SCIENCE IN AUSTRALIA
GENDER EQUITY

Athena SWAN

Institution Application

SAGE Cygnet Awards

THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

SAGE Cygnet Award Application Form

SAGE Cygnet Award Application

Name of institution	University of Newcastle
Date of application	31 October 2023
Award Level	Cygnet
Date joined Athena SWAN	Cohort One – January 2016
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UNIVERSITY OF NEWCASTLE: SAGE CYGNET 4		
BARRIER TYPE	**CURRENT CYGNET**	**BARRIER**
Mandatory Sub-group barrier		STEM Pipeline: Difficulty attracting and recruiting female students and academic staff into the College of Engineering, Science and Environment
Mandatory Institution-wide barrier		Career Development Support
Institution- wide barrier		Indigenous Cultural Competency
Institution- wide barrier	⟶	Supporting Carers
Institution- wide/Sub-group barrier		

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which our campuses are located:

- The Awabakal and Worimi Peoples at our Newcastle City campus
- The Pambalong Clan of the Awabakal Nation - Newcastle campus at Callaghan
- Darkinung People - Central Coast campus at Ourimbah
- Biripai People - Port Macquarie campus
- Gadigal People of the Eora Nation – Sydney CBD

We also acknowledge and pay respect to the other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations from which our students, staff and community are drawn.

Artwork: Indigenous Education Strategy (2020)
Artist: Jasmine Craciun (Bachelor of Visual Communication 2018)

Alumna Jasmine Miikika Craciun is a proud Barkindji, Malyangapa designer and artist with a passion for telling the stories of, and communicating to, diverse groups of people.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

ASIABA	Athena Swan Institution Application Bronze Award
ASBA	Athena Swan Bronze Award
ASBAP	Athena Swan Bronze Action Plan
ASWP	Athena Swan Working Party
CHMW	College of Health Medicine and Wellbeing
FWA	Flexible Work Arrangements
HRS	Human Resources Services
SAGE	Science Australia Gender Equity

Key Barrier

The University of Newcastle identified **insufficient support for staff with caring responsibilities** as the fourth key barrier to address in the pathway to Silver accreditation.

International research has demonstrated that the **effective delivery of flexible work arrangements** and management of career breaks makes a crucial difference to working carers in the progression of their careers. (Austin and Heyes, 2020) Similarly, additional studies have shown that **effective policies, practices, and workplace culture** around support for staff with caring responsibilities increase staff attraction, retention, and engagement. (Tsen, et. al., 2020; Onken-Menke, 2017; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013; McNall, et.al., 2010).

Identification of this key barrier as **Theme 5 in the Athena Swan Institution Application for Bronze Award** (ASIABA, 2018) informed the efforts the University has subsequently taken to improve equity for working carers (Table 1).

	Description of Action	Justification/Evidence
5.1	Amend Policy and guideline to exclude minimum two-month period to be away for academic staff with caring responsibilities applying for Special Studies leave.	Mobility challenges exist for women with caring responsibilities to work away from home. Formal exemption process may deter women applying.
5.2	Creation of a childcare working party to address gaps in childcare services – particularly (0-2 age group) for women returning from parental leave at main campus and other sites.	Lack of childcare at Callaghan and satellite sites – particularly 0-2 age group, impacting on women returning to work.
5.3	Women-in-Research Fellowships - Flexible scholarship funding to support women to progress their research. Examples include appointment of a Research Assistant, Teaching buy-outs, travel conference funding.	Women with carer responsibilities face challenges of extended leave or breaks in employment impacting research outcomes and career progression
5.4	Provide flexibility for women to take six months parental leave in blocks with option to return sooner (if preferred) but take remainder over a longer period as part-time hours.	Extended periods away from workplace (due to parental leave or caring responsibilities) can be detrimental to research outputs.
5.5	Educate and support managers on flexible working options for women seeking career progression with young family.	Women remain predominantly primary carers and need flexibility to return to work including reasonable part-time work allocation.
5.6	Encourage ongoing connection with staff on parental leave through University's Stay in Touch process and develop action plans for female academic staff that highlights if they are contributors to grants or papers.	Women can feel isolated on extended periods of leave and value interaction/updates on significant events – including research updates/progress.
5.7	Continue to apply for Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Accreditation each year to ensure University standards are best practice for breastfeeding mothers returning to work.	Staff and students require parenting rooms at various locations to assist with balancing work/study and caring responsibilities.
5.8	Update Policy and Faculty Gender Equity Plans with core meeting hours.	Not all meetings held at University are held at family-friendly times.

Table 1. ASBAP Theme 5: Supporting Carers

With the disruptions to working lives caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the importance of supporting working carers in their dual role came into sharper focus.

Between 2020 and 2023, the University sought to reduce the impact of this barrier by taking the following Cygnet Actions to provide better support for carers. (See below, Table 2)

Cygnet Action	Support For Carers
Action 1	Developing a new flexible work policy and resources to better support carers (ASBAP 5.8)
Action 2	Increasing awareness of workplace practices designed to support carers through flexible work arrangements and better management of career breaks (ASBAP 5.1, 5.3, 5.4, and 5.6);
Action 3	Providing additional entitlements in the Enterprise Agreement for those with carers responsibilities and improve understanding of those entitlements (ASBAP 5.5)
Action 4	Improving on-campus facilities to support carers while at work (ASBAP 5.2 and 5.7).

Table 2: Actions to Reduce Barriers for Staff with Caring Responsibilities 2020-2023

Evidence of Barrier

At the time of Athena Swan Bronze Award (ASBA), the University had progressed a few initiatives to support staff with caring responsibilities:

- Parental Leave Policies were in place, but there was no Flexible Work Policy;
- Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA) were available, but they were not widely understood or used; and
- Childcare centres were located on University campuses, but limited or no breastfeeding facilities were available to support carers needs at work.

Evidence gathered at the time of ASBA demonstrated that **staff were not fully aware of these support mechanisms** and/or **did not know how best to utilise these processes** to support their needs as carers. There was also **no formal training for managers and supervisors**, who needed to guide staff through the management of career breaks and return-to-work arrangements. This resulted in:

- Low numbers of staff utilising flexible work arrangements[1];
- Lack of flexible work options (including working from home), especially for professional staff;
- Limited staff retention post parental leave.[2]

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[1] 15 Academic staff (14 females and 1 male) and 76 Professional staff (72 females and 4 males) in 2017.
[2] 34 out of 47 staff (72%) who took parental leave returned to work in 2018.

Actions and Outputs

Since 2020, the Athena Swan Working Party (ASWP) has monitored progress of the 8 actions under Theme 5 (Supporting Carers) of the ASBAP with a traffic light system (Figure 1). As of 2023, all actions were initiated with status noted either as complete (green light) or partially complete (yellow light).

Actions		Success Measure	Status Comments 2023	Status Code	Corresponding Cygnet Report
Theme 5: Supporting Carers					
5.1	Amend Policy and guideline to exclude minimum two month period to be away for academic staff with caring responsibilities applying for Special Studies leave.	Policy updated with 10% increase in women applying for SSP.	Seek numbers from HR.	🟢	Supporting Carers Cygnet
5.2	Creation of a childcare working party to address gaps in childcare services – particularly (0-2 age group) for women returning from parental leave at main campus and other sites.	Childcare Working Party established. Report with findings and recommendations completed	Investigating salary sacrificing options for childcare in all centres for Cygnet.	🟢	Supporting Carers Cygnet
5.3	Flexible scholarship funding to support women to progress their research. Examples include appointment of a Research Assistant, Teaching buy-outs, travel conference funding. Funding committed for 2018 cohort = $373,724.00. Research Plan/report provided by Participants at conclusion of fellowship to assess impact. Participants to also identify Legacy (eg mentoring) to give back and help others.	Participants meet or exceed PEF targets for Research criteria. 13 additional mentors identified for future mentees.	RA WIR Fellowships continuing.	🟢	Career Development Cygnet
5.4	Provide flexibility to women the option to take six month parental leave in blocks with option to return sooner (if preferred) but take remainder over a longer period as part-time hours.	Parental Leave brochure and supporting information on web updated.	Completed.	🟢	Supporting Carers Cygnet
5.5	Educate and support managers on flexible working options for women seeking career progression with young family.	Toolkit on web updated with flexible work best practices and face to face training delivered by GECs and HRS.	Further work currently underway to improve resources/support for inclusion in Cygnet report.	🟡	Supporting Carers Cygnet
5.6	Encourage ongoing connection with staff on parental leave through UON's Stay in Touch process and develop action plans for female academic staff that highlights if they are contributors to grants or papers.	Staff receive regular communication about significant events from Supervisor and peers.	Further work currently underway to improve Keep in Touch process via Enboard + for inclusion in Cygnet report.	🟡	Supporting Carers Cygnet
5.7	Continue to apply for Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Accreditation each year to ensure UON standards are best practice for breastfeeding mothers returning to work.	UON receives BFW Accredited each year to ensure facilities are best practice for breastfeeding staff and students.	Achieved BFW accreditation and will continue to meet requirements through regular audits.	🟢	Supporting Carers Cygnet
5.8	Update Policy and Faculty Gender Equity Plans with core meeting hours.	Gender Equity Plans are updated with core meeting hours of 10am to 4pm and monitored through GEC.	Confirm with AD EDI's to see if introduced formally in respective Colleges.	🟡	Supporting Carers Cygnet

Figure 1. Athena Swan Bronze Action Plan Dashboard, Theme 5: Supporting Carers, Progress Monitoring via Traffic Light System

As the result of COVID-19 disruptions, however, the **program of work related to supporting carers was significantly rescoped** in 2020-2021 **to address four higher-level Cygnet Actions** (Table 2). The original Bronze actions are incorporated into this overarching program of work.

Cygnet Action 1: Developing a new flexible work policy and resources to better support carers

To ensure greater flexibility was available to all staff, particularly those with caring responsibilities who were disproportionally affected, the University committed to the creation of a new policy and additional resources related to Flexible Work that would assist staff to balance work and home life, and for managers to support FWA in balance with operational responsibilities.

During 2020 and 2021, staff and students were surveyed seven times to understand the impact COVID was having on their working lives (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Staff and student surveys conducted during COVID

Work from home was discussed in nearly all pandemic-related surveys. As an example, the Staff Covid-19 Check-In Pulse survey in May 2020 featured questions around managing workload whilst working from home. (Figure 3 - 5) **Engagement with the surveys and draft policy was high**. The University **received over 400 submissions**, which helped leaders to understand the types of flexibility that mattered most to staff.
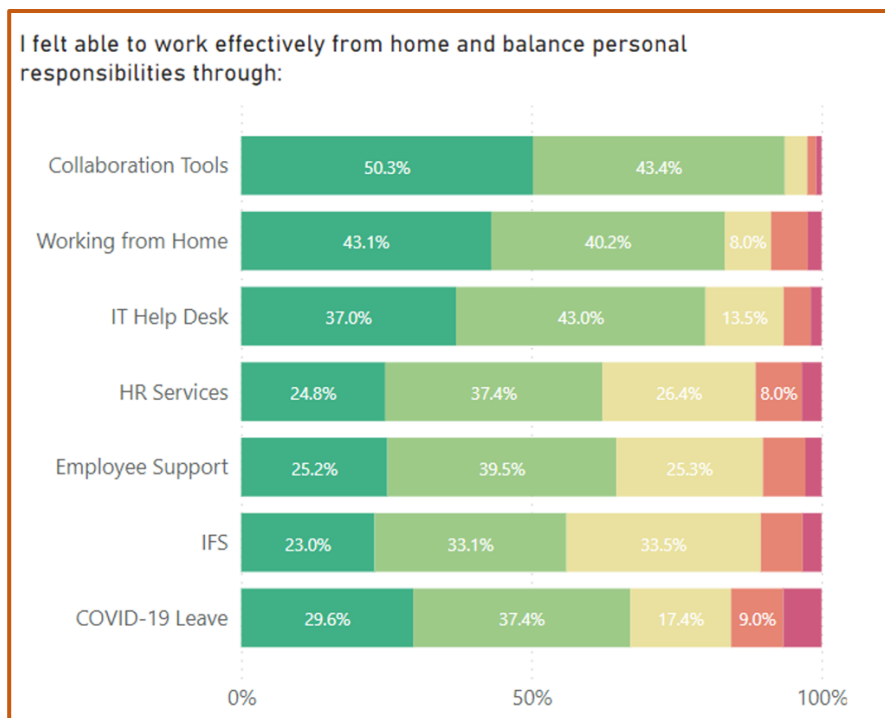
Figure 3. Staff were asked how they felt about working from home and the supports that helped them balance personal responsibilities.

Figure 4. Staff were also asked about the importance of different types of flexibility

9
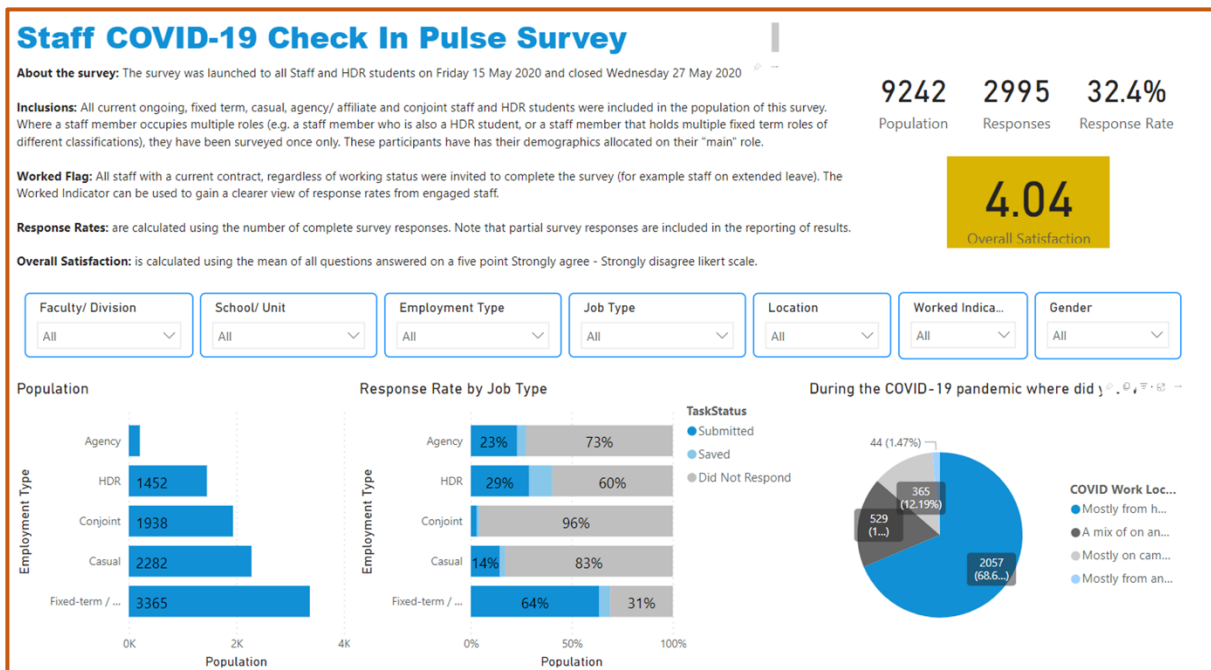
Figure 5. Staff COVID-19 Check-In Pulse Survey Results

Survey results were used to inform the development of a **new Flexible Work Policy** which was approved on 20 April 2022 (Figure 6) and became effective on the University's website on 28th April 2022.
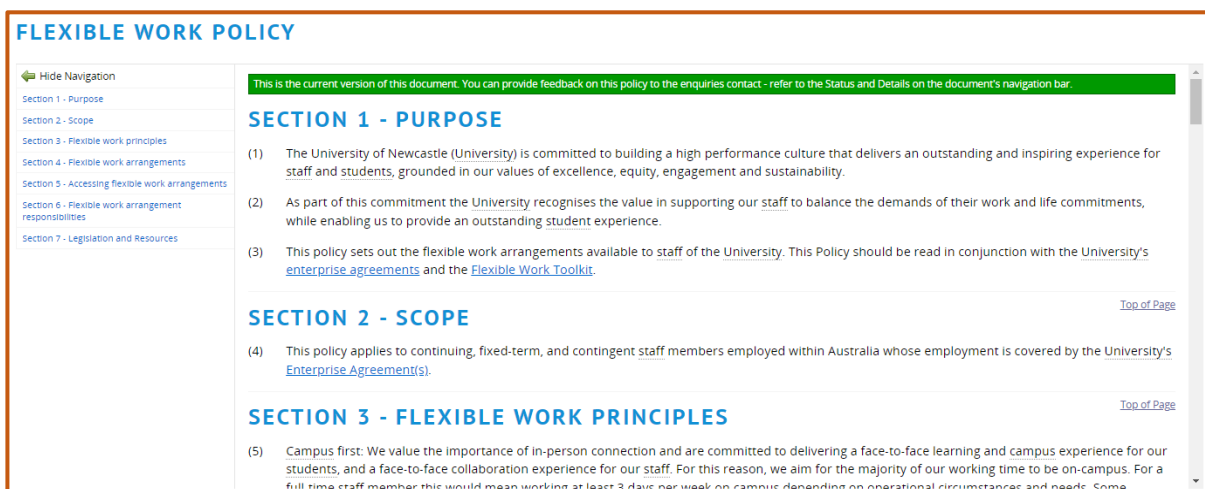
Figure 6. Flexible Work Policy

As part of the procedures developed to support the new policy, **additional types of flexible work** were articulated and defined to provide staff and their managers with additional understanding of how the policy can be used (See below, Table 3).

Location flexibility	Depending on the nature of their role, staff may be able to work from home or an alternative work location that is both safe and productive.
Hours flexibility	Based on operational needs and opportunities, staff may be able to take advantage of flexibility in their usual schedule of work. This may include but is not limited to varied start and/or finish times; working normal weekly hours of work over fewer days; varying normal working days; moving to a fractional load; or working hours over part-year periods.
Role flexibility	Staff may apply to share their role or part of their role with one or more other staff members. Role sharing may be approved where the specific role or duties to be shared can be undertaken by another staff member. This may include split/alternate days and/or weeks.
Leave flexibility	Staff may apply to purchase additional annual leave during a calendar year. Staff may apply for various forms of paid and unpaid leave in accordance with the University's Enterprise Agreements. Some forms of paid leave may be granted at a full or half pay.

Table 3. Types of flexible work

To assist staff with their understanding of the new flexible work options and to help them navigate the processes involved, a comprehensive **online Flexible Work Toolkit** was developed and made available as a Sharepoint site in June 2022, creating a one-stop shop for resources related to flexible work (Figure 7).
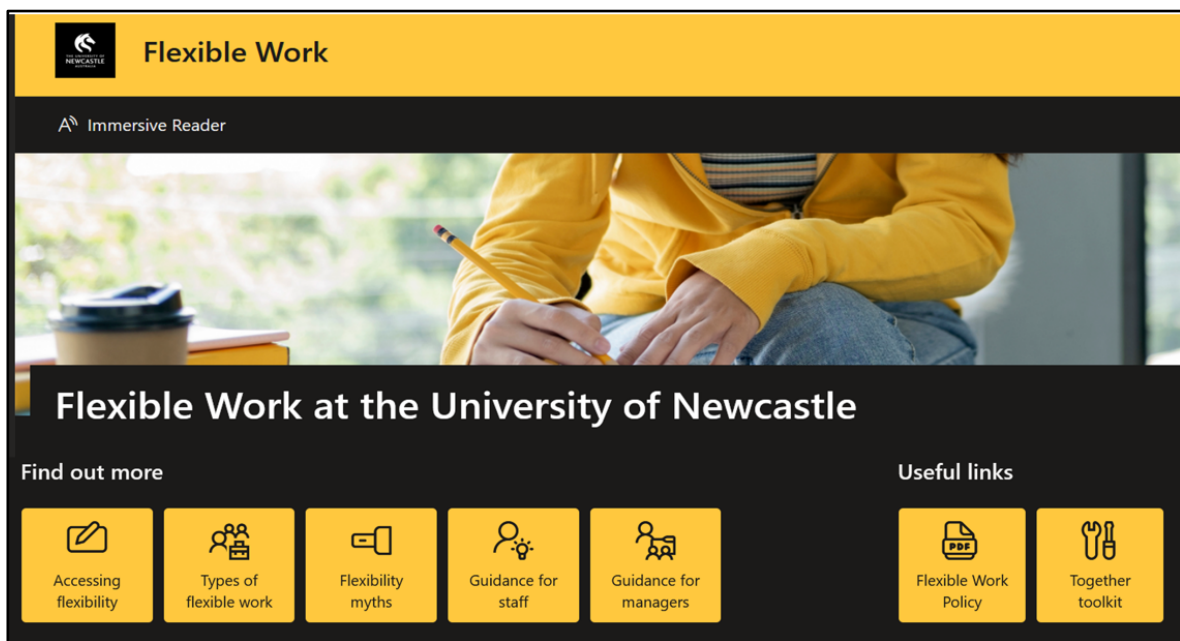
Figure 7. Flexible Work Toolkit webpage.

In the **24 hours after launching the tools online, over 2,400 staff accessed** the material.

The Flexible Work Toolkit includes a **dedicated section for Managers** to assist them in better supporting staff in balance with operational needs (See below, Figure 8).
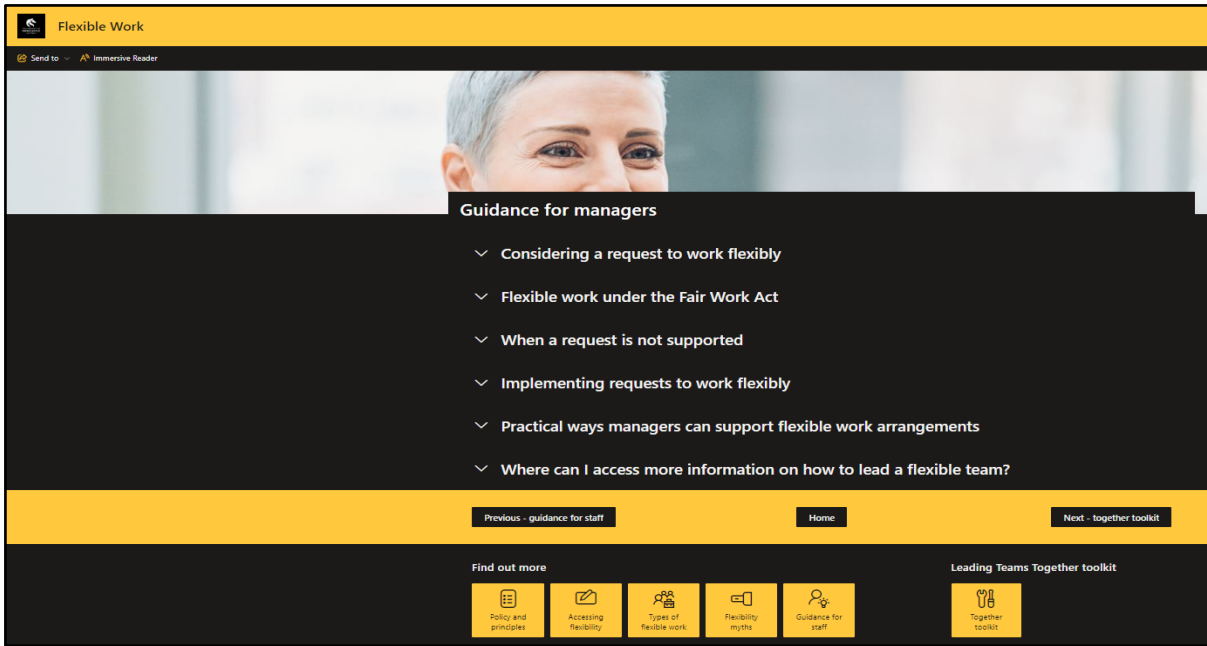
Figure 8. Guidance for Managers Toolkit

In addition to the Toolkit, the University's Resources Division conducted **management training sessions** for school, college, and divisional leaders. (Figure 9) The leaders were educated and supported on a range of flexible working options, including women seeking career progression with a young family.

Figure 9. Sample slide from Management Training Sessions that took place in May-June 2022

Training sessions were conducted in May and June 2022, with management teams from areas across the University attending (See below, Table 4). Management then championed sessions that were run for their respective staff cohorts.

College	No.
Pro Vice-Chancellors	3
Dean/Assistant Deans	7
Heads of School	12
Faculty Managers	3
Director/Associate Directors	11
Executive Officers	18
Total	**54**
Division	
Deputy Vice-Chancellors	3
Pro Vice-Chancellors	6
Directors/Associate Directors	49
General Manager	1
Executive Officers	11
Total	**70**
TOTAL	**124**

Table 4. Training of Management on Flexible Work

Cygnet Action 2: Increasing awareness of workplace practices designed to support carers through flexible work arrangements and better management of career breaks

To **increase awareness of workplace practices designed to support carers** as they entered into FWA, to provide better management of career breaks, and to improve workplace culture, the University developed a number of initiatives (Table 5):

Initiative 1	**Keep in Touch option for staff going on parental leave**
Initiative 2	**Enboard Platform enhancement to keep staff connected**
Initiative 3	**Gift pack for staff going on parental leave**
Initiative 4	**Launch of Balance2Life hub with resources for carers**
Initiative 5	**Carers campaign to raise staff awareness via The Loop and new screensavers**
Initiative 6	**Improved access to and provisions within Special Studies Program for academics with carers responsibilities**
Initiative 7	**Provision of funding for carer expenses for Women in Research Program participants**
Initiative 8	**Improved recognition of career interruption within promotion processes**
Initiative 9	**Pilot core meeting hours in the College of Health, Medicine and Wellbeing**

Table 5: Nine Key Initiatives of Workplace Practices Designed to Support Carers 2020-2023

Initiative 1: Keep in Touch option for staff going on parental leave:

A *Keep in Touch* option is available for staff going on parental leave by mutual agreement with their manager. While there is no obligation to keep in touch, some staff like being kept informed of what is happening in the workplace which often assists with return-to-work plans. Staff are encouraged to discuss if, and how, that communication should occur. Established Onboarding Officers in each School or Unit can also assist with this process. *Keep in Touch* information is contained under the Managing Family Responsibilities section of the University's website and is also referenced in the University's Parental Leave Guidelines.

Initiative 2: Enboard Platform enhancement to keep staff connected

In April 2023, the University piloted a new platform called *Enboard* to optimise the onboarding experience for new staff. After 6 months of trialling *Enboard*, the University seized the opportunity to utilise the platform for staff going on and, returning from, parental leave to enhance the Keep in Touch process. During August and September 2023, workflows were developed to identify key journey points where connection with staff members would occur and personalised messages developed, with an example provided as per Figure 10 below. This Pilot was launched for National Carers Week (15 to 21 October) and communicated to staff via the University's internal communication resource, *The Loop*, on 17 October **(ASBAP 5.6)**.
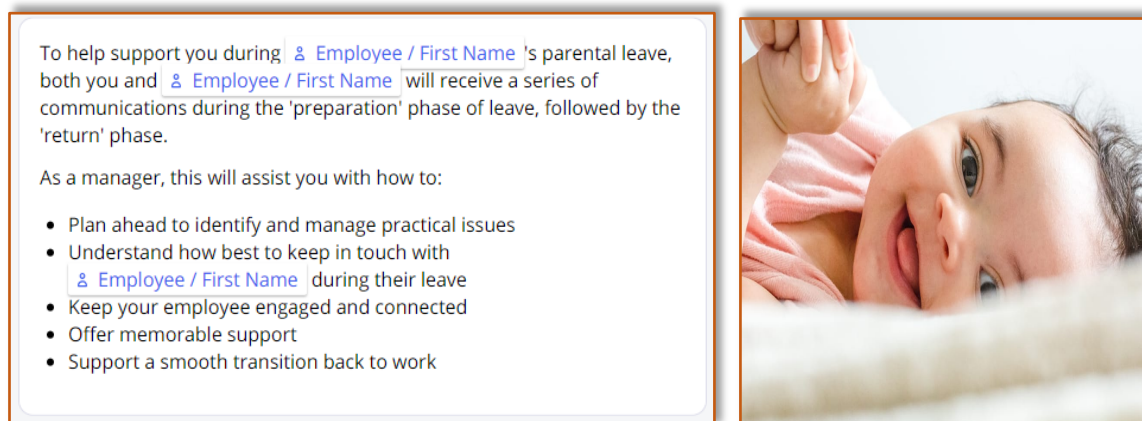
Figure 10. Example of message from *Enboard* to Manager.

Initiative 3: Gift Pack for Staff Going on Parental Leave

Similar to the Welcome Pack that is sent to new starters as part of the Onboarding Pilot, the University decided to replicate this approach by providing staff going on parental leave with a gift pack that included a Future Student Onesie, a scented candle and box of tea (Figure 11). Again, this was launched as part of National Carers Week.

Figure 11. Gift package for new parents

Initiative 4: Launch of Balance2Life hub with resources for carers

As part of the University's commitment to staff well-being, including balancing work and family life, the University launched the *Balance2Life* hub in October 2021 to all staff. This comprehensive site includes a range of health and wellness support, as well as tailored resources to support staff going on, and returning from parental leave. It also supports a Managers *Moments Dashboard* (Figure 12).

In addition to resources for staff going on and returning from parental leave, there are also resources to support staff with eldercare or disability care responsibilities.

Thankfully, we have you covered in this area with our **Parental Leave Toolkit for Managers**. This Smartcoach will serve as your playbook through every stage of your team member's parental leave journey, covering the run-up to the period of leave, the time away and return to work. We allocate professional and personal tasks throughout your team members leave journey as a call to action to help you take charge.

Figure 12. Parental Leave Toolkit for Managers

Initiative 5: Carers campaign to raise staff awareness via The Loop and new screensavers

At the commencement of September 2023, the University featured an article in *'The Loop'* (the University's main communication platform for staff) which shared the results of a pulse survey focused on support for carers. This survey was distributed as part of the Employee Experience Framework which has a commitment to '….. balance work and life to achieve success, work safely and enhance wellbeing'. The article also promoted a range of resources to support staff with caring responsibilities such as the Balance2Life platform, the Flexible Work Toolkit and the Parental Leave Guideline and new screen savers were purposely developed to feature a diverse range of caring scenarios (e.g. caring for children, eldercare and disability care) which were on rotation on the staff carousel (Figure 13).

Figure 13. Image of screensaver for Carers Campaign in staff lunch room

To recognise the significance of National Carers Week (15 to 21 October), the University used this platform to continue the Carers campaign commenced in August/September by including another story in *The Loop*, this time adding a personal element by featuring 'staff as carers' stories. In addition to the re-promotion of resources, recirculating screen savers (Figure 14) and promoting an Eldercare Webinar, the campaign also provided the opportunity to launch the new Enboard Pilot aimed at the provision of a more optimal and personalised Keeping in Touch program for staff on parental leave.

Figure 14. Images used in screensavers as part of the Carers Campaign

Initiative 6: Improved access to and provisions within Special Studies Program for academics with carers responsibilities

The specific action from ASBAP was for the Special Studies Program (SSP) Policy to be updated to exclude the minimum requirement to be away overseas (2 months). As part of the work on this cygnet, it was deemed that applicants with exceptions based on carer responsibilities could adequately rely on Section 6a of the Policy (Figure 15), which states that "SSP of less than two months overseas may be considered with the approval of the Pro Vice Chancellor" (PVC). If PVC approval for travel of less than two months was not sought by the academic as part of their application, the SSP Officer would apply on their behalf. In addition, SSP candidates with caring responsibilities are also provided with additional financial support to take dependent children with them overseas. **(ASBAP 5.1)**

General Principles of the SSP

(6)   SSP will generally be for a maximum period of 6 months, with a continuous period of two months or more away from home. However, the offer of a period of SSP will be flexible to allow for the needs to the applicant and the University, and shall take into account any reasonable requests for flexibility including matters such as:-

    a. SSP of less than two months overseas may be considered with the approval of the Pro Vice-Chancellor;

    b. Staff involved in teaching on a trimester basis will not be disadvantaged.

(7)   Where forms are set and published for application, determination of and appeal of decisions for SSP, then such forms are the prescribed forms, and

Figure 15. General Principles of the SSP

Initiative 7: Provision of funding for carer expenses for Women in Research Program participants

The Women in Research (WIR) program (introduced in 2018 in support of ASBA) provides early and mid-career women in research (academic levels B and C) with dedicated mentoring and structured support so that they may focus intensively on research and re-establish, strengthen, and accelerate

their research careers. Post Bronze Award, the University supported participants with caring responsibilities by covering family/carer expenses when attending research-related conferences or focus on research outputs at home. For the four years of its implementation, eight participants received funding specifically for children/carer needs. (see Table 11 in Outcomes below) **(ASBAP 5.3).**

Initiative 8: Improved recognition of career interruption within promotion processes

Promotion information sessions for equity cohorts have been held annually from 2018 to 2023. Initially these promotion sessions were for women. In 2022, the scope was broadened to be inclusive to all genders with a focus raising awareness of carers responsibilities that extend beyond motherhood. The focus in these sessions was on career interruption and how to draft relative to opportunity statements reflective of carers responsibilities. Staff who attended these sessions had experienced career interruptions, such as extended leave and/or returned to work on a fractional basis due to carer responsibilities (Table 6). To assist further, attendees were also invited to have drafts of their equity statements reviewed by the Manager, Equity Diversity & Inclusion. Promotion Panel members also undertook panel training, which included the importance of recognising outputs relative to opportunity **(ASBAP 3.3)**.

Promotion Session	Promotion Year	Number of participants
Information Session for Women	2018	38
	2019	35
	2020	31
	2021	33
Equity Information Session	2022	26
	2023	21

Table 6. Promotion Information Sessions

Initiative 9: Pilot family-friendly core meeting hours

To support carers further, core meeting hours are being piloted in the College of Health, Medicine & Wellbeing to ensure meeting times are carer friendly and flexible **(ASBAP 5.8)**. Figure 11 provides the wording recommended for Committee Terms of Reference within the College. See **Further Actions**.

The <xxxx Committee> meetings will be scheduled between the hours of 9:30am and 2:30pm on weekdays, unless impracticable for the majority of committee members. All members will have the option of attending by zoom. This supports the health and well-being of members and ensures meeting times will not disadvantage or preclude participation of members with carer responsibilities or other commitments outside of core business hours. When arranging meeting times, consideration will be given to part-time workers and those with other scheduled commitments (e.g. teaching commitments). Meeting times will be flexible and will be held on different days and/or at different times so that all members are able to attend the majority of scheduled meetings.

Figure 11. Core meeting hours statement for Committee Terms of Reference, ratified August 2023

Cygnet Action 3: Providing additional entitlements in the Enterprise Agreement for those with carers responsibilities and improve understanding of those entitlements

Since Bronze the University has engaged in two rounds of Enterprise Bargaining. In the most recent round, the University intentionally sought to provide additional entitlements for carers and to improve staff understanding of those entitlements.

Parental Leave

The University offers 26 weeks paid parental leave which can be taken at full- or half-pay and is separate from the Australian Government's Paid Parental Leave Scheme. The University also provides paid partner leave (secondary carer) to staff who are the partner of a primary carer (spouse, de facto, same sex partner). Partner leave can be taken during the three weeks prior to the expected birth or placement of a child and up to six months after the birth or placement of a child.

The University's Parental Leave Guidelines provides comprehensive parental leave information for staff and was **updated in 2019** to reflect new Enterprise Agreement provisions that included enhanced leave arrangements where a pregnancy was terminated by miscarriage, still birth or due to a life-threatening circumstance as well as increasing partner leave from 2 to 3 weeks. In **October 2023, the Guidelines were again updated** to reflect new and additional Enterprise Agreement provisions which include equal paid leave for parental bereavement and access to life leave for medical appointments including staff experiencing difficulties with pregnancy e.g. IVF. **(Figure 16; ASBAP 5.4)**.
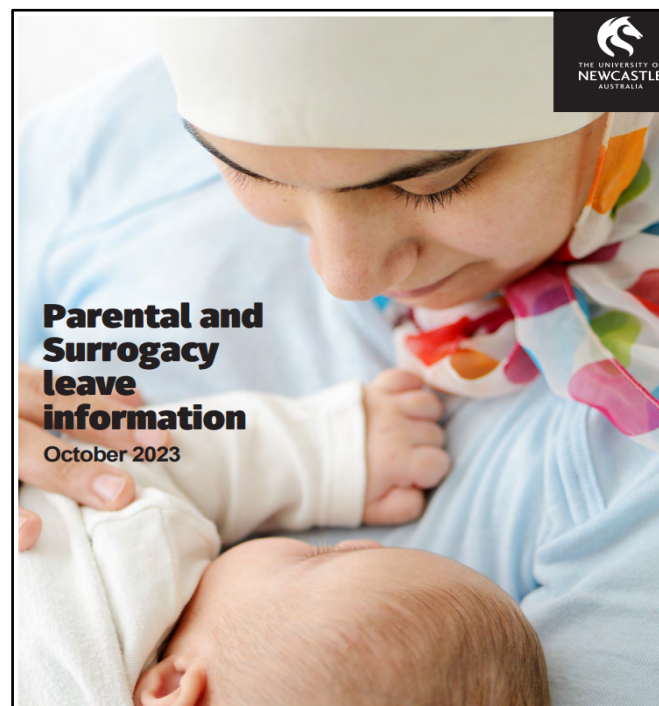
Figure 16. Parental and Surrogacy Leave Booklet

Personal Leave (Carers and Life Leave)

The University provides for a staff member, other than a casual staff member, to take up to 25 days paid personal leave in any 12- month period. In developing its new Enterprise Agreement (endorsed September 2023) the University provided further flexibility of personal leave for staff through the **introduction of 10 days 'Life Leave'** which can be taken **in addition to Carers Leave**. Example

scenarios may include (but are not limited to) school holiday care, grandparent responsibilities or eldercare responsibilities.

Balancing Family/Carer Responsibilities Work and Study Policy

To **complement the new entitlements for carers**, the University took the opportunity to reinforce its commitment to carers by **updating its Balancing Family/Carer Responsibilities and Study Policy** in May 2023. The Policy, originally developed to outline the University's commitment to supporting staff and students with family/caring responsibilities, was updated to include more inclusive language such as references to 'all genders' (rather than binary terminology), recognising inclusive definitions of family (e.g. same sex and de factor partners) as well as demonstrating awareness and sensitivities required for cultural differences. Links to the Parental Leave Guidelines and the Flexible Work Policy were also added as well as a **new Guideline for Staff/Students Bringing Children on Campus** (Figure 17).

SECTION 3 - FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES

(5)   The University recognises that:

a. family responsibilities impact on all aspects of an individual's life and are not confined to the 'private' sphere. The ways in which such responsibilities impact on work and education mean that they are the concern of the University as a whole;

b. family responsibilities affect all genders;

c. families are diverse. 'Family' is defined by the University in an inclusive way, and includes same sex and de facto partners. The University also recognises the wide kinship and family networks of many cultures, and wants to be sensitive to cultural differences in the implementation of its family-friendly policies;

d. students and staff should have access to the same educational and employment conditions regardless of their family responsibilities; and

e. leave and benefits should be reasonably provided to accommodate the roles of students and staff with respect to these family or carer responsibilities.

(6)   The University encourages a shared-care model whereby family and carer responsibilities are undertaken by all genders.

(7)   The provisions for children on campus (see Managing Family Responsibilities for more information) for staff and students are part of the University's affirmative action for care-givers.

Figure 17. Extract from Balancing Family/Carer Responsibilities Work and Study Policy

Cygnet Action 4: Improving on-campus facilities for support carers while at work

The ASBAP committed the University to (1) the creation of a childcare working party, and (2) continue to apply for Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Accreditation each year.

Establishment of Childcare Working Party

The **Childcare Working Party** (project board) was established in 2020 to address gaps in childcare services (ASBAP 5.2). The objective of the project was to achieve an increase in childcare places (up to 200 over time if demand supports) on our Callaghan campus. To achieve this, a precinct approach near existing centres was explored. The focus has been on nursery placements (0-2), where demand currently outstrips supply, to ensure the service supports early career academics and students back into the workforce and study. Figure 18 (below) shows the summary of the childcare precinct project and timeframe developed with the Childcare Working Party.

2020

Project Board Established

University of Newcastle Childcare Strategy
Developed and approved and forms the strategic foundation of the project.

2021/2022

Physical Infrastructure Assessment
Supply and demand study and Concept Design work

Business Case
Development and approval sought

2023

Current **providers arrangements** fall due for renewal

2024 - 2025

Building one childcare centre for 0 to 2 babies

Figure 18. Summary of Childcare Precinct Project

Breastfeeding-Friendly Workplace accreditation

In response to ASBAP 5.7, the University continued to apply for Breastfeeding-Friendly Workplace re-accreditation to ensure its standards are the best practice for breastfeeding-mothers returning to work. This involved ensuring that a number of well-equipped, comfortable, and private breastfeeding spaces were available to staff across our campuses. It also involved refurbishment of existing buildings to accommodate breastfeeding mothers and their children. Breastfeeding spaces are now included as part of any new building design. An example of one of the Breastfeeding Rooms in shown in Figure 19.

Figure 19. Breastfeeding room in the University's V Building

Outcomes

Outcomes related to Cygnet Action 1: Developing a new flexible work policy and resources to better support carers

High engagement by staff visiting the Flexible Work webpages

Table 7 displays webpage analytics for the last 30 days to demonstrate current engagement, including the total number of viewers and visits of the different pages of the flexible work toolkit over the Sharepoint site's lifetime i.e.16 months. (**ASBAP 5.5).**

Content	Viewers	Visits
Front Page	1658	4925
Policy and Principles	1113	2480
Leading Teams: Together even when apart	627	1472
Flexible work home	66	87
Policy and Principles	42	48
Accessing Flexibility	32	52
Types of flexible work	32	49
Guidance for staff	29	41
Hours flexibility	11	20
Flexibility myths	23	30
Guidance for managers	19	26
UON Together Toolkit	22	28
Leave flexibility	5	7

Table 7. Viewers and Visits to Flexible Work webpages (last 30 days)

Increased resources for Managers to better manage a range of flexible work options for staff

A dedicated toolkit section designed for Managers and face-to-face training provided by the Resources Division initially and then ongoing support by key groups such as Gender Equity Committees and Human Resources **(ASBAP 5.5)**.

Engagement by staff with a range of communication methods to promote FWA options

Results from the Inspiring People Employee Experience Pulse Survey (March 2023) further demonstrates impact of communication channels (Policy, Toolkit, Manager etc.) to inform staff of options. The results also highlight the primary reasons for male and female staff taking FWA's was '*balancing work with home life*' and '*better work life balance*' and the most common FWA options utilised were '*work from home*' and '*hours flexibility*'. **(Figure 20; ASBAP 5.5)**
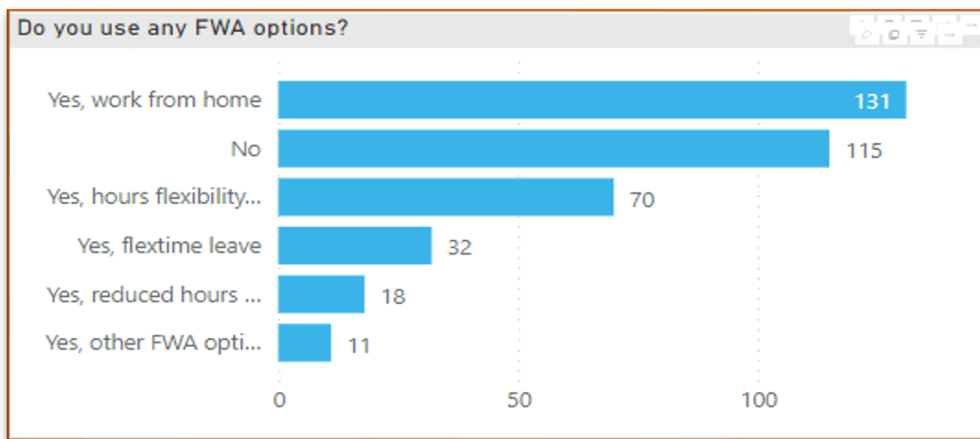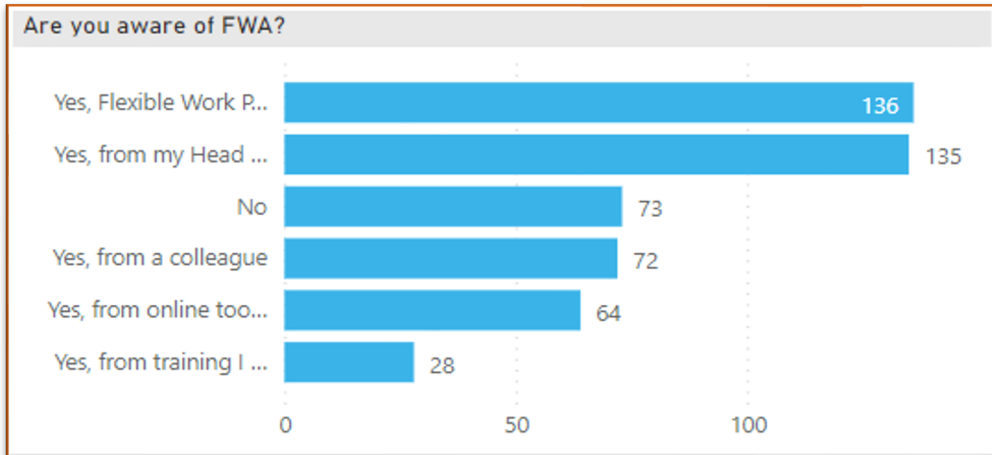
Figure 20. Female results from IPEX Pulse Survey

Increased number of staff utilising formal FWA options

Figure 21 shows the increase in the number of staff utilising FWA from 103 staff in 2018 to 174 staff in 2023 **(ASBAP 5.5)**.
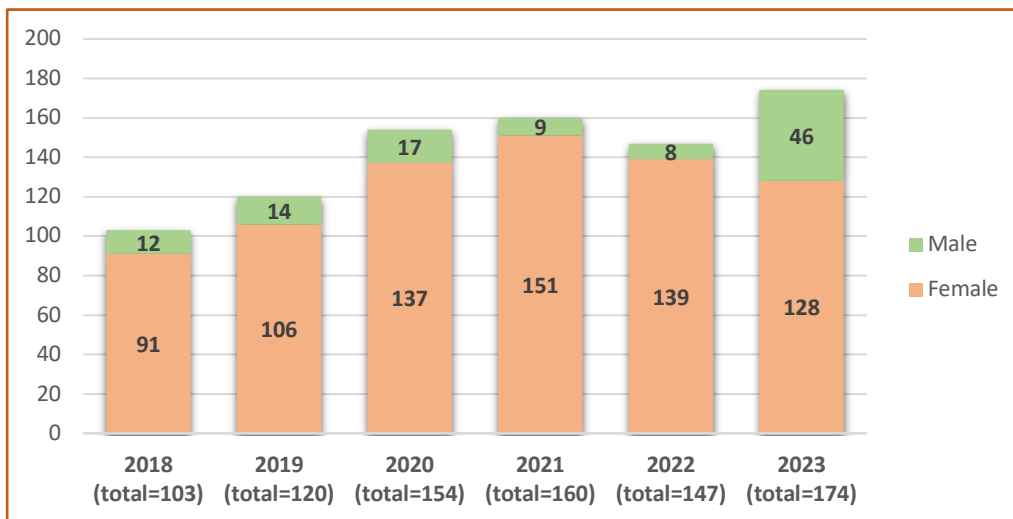
Figure 21. Number of staff utilising FWA options from 2018-2023, including differentiation by gender

Increased satisfaction by staff relating to workplace flexibility

Results from the 2023 'Your Voice' Staff Engagement Survey showed that >60% of Staff were satisfied across all measures of flexibility (Table 8), with up to 7% increases from the 2021 Survey **(ASBAP 5.5)**

SURVEY MEASURE	2023 STAFF-REPORTED SATISFACTION		
	Parent with dependent children	**Women**	**Men**
Our University has enough flexible work arrangements to enable me to meet my carer responsibilities.	78%^	79%^	79%
I maintain a good balance between work and other aspects of my life.	62%	66%	65%
I have the flexibility I need to manage my work and other commitments.	71%	74%	75%
Note:*All measures reported above represent an increase ranging from 1-7% from the 2021 survey; increases >5% are denoted with a ^*			

Table 8. Results from the 2023 'Your Voice' Staff Engagement Survey

Outcomes related to Cygnet Action 2: Increasing awareness of workplace practices designed to support carers through flexible work arrangements and better management of career breaks

The outcomes related to Initiatives 1 (Keep in Touch), 2 (Enboard Platform), 3 (Gift Pack), and 5 (Carers Campaign) are largely soft interventions aimed at improving awareness and workplace culture. See Impact section below. In contrast, we have quantitative data in relation to initiatives 4, 6, 7 and 8). Initiative 9 is still in pilot phase.

Strong engagement with Balance 2 Life Wellness hub for Carer Support/Resources (Initiative 4)

- 1795 staff registrations for the hub.
- As a result of the Carers Campaign, parenting and carers support was the third most viewed topic, with the parenting and carers resource page the most viewed.
- 4% of the hub users who completed the 'work life setup' survey are new mums, 54% are responsible for caring for a family member or friend and 44% have children under 12 years.
- Of the 334 users who have set profile preferences, 28% have set a preference for family and parenting related content to appear in their feed and 6% have set this for eldercare.

Figure 22. Current statistics related to staff engagement with Balance 2 Life Wellness hub

Increased the number of women approved for SSP by the year 2023 by 15% (Initiative 6; ASBAP 5.1). In 2023, 60% of the total staff who applied and were approved for SSP were women. The proportion exceeds the 10% increase target set for Bronze by 5%. (Table 9)

Year	Total Staff	Females
2018	62	28 (45%)
2019	54	27 (50%)
2020	4*	3* (75%)
2021	14*	9* (64%)
2022	25	13 (52%)
2023	25	15 (60%)
*Note that the number of total staff approved for SSP in 2020 and 2021 significantly decreased due to COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions.		

Table 9. SSP application approval by year

Provision of funding to be used for carer expenses in the Women in Research program (Initiative 7; ASBAP 5.3)
Eight Women in Research Recipients provided funding to attend overseas conference and/or progress research output through targeted financial carer assistance. (Table 10)

Year	Targeted financial assistance	Funds ($AUD)
2018	Carer to assist with child travel to international conference and presentations	4,570
	Long day care for 20 weeks	3,600
	Child tutoring assistance 40 weeks	2,000
2019	Out of School Hours Childcare - 3 afternoons/week	2,400
	Childcare fees (attending international conference) + School vacation workshops	6,840
	Carer to assist with child travel to international conference and keynote presentation	4,570
2020/21	Part day care 3days/week for 26 weeks (assist with after school activities)	7,800
2022	Out of School Hours Childcare 40 weeks	4,000

Table 10. Women in Research Fellowship carer funding to achieve sustained research-focused outputs by supporting work/family balance obligations (i.e. child/carer payments)

Improved recognition of career interruption within promotion processes (Initiative 8; ASBAP 3.3)
137 staff with Relative to Opportunity (RTO) statements (carer reasons) were successfully promoted between 2018 to 2023 inclusive. (Table 11)

Year	RTO (carers) FEMALE	RTO (carers) MALE	RTO (carers) Total
2018	20	2	22
2019	29	3	32
2020	12	2	14
2021	21	1	22
2022	15	5	20
2023	22	5	27

Table 11. Successful Promotions with RTO (Carer Reasons)

Outcomes related to Action 3: Providing additional entitlements in the Enterprise Agreement for those with carers responsibilities and improve understanding of those entitlements

Increased the parental leave return rate by 18% from 2018 to 2022. Table 12 provides further detail by year. As this is an annual reported figure, 2023 numbers will be available in April 2024. **(ASBAP 5.4, 5.6, and 5.7)**.

Year	No	Yes	Total
2018	13	34	72%
2019	10	44	81%
2020	6	58	90%
2021	17	69	80%
2022	7	64	90%

Table 12. Parental Leave return rate (employment 3 months after return)

Significant uptake of the University's new Life Leave for staff. Since the introduction of this new leave provision as part of the new Enterprise Agreement which commenced on 20 September 2023, female staff members have booked 1571 days and male staff members have booked 558 days. Life leave has been used to date by staff to complement carers leave and has afforded greater flexibility to staff overall to balance work and home/life responsibilities.

Outcomes related to Action 4: Improving on-campus facilities for support carers while at work

Approval granted to build an additional childcare centre on the University's main campus.

As a result of increasing building costs and a significant uplift in the capital investment required for the delivery of a new childcare centre, the University is currently exploring the most appropriate delivery model for achieving an increase in the availability of 0-2 year old placements on campus. **(ASBAP 5.2)**

Accredited by the Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace (2020 to 2024) in recognition of meeting best practice for a supportive environment for breastfeeding women in the workplace **(ASBAP5.7).**

A quote from the Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace upon accreditation in August 2020:

> '*They have consistently demonstrated outstanding support for breastfeeding staff and have strived to provide the best support to their staff when they return to work after having their baby. The Australian Breastfeeding Association is proud to call the University of Newcastle one of its most dedicated accredited BFW.*'

Figure 23. Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Accreditation

Impact

From September-October 2023, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with 15 University staff (12 female and 3 male carers) who had accessed at least one of the carer supports from the University following ASBA in 2018. Most participants commended the University for the support it provides for carers, with reports of positive impacts in their work (achievements in work responsibilities, success in career goals and/or progression, job satisfaction, and maintained work identity) as well as their personal life (achievements in parent/carer responsibilities, improved health and wellbeing, good work-life balance, and enhanced relationships).

Figure 24 shows the various carer supports at the University and the resulting positive impacts with supporting quotes.
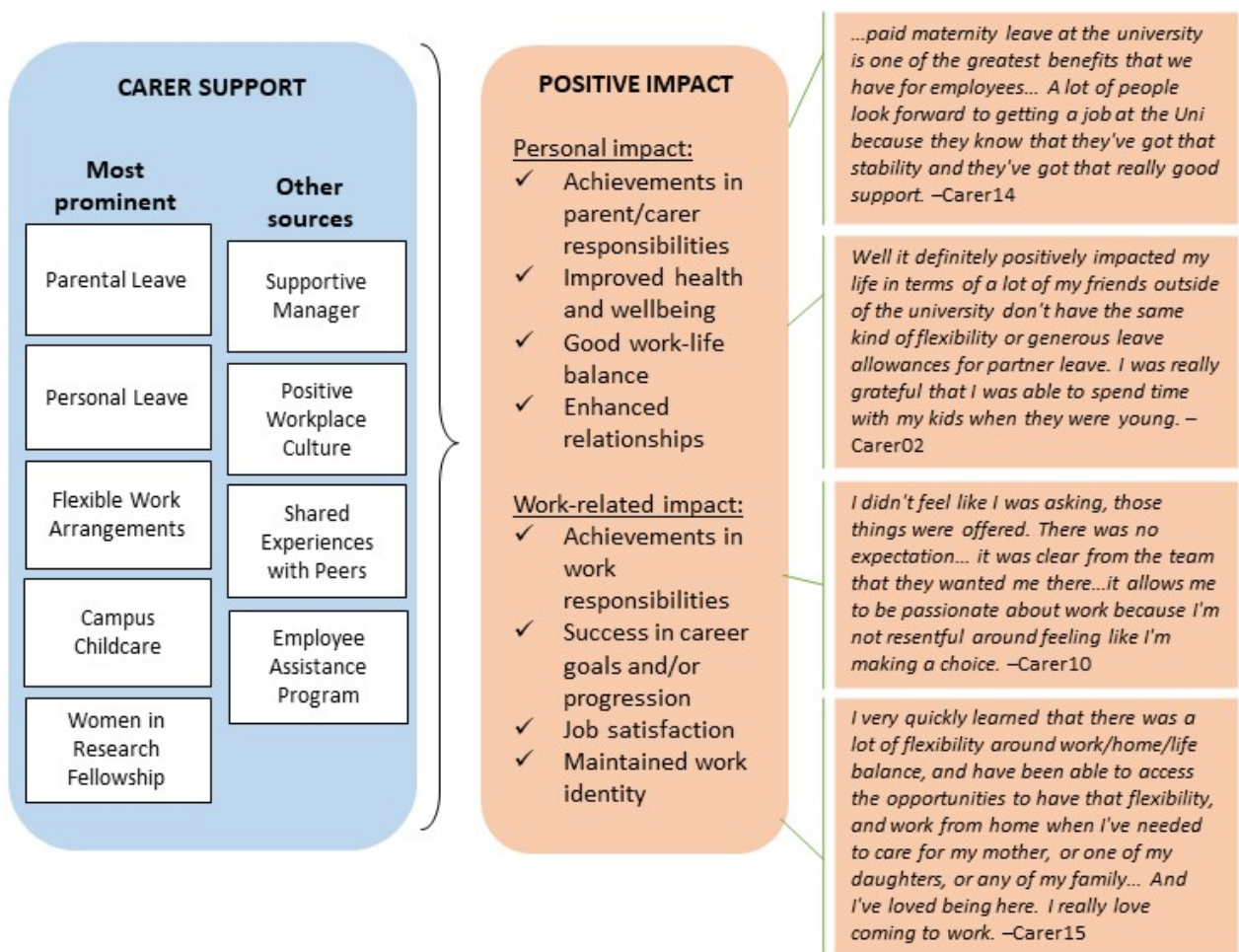
Figure 24. Positive Impact of Carer Support at the University of Newcastle

Flexible Work (Cygnet Action 1; ASBAP 5.5)

Of all the supports offered by the University, FWA was the most impactful for all participants, underpinning their ability to balance work and carer responsibilities. The most utilised forms of FWAs included work from home, flexible working hours (start/finish times), and fractional appointments. Personalisation of FWAs was especially important, to ensure an appropriate fit with the participants

unique circumstances and preferences. One concern expressed by several participants was that of FWAs as a 'double-edged sword'. As Carer13 explained: *Flexibility to me is a double-edged sword. Flexibility means you can work anytime and anywhere, which is great, except that you also might feel compelled to work anytime and everywhere. So, it cuts both ways.* This suggests that implementation of FWAs should be considered alongside work expectations and work allocation to ensure that flexibility does not increase workload.

SUPPORT	EXAMPLE QUOTE FOR IMPACT
Flexible Work	Work from home - Carer05: *…if I'm not able to say work from home several afternoons a week, then I would have to drop to part-time, because I don't want my kids to be alone in an empty house… they're not distracting me from doing my work, it's actually highly productive to sit in my home office and I know that the kids are just down the hall doing their homework, but I'm there if there's anything that they need. It's much more efficient for me. It's something that's really important to me.* Flexible hours - Carer10: *So flexibility in working hours, being able to start later, start earlier, take time out within the day and make up that time as opposed to having to put in class or leave requests and all that additional admin. It's just that do your hours within the day or within the week and it's all good. Get your job done… knowing that if I can still work full-time and not miss out on those activities with my kids, if I can still get my job done and still do my hours across the day… Because then it allows me to be passionate about work because I'm not resentful around feeling like I'm making a choice.* Fractional appointments – Carer11: *I came back at four days a week… I did [maintain that] until the year before last, until my eldest went to school…The reduced workload was fantastic.*

Table 13. Qualitative evidence, Flexible Work Arrangements

Keep in Touch (Cygnet Action 2; ASBAP 5.6)

Despite this being available as part of the Parental Leave policy, no participants were aware of this provision. A key area of improvement is increasing awareness of this provision and enhancing the experience for staff (particularly on their return to work) which will be achieved through the new Enboard program mentioned in the Output/Activity section. This is especially important as several participants experienced hardship in their return to work following parental leave due to a lack of communication regarding changes in their team or role during their leave.

Women in Research Fellowships (Cygnet Action 2; ASBAP 5.3)

For participants that had accessed the Fellowship funding specifically to support childcare, this was crucial in ensuring they were able to focus on their research and recover their research trajectory. Of note is the community of ongoing technical and compassionate support that the Fellowship provided for women, with many participants reporting feeling supported and valued as both an academic and a mother. (See below, Table 14)

SUPPORT	EXAMPLE QUOTE FOR IMPACT
Women in Research Fellowship	Carer08: *I shall say that I really benefit a lot from the women fellowship grant… no other funding will provide such great flexibility and considerate thoughts to help with the researchers, especially women researchers… by utilizing this available fund, I can achieve the greater balance between work and the life of carer… due to the Women fellowship grant, I just got a really great result for the publication output last year as the academic dashboard showed my research outcome for general publication in Q1 ranking.*

Table 14. Qualitative evidence, Funding for carers expenses as part of equity fellowship

Special Studies Program (Cygnet Action 2; ASBAP 5.1)

The impact of the SSP for supporting carers appeared mixed. One participant (Carer01), a single parent, accessed financial support for her children to accompany her on the SSP trip which consequently accelerated her research. Other participants however, reported barriers in organising childcare or receiving financial support for their child/family to accompany them, and they were consequently unable to partake in SSP or had to substantially modify their travel plans.

SUPPORT	EXAMPLE QUOTE FOR IMPACT
Special Studies Program	Carer01: *I had SSP and that was also amazing, that support I then got, to take the kids with me for six months, and we went to [country] for six months. That trip created, or set up, what I've been able to do. Even though it was such hard work... it let me build some of those contacts that subsequently that have become important for my research now, or my teaching.*

Table 15. Qualitative evidence, Carers support provisions while on SSP

Parental Leave (Cygnet Action 3; ASBAP 5.4)

Participants expressed that the Parental Leave policy was superior to what is offered by other organisations and institutions, in terms of leave entitlements and flexibility. In particular, the ability to personalise implementation of the Policy to best suit the unique circumstances of staff was highly impactful.

SUPPORT	EXAMPLE QUOTE FOR IMPACT
Parental Leave (including Partner Leave)	Carer02: *It definitely positively impacted my life in terms of a lot of my friends outside of the University don't have the same kind of flexibility or generous leave allowances for partner leave. So I was really grateful that I was able to spend time with my kids when they were young.*

Table 16. Qualitative evidence, Parental leave provisions

Personal Leave (Cygnet Action 3)

Many participants had accessed personal leave, allowing them to effectively balance carer and work responsibilities without financial repercussions or having to use annual leave. This was especially important for participants because it meant they did not have to use Annual Leave which was then saved for its intended purpose of allowing staff to relax and rejuvenate (i.e., achieve good work life balance). Carer15, an Aboriginal Staff member, spoke of the positive impact of the University's

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leave (10 days of each, paid and unpaid), which she accessed for cultural purposes – an essential part of wellbeing and feeling supported as a Carer.

SUPPORT	EXAMPLE QUOTE FOR IMPACT
Personal Leave	Carer14: *I'm just extremely grateful about the benefits that the university gives you. We've got an extensive amount of personal leave that they give you every year, and I think that that's just so helpful… the last few months I've been taking some personal leave to take care of mum. I would say obviously that part has been a lot easier because I've been taking some personal leave, so I haven't had to try and juggle doing work as well as her [mum].*

Table 17. Qualitative evidence, Personal leave provisions

Childcare (Cygnet Action 4; ASBAP 5.2)

Childcare was the most prominent concern for parents of younger children given that childcare must be addressed for a parent to return to work and fulfill job responsibilities. The on-campus childcare centre was highly impactful for parents: its close proximity to the workplace cut down on commute times and provided parents access to their child, if needed. Carer11, a parent of a child with disabilities, shared: *It's so nice to be able to have him on-campus. And one of his seizures happened while on campus; to be able to be only two minutes away was very helpful.*

Moreover, parents had high trust in the centre staff and felt that it was an excellent institution providing high quality education and care. However, due to its excellence, it is also in high demand and some participants were not able to enrol their child due to the lack availability. Even participants who were successful reported waiting lists and other barriers prior to their child's enrolment. This highlights the need to increase accessibility of on-campus childcare, to ensure that the benefits are realised on a broader scale.

SUPPORT	EXAMPLE QUOTE FOR IMPACT
Childcare	Carer03: *So that was fabulous having that at the Callaghan Campus, that really helped with managing things and quality of life. The fact that I could just drop him [child] and then walk two minutes to my office was really excellent, just knowing that he was nearby and it's really high quality care as well. It's a really fabulous institution. So yeah, we're really, really happy with that. I'm really grateful to have that available.*

Table 18. Qualitative evidence, Childcare centres

Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace (Cygnet Action 4; ASBAP 5.7)

The impact of the University's dedicated spaces for supporting carers has been positive, with workplace practices externally assessed through accreditation.

SUPPORT	EXAMPLE QUOTE FOR IMPACT
Breastfeeding-Friendly Workplace Accreditation	*Anonymous*: As a new mum returning to work I really appreciate these areas to make me feel comfortable and not feel as if i have to choose between weaning and working.*

	Anonymous*: As a breastfeeding mother, the support of University to return to work and continue to breastfeed has been amazing. Thank you. *Staff testimonial made publicly in 'The Loop' (University Staff communication platform on SharePoint); names have been removed for the purpose of this report

Table 19. Qualitative evidence, Breastfeeding Facilities

Other Supports

Throughout the interviews, several themes emerged of other supports that were important for Carers. First, having a supportive manager appeared to be pivotal as many policies and support systems are managed locally through discussions between staff and their manager. As Carer05 described: *I think it ends up then very much depending on what kind of manager you have, and not all managers are equally flexible.* Second, participants expressed the importance of a positive workplace culture where parents and carers were accepted and felt comfortable to express needs around carer responsibilities. Carer10's positive experience as a parent at the University was attributed to this: *I think I've been really fortunate in having really supportive environments and finding my way into those settings.* Third, many participants found great support through sharing experiences with peers/colleagues with similar life circumstances. Finally, a few participants who expressed considerable hardship during their carer journey found great support, and help with mental wellbeing, through the Employee Assistance Program (EAP; a free counselling service). For example, Carer04: *I got to the point where I felt like I wasn't managing and coping as well as I should… between the supporting of my wife with her health… having a new baby, juggling a significant governance role responsibility, trying to maintain research outputs, all those different streams, I guess you could say just trying to manage that kind of wore me down. And so the EAP was really helpful at that point to give me a landing pad to talk it through and try to work out ways to prevent that cycle happening again.*

In recognition of these other supports, further efforts to support Carers at the University might include:
- Ensure managers are supportive of Carers, engage in discussions with staff, and oversee policy implementation;   - Reinforce a positive institutional culture surrounding carer responsibilities and work-life balance;   - Establish mentoring networks for Carers; and   - Increase information availability and referral to the EAP for carers.

Table 20. Considerations for further initiatives to support carers on the pathway to Silver

The ASWP will provide guidance in terms of how the University might best deliver these other supports and incorporate into the continued work on Cygnet Actions 1 and 2 as we continue on the path to Silver Award.

Further Actions

Ref	Rationale/Evidence	Actions	Year	Responsibility	Budget	Desired Outcome/Target
1	Demand for additional 0-2 age group childcare spaces, impacting on parents returning to work.	New building and/or expansion of existing childcare centres.	2024	Childcare Working Party IFS	Tbc	Increase in 0-2 spaces for childcare allowing staff to return to work post parental leave.
2	Enhanced *Keep in Touch* process to allow staff on parental leave to feel connected and re-engage with workforce	Implement *Keep in Touch* online platform, if 6-month pilot proves successful	April 2024 onwards	Human Resources	Minor – cost to Unit area for welcome pack.	Employee Experience and retention of staff
3	Core meeting hours to support carers in their participation in meetings	Review outcomes of College pilot of core meeting hours and provide institutional recommendation based on results, if 2024 pilot proves successful	2025 onwards	Human Resources Equity Diversity & Inclusion	N/A	Employee Experience and retention of staff
4	Build capacity of leaders with respect to understanding of challenges for staff with caring responsibilities.	EDI Training program for Leaders includes feature on staff as carers.	2024	Equity Diversity & Inclusion Human Resources	N/A	Leaders better equipped to have conversations with staff balancing work and caring responsibilities.
5	Staff with interruptions based on carer needs are not disadvantaged in career progression.	Equity Information sessions for Promotions	Annually	Human Resources	N/A	Successful promotion applications from academic staff with carer interruptions
6	Staff returning from parental leave are supported with comfortable rooms for breastfeeding.	Continue to apply for Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Accreditation	2024	Equity Diversity & Inclusion IFS	N/A Costs attached to upgrades of rooms if required	Parental leave return rates increase.
7	Many staff balance work responsibilities with caring responsibilities and require flexibility.	Promote resources for Carers	Quarterly	Equity Diversity & Inclusion Human Resources	N/A	Staff are aware of FWA options

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