be ruthless.
- ▶ It's never going to be perfect.
- ▶ You **are** going to hate the sight of it.
- ▶ Don't sweat the small stuff.

## Afterwards

- ▶ Do remember to thank your team properly (event?).
- ▶ Reflect on what you learnt about your department (and UoB).
- ▶ Takes a long time to hear . . . so put it out of your mind.
- ▶ But realistically, going to have to start Actions anyway.
- ▶ Start thinking about handover/succession planning.
- ▶ If you don't get it, do support one another.
- ▶ If you do get it, do celebrate again.
- ▶ **GOOD LUCK!!!!**