# SAGE Cygnet Award Application
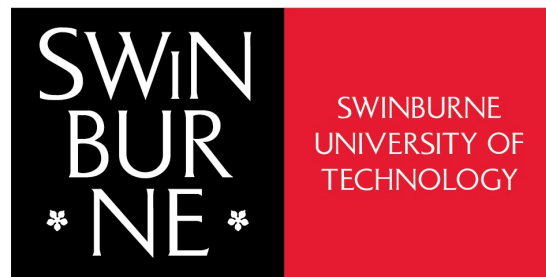




| Name of Institution | Swinburne University of Technology |
|---|---|
| Date of Application | 1 November 2023, resubmitted 30 April 2024 |
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# SWINBURNE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY: SAGE CYGNET #1

**Word limit – 2500 words (excluding the institutional context and excluding the action plan)**

| | ✓ Current Cygnet | **Barrier** . |
|---|---|---|
| [Mandatory] Institution-wide barrier | ✓ | Promotion |
| [Mandatory] Sub-group barrier | | |
| [Please select] Institution-wide/Sub-group barrier | | |
| [Please select] Institution-wide/Sub-group barrier | | |
| [Please select] Institution-wide/Sub-group barrier | | |

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# KEY BARRIER

The key barrier addressed in this Cygnet application is the Academic Promotions process. This process is the dominant internal pathway for individual career progression for academic staff at Swinburne University of Technology. It is an important tool for recognising and rewarding academic achievement and developing the University's staffing and leadership profile.

This Cygnet addresses the support available to improve women's participation in the promotions process and the barriers within the process itself. The sub barriers include:

- **Lower number -** of women applying for academic promotion
- **Understanding** – women's understanding of what is required to participate in the promotions process and their readiness for promotion
- **Process** – perception that the academic promotions process and requirements lack transparency and fairness (experience of women including carer status not adequately captured)
- **Support** – access to formal and informal networks

An inclusive academic promotion process and support mechanism is critical so that women feel confident and encouraged to progress their careers, and to enable other gender equity strategies such as increasing recruitment and retention.

# Cygnet application summary – Academic Promotions

## Barriers

- Lower number of women applying for promotion

- Women's understanding of what is required to participate and their readiness

- View that the process and requirements lack transparency & fairness (experience of women including carer status not adequately captured)

- Support - Access to networks

## Activities & Outputs

- Maintain and expand the Swinburne Women's Academic Network (SWAN) program

- Demystify and improve the promotion process

- Provide a culture of support

- Evaluate and report impact

## Outcomes

- Increase in number of applications from women and quality of applications

- Improved success rate of women applicants

- More women in leadership positions

- Policy shifts including greater focus on diversity & inclusion embedded in promotions process

- Internal recognition including VC Awards

## Impact

- Improved lived experience for academic women including greater sense of belonging and confidence to progress their careers

- Ecosystem of continued support:
  o safe space for development
  o opportunity for interdisciplinary networking
  o Mentees becoming mentors

- External publications

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**Further Action**

| Build academic manager capability to have more effective performance conversations | Sustainable growth of the SWAN program to enable more support for intersectional diversity | Review promotions process and enhance the collection and analysis of intersectional demographic data | Improve integration with academic promotions and YPD (performance & development process) |

SWIN BUR NE — SWINBURNE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

# EVIDENCE OF BARRIER

The key barriers to women participating in the academic promotions process were identified in 2014, by three women who had served on academic promotions panels prior to the self-assessment undertaken for the Athena Swan Bronze Application. At this time less than a quarter (23.4%) of the Professoriate (Level E Academics) were women, with 34.2% of the academic workforce identifying as women. To address the underrepresentation of women at senior academic levels, it was critical to further investigate and address the barriers to progression for academic women at Swinburne.

Figure 1 below demonstrates lower numbers of women applying for academic promotion.



| | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male promotions | 12 | 12 | 15 | 25 | 20 | 19 | 18 | 21 | 24 |
| Female promotions | 9 | 18 | 6 | 12 | 14 | 12 | 20 | 23 | 10 |
| Male applicants | 26 | 22 | 22 | 35 | 34 | 32 | 34 | 39 | 33 |
| Female applicants | 19 | 20 | 10 | 16 | 18 | 17 | 32 | 27 | 17 |
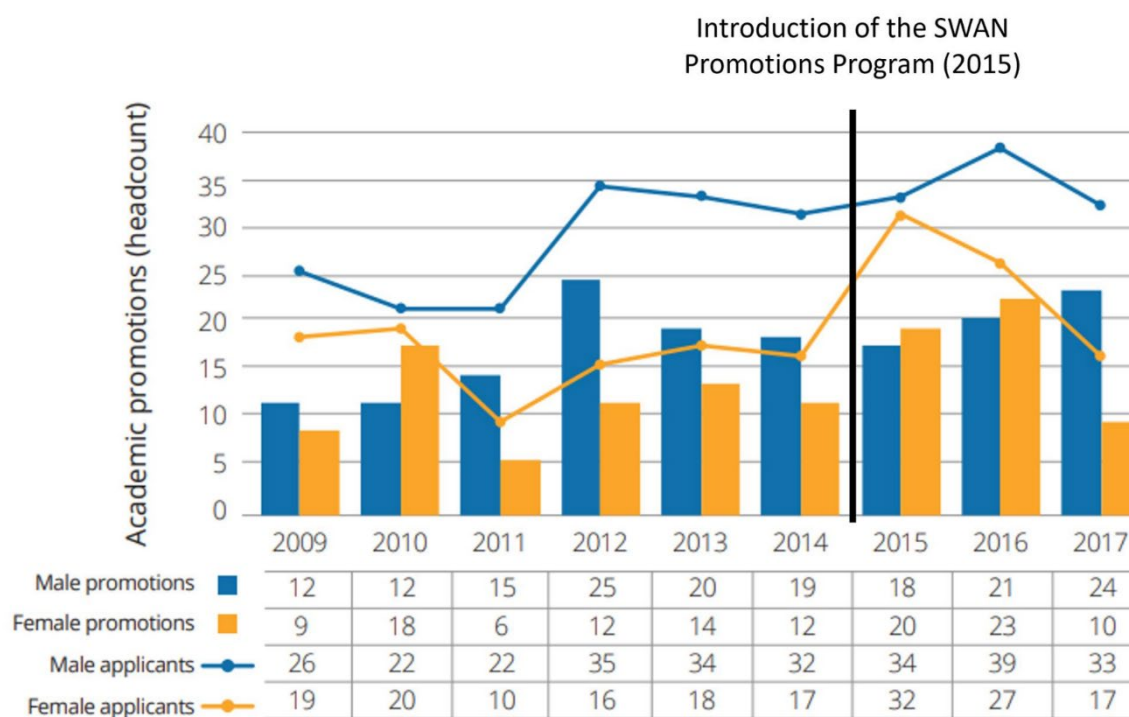
Figure 1 Academic applications and promotions headcount by gender (2009 – 2017)
*Source: Swinburne University of Technology Athena Swan Bronze Application*

While lower numbers of women applying for academic promotion can be partially attributed to the lower number of women in academic positions, this analysis was not completed in the years prior to 2014. With the implementation of the SAGE program of work and the delivery of a promotions dashboard we have been able to complete this analysis for the years 2014 – 2022. In 2014 there was little difference in promotion rates of 8.4% for men and 8.5% for women. On average success rates were higher for women (70%) than men (59%), however this changed significantly when looking at Level E success rates for women (33.3.%) and men (66.6%).

*Figure 2 Promotion rates by academic headcount and gender (2014 – 2022).*
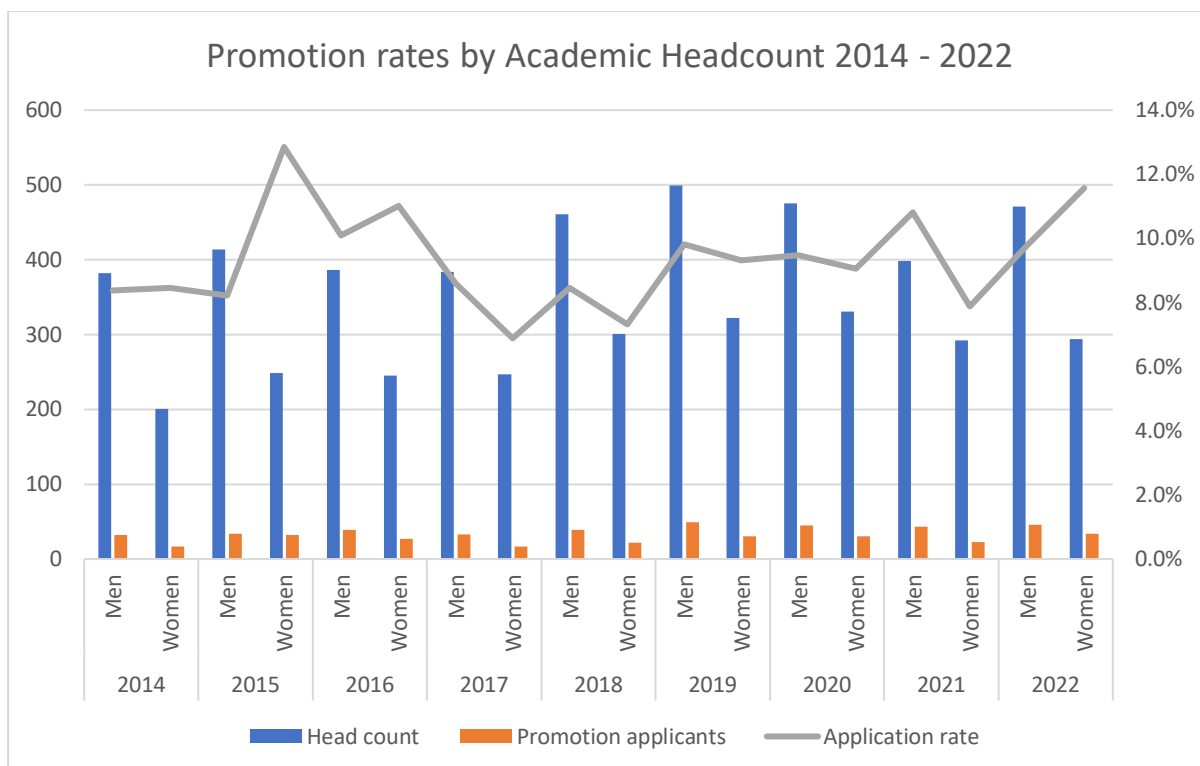
To reduce the gender gap in senior academic roles, women need to participate in the academic promotions process at a higher rate and with a higher success rate than men.

## BARRIER 1 – Understanding of the process and readiness to apply

Initial conversations with women revealed that many relied on encouragement from others, including their line managers, as a signal for when they were ready to apply for promotion. This resulted in women who may have low visibility in the university due to caring commitments or due to being part time "not being tapped on the shoulder" for promotion in comparison to male colleagues with more physical presence on campus. This was compounded by a lack of understanding of the process, which can impact the quality of the application.

Women's status as carers or having career interruptions also meant that line managers may not have perceived some women as being interested in promotion. This is a common misconception in academia (Bosquet, Combes, & Garcia-Penalosa 2019)[1].

2017 survey findings in preparation for the Athena Swan Bronze application in 2018 found that caregivers of all genders were more than twice as likely to delay academic promotion and 30% less likely to receive:

- feedback that encouraged career progression;
- encouragement to undertake further training/professional development; and
- advice about how to publish.

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[1] Bosquet C, Combes PP, & Garcia-Penalosa C 2019, 'Gender and Promotions: Evidence from Academic Economists in France', Scand. Journal of Economics no 121, vol 3, 1020–1053,

## BARRIER 2 – Academic Promotions Process – perceptions of transparency and fairness

Iterative feedback from women applicants to People and Culture (P&C) via Swinburne Women's Academic Network (SWAN) about their experiences with the promotion process include: "women felt their experiences were not adequately captured by the existing application process/forms"; "they feared the criteria, format or process placed them at a disadvantage".

The promotions process originally involved the writing up of three portfolios outlining achievements and a CV. There was no opportunity to outline the impact of career interruptions or caring responsibilities. Given the weight of family caring duties, whether of children or parents, tends to fall on women, this lack of recognition of career interruptions meant that women who did apply for promotion were evaluated against male colleagues who tended not to have these barriers to career development opportunities. This also made it more challenging for promotion committees to evaluate the achievements of part-time staff against full-time staff who had a more traditional trajectory of achievements. There was limited understanding of why women may not have adequate conference presentations, especially international conferences that required travel, why they may not be participating in external or after-hours projects, or why they may not be able to contribute to many committees and networking events as their colleagues.

## BARRIER 3 – Access to support networks

While Swinburne had a promotion mentorship scheme in place, it was more focused on discussions around promotion in general. The mentorship program was announced around the same time as the opening of the promotions round, which meant that it tended to target individuals who were already preparing for promotion. The mentors were mainly men. It also left applicants with limited time to access mentoring and was focused on mentoring for the application for that year. Without access to formal and informal mentoring, such as line manager support and a wider mentoring community, women had limited ways of finding out about the requirements of the promotion process and what standards of performance are expected for promotability. It also meant that there were limited opportunities for women to strategise for promotion over the longer term.

Due to a smaller number of academic women, it was difficult for women to develop networks across the university. The lack of networks for women in academia is also acknowledged in the literature (see for example van den Brink and Benschop 2014).[2] This lack of networks played a significant role in what information was available to women about the promotion process.

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[2] M. Van den Brink and Y. Benschop (2014) Gender in academic networking: The role of gatekeepers in professorial recruitment. Journal of Management Studies 2014 Vol. 51 Issue 3 Pages 460-492

# ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

The Swinburne Women's Academic Network (SWAN) was established in 2015 by three academic women in response to the barriers to academic promotion that they had identified through their personal lived experience and their role on promotions panels.

SWAN started as a grassroots network designed to

- assist women at any stage of their academic career, develop their leadership capacity;
- provide support for those wishing to progress in their careers; and
- address the underrepresentation of women at senior academic levels.

SWAN has delivered a 5-month Promotion Support Program annually for the last eight years (2015-2023). The program includes monthly training sessions for academic women with guest speakers focused on developing the skills and understanding of the process needed to present a successful promotions application and to provide women with a mentor.

The design of the program was primarily developed to address barriers 1 (Understanding) and barrier 3 (Support) outlined in Table 1.

*Table 1: SWAN Promotion Program Aims*

| Program aim | Barrier |
|---|---|
| To increase the understanding amongst women academics about the promotion process and requirements. | Understanding - Process |
| To assist women in evaluating whether they are ready for promotion. | Understanding – Readiness |
| To provide a supportive environment where women can share their experiences of career trajectory, promotion preparation and career development.<br><br>To provide networking opportunities | Support |

A total of 383 women have participated as mentees over this period. Table 2 provides a summary of participation by year and academic level.

*Table 2 :Summary of participation in the SWAN Promotions Support Program (2015 – 2022)*

| Year | Academic Level | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | A-B | | B-C | | C-D | | D-E | |
| | Mentee | Mentor | Mentee | Mentor | Mentee | Mentor | Mentee | Mentor |
| 2015 | 12 | 4 | 28 | 10 | 15 | 6 | 6 | 2 |
| 2016 | 14 | 5 | 15 | 6 | 12 | 6 | 4 | 1 |
| 2017 | 5 | 2 | 19 | 5 | 8 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
| 2018 | 8 | 3 | 27 | 13 | 8 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| 2019 | 9 | 4 | 20 | 10 | 18 | 9 | 8 | 5 |
| 2020 | 8 | 5 | 24 | 22 | 13 | 10 | 10 | 9 |
| 2021 | 4 | 2 | 16 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 6 | 4 |
| 2022 | 10 | 8 | 18 | 14 | 12 | 9 | 9 | 4 |
| **Total** | **70** | 33 | **167** | 83 | **96** | 51 | **52** | 28 |

The high uptake and success of the introduction of the promotions program has been recognised and supported by university leadership and is now embedded in university culture. SWAN has received ongoing funding and workload allocation to address the under-representation of women in senior academic and professional positions at Swinburne.

The network has evolved to provide an ecosystem of support that is co-designed by academic women for academic women where mentees become future mentors. Initially it was challenging for the SWAN leadership team to access the data they required to evaluate the program. Greater recognition from university leadership in recent years has enabled SWAN to work in partnership with university leaders and the P&C team to advocate for changes to the academic promotions process to address the concerns that have been raised about perceptions of transparency and fairness. In 2019 the Vice Chancellor, Professor Linda Kristjanson shared with the University that she believed a key driver of achievements for the 2019 Promotion outcome round was 'our SWAN team and their continued support and mentorship of women, resulting in a significant increase in the success rate of women applicants this year'.

The SWAN leadership team also received two Vice Chancellor's Awards, one for Culture and Diversity in 2015 and another for Diversity and Inclusion in 2018 which highlights the success and importance of the program.

A summary of key activities and outputs achieved through this partnership to improve support for women and the process itself is provided below in Table 3:

*Table 3 :Summary of activities and outputs to address the barriers to promotion*

| Activity | Key barrier | Output |
|---|---|---|
| Monthly training sessions with speakers including Deans, past participants and promotion panel members from across the University. Video recordings of sessions related to the application. | **Understanding / support** | Participants have greater access to information to improve their understanding of the process. The video recordings support women who are not able to make the sessions in person. During and post Covid 19 pandemic all sessions transitioned to online delivery. |
| Access to resources, including 159 past successful applications, are available. All of these applications are donated to SWAN and women can work through these applications. | **Understanding** | A wide variety of past applications provide samples of different types of successful applications. |
| Mentoring and peer mentoring | **Understanding/ support** | Opportunity to have focused personalised and group-based discussion on promotion applications. Noting that this output is dependent on the quality of relationship with the mentor and peer group and the willingness of all parties to dedicate time to this. |
| Training of academic promotion panel members introduced in 2015 | **Process** | The training provides a more consistent and "fair" approach to |

| | | assessing promotion applications and mitigating bias. |
|---|---|---|
| Introduction of a separate page in the Academic Promotions template titled "Relevant Personal Circumstances" where applicants could speak to the impact of career interruptions (2017) | **Process** | Applicants have an opportunity to speak to the impact of caring responsibility or other personal circumstances to better capture and recognise women's lived experience. |
| Dedicated intranet page developed for Academic Promotions resources.<br><br>Key attributes of a strong application and perspectives from a past women applicant included in University briefing session (2019)<br><br>Advice regarding impact of COVID included in briefing sessions (2020) | **Understanding** | These resources are available to all staff to improve their understanding and awareness of the process. |
| Improved representation across promotion assessment panels<br><br>Dean's letter of support template updated to feature more gender-neutral language and that they provide context and expectations especially for non-traditional roles rather than repeating what the applicant is saying (2021)<br><br>Committee composition extended to include participation from Pro Vice Chancellor Indigenous Engagement (2022) | **Process** | This contributes to a fairer process by mitigating bias through having more diverse panel members and a focus on more gender-neutral language.<br><br>Including the Pro-Vice Chancellor Indigenous Engagement will also help identify and mitigate potential barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants. |
| "Special Personal Circumstances" renamed "Performance Relative to Opportunity". Guidelines were developed for both applicants and assessors. (2023) | **Process** | This provides applicants and assessors with a more methodical approach/tool to identify and assess impact. This also seeks to reduce bias in the assessment. |
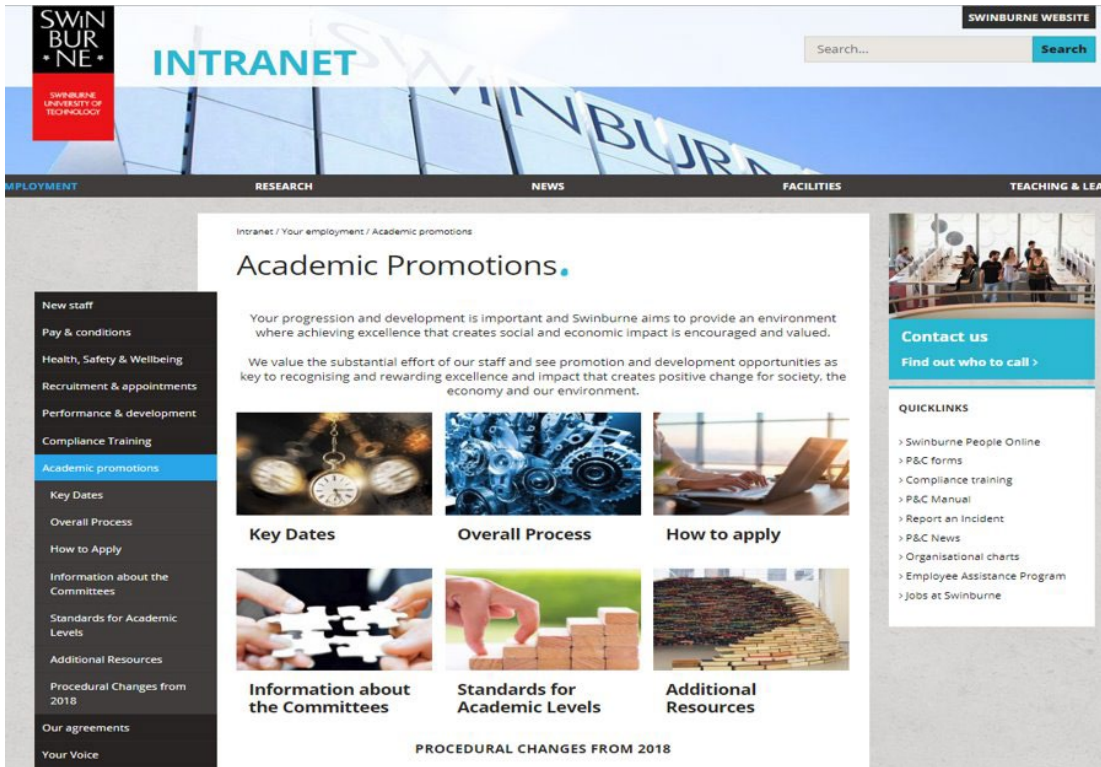
*Figure 3 Example of Improved Academic Promotions web page*



*Figure 4 : Photo of SWAN leadership team 2018*

L-R: Dr Carolyn Beasley, Dr Jennifer Beaudry, Professor Helana Scheepers, Professor Rosemary Stockdale, Professor Virginia Kilborn, Associate Professor Christine Thong & Associate Professor Flavia Marcello

# OUTCOMES

The uptake of the SWAN program was significant and beyond expectations. The attendance shows high demand, but the effectiveness of the program goes beyond the number of attendees. The goals of the program were to:

1. provide a supportive environment for women that was of value to them
2. increase women's participation in the promotion process, and
3. improve the representation of women in senior academic positions.

The measure of the success of the program is outlined in the number of women taking part and applying for promotion. However, the ultimate success of the SWAN program is measured in the success rate of those women who applied for promotion. To achieve goal 3, application and success rates for Level D and E need to be higher than men's application and success rate.

## OUTCOME 1 - Increase in number of women applying for promotion

Figure 5 shows the number of applications submitted by men and women across the period 2009 - 2022. There was a sustained significant increase in applications from women since SWAN was introduced.

The average number of applications between 2009 – 2014 was approximately 16 applications from women per year and 25 applications from men. After SWAN was introduced, the average number of applications increased to approximately 23 applications from women per year and 35 applications from men on average, as well as a small number of non-binary applications being submitted for the first time.



(The % of total applications that were submitted by women or non-binary people each year is indicated)
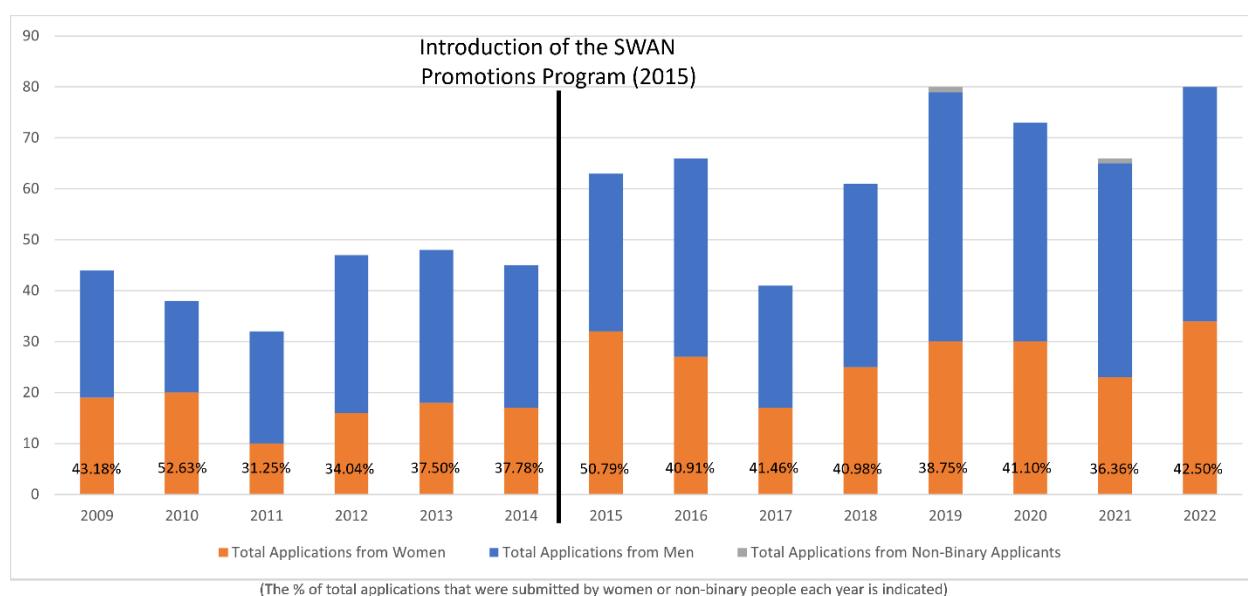
*Figure 5 Academic Promotions 2009 – 2022*

A more detailed analysis of the data shows some interesting differences in the number of applications per level. Table 4 below focuses specifically on promotion applications received from women at different levels. A key observation about the difference in applications after 2015 was the increased number of applications for Level D and E.

| Women only applications | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Level A-B | 2 | 4 | 0 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 6 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 5 |
| Level B-C | 10 | 11 | 5 | 4 | 10 | 8 | 14 | 6 | 4 | 9 | 14 | 12 | 10 | 9 |
| Level C-D | 5 | 4 | 2 | 6 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 8 | 7 | 5 | 9 | 7 | 5 | 10 |
| Level D-E | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 6 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 5 | 9 | 6 | 10 |
| Total | 19 | 20 | 10 | 16 | 18 | 17 | 32 | 27 | 17 | 22 | 30 | 30 | 23 | 34 |

**Introduction of the SWAN program (2015)**

*Table 4: Number of promotion applications from women only (2009 – 2022)*

## OUTCOME 2 - Improved success of women applying for promotion

An overview of the success rate of promotion by gender from 2009 to 2022 is given in Figure 6. Upon the establishment of the SWAN Promotion Program in 2015, there was a jump in the number of promoted women at Levels B and C but no increase in women's promotion success at senior levels D and E in this year. It is well studied that there are substantial barriers to women's promotion to the senior levels. However, the plots show that the number of promoted women at the professorial level (i.e., levels D and E) has increased and exceeded the number of men promoted to level E in 2016 and 2020, and was equal in 2022. This confirms the impact of the SWAN Program, supporting women to overcome the barriers and succeed at promotion to senior levels.

Figure 7  represents the number of women promoted to each level (B, C, D and E) each year (2009 – 2022). From 2015, the figure also displays the number of promoted women who participated in the SWAN mentoring program. There are fluctuations from year-to-year, but over time the average number of successful applications from women per year has increased since the introduction of the SWAN mentoring program.

Since 2015, 112 of the 153 women who have been promoted participated in the SWAN promotions program (73%). We believe that the average number of applications from women is an indicator of a change in culture, successful mentoring of women and increased confidence. When we compare the average annual number of successful applications from women in the period 2009-2014 (16.7) to the average annual number of successful applications from women in the period 2015-2022 (26.5) using a t-test, we find that the increase is statistically unlikely to have occurred by chance ($t_{12}$ = 4.20, p = 0.001) and that the effect size is large (Cohen's d = 2.27).
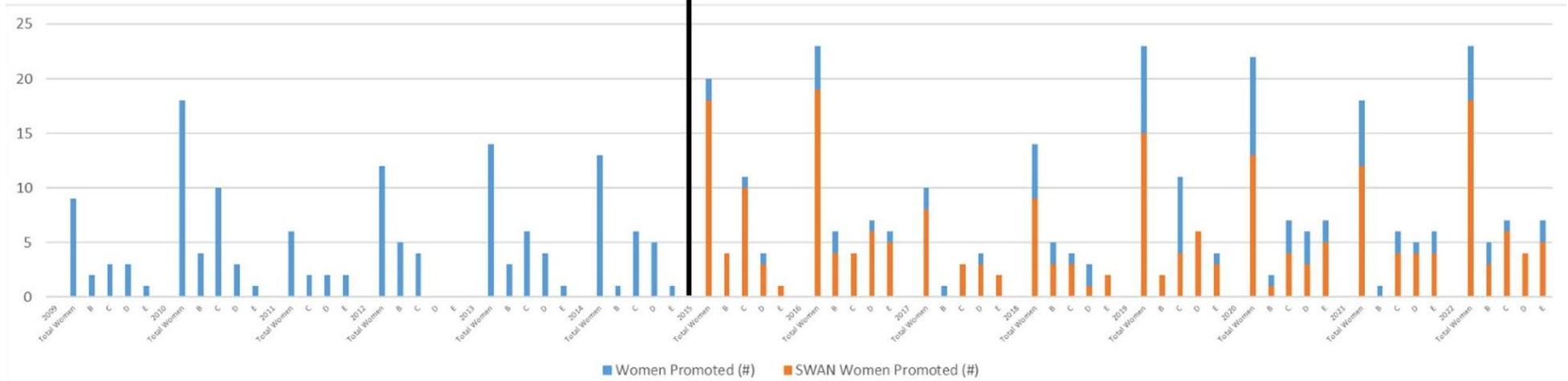
*Figure 6: Counts of women promoted at each level (and contribution of SWAN), 2009- 2022*
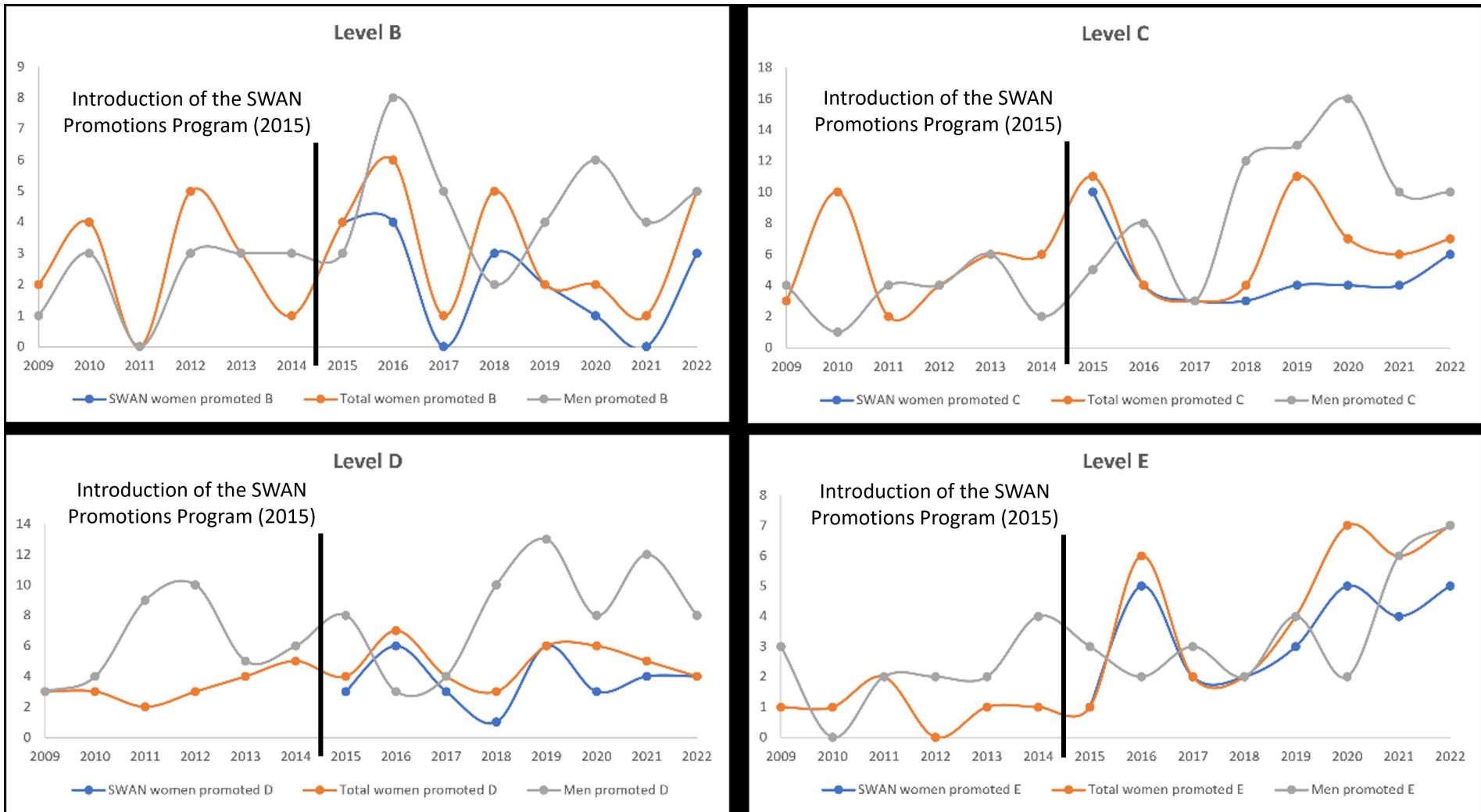
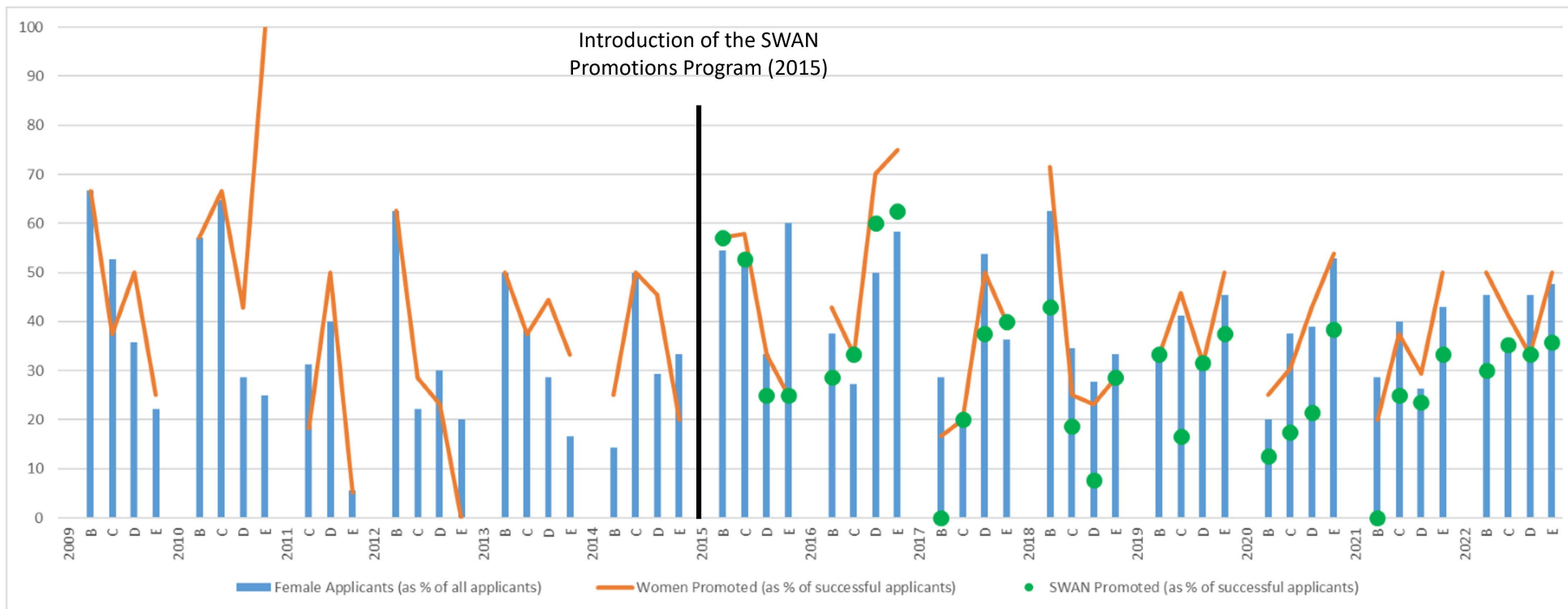*Figure 7: Promotion overview by gender and level, 2009-2022.*

*Figure 8: Promotion overview by gender and level, 2009-2022.*

Proportions of total applications that women submitted (blue bars), the proportion of successful women applications (orange line), and the proportions of successful applications by SWAN mentees (green dots) by year and level.

# OUTCOME 3 - Improved representation of women in senior academic roles

Figure 8 illustrates the percentage of applications at each level (for the years 2009-2022) that were submitted by women (blue bars); overlaid is the percentage of successful applications that women submitted for the years 2015-2022. The percentage of successful applications submitted by women who participated in SWAN mentorship is also indicated by the green dots. Applications from women (as a proportion of the total applications submitted) for levels D & E increased in 2015 and have consistently remained above pre-2015 and 2018 levels.

The average rate of women applying for promotion at Level D (between 2014 and 2022) was 11.96 %, with a success rate of 73.74%. This was higher than the average rate of men applying for promotion at Level D, which was 9.65%, with a success rate of 64.64% over this same period. The application and success rates for Levels D and E are provided in Tables 5 and 6 below.

*Table 5: Level D Application and success rates by gender (2014 – 2022)*

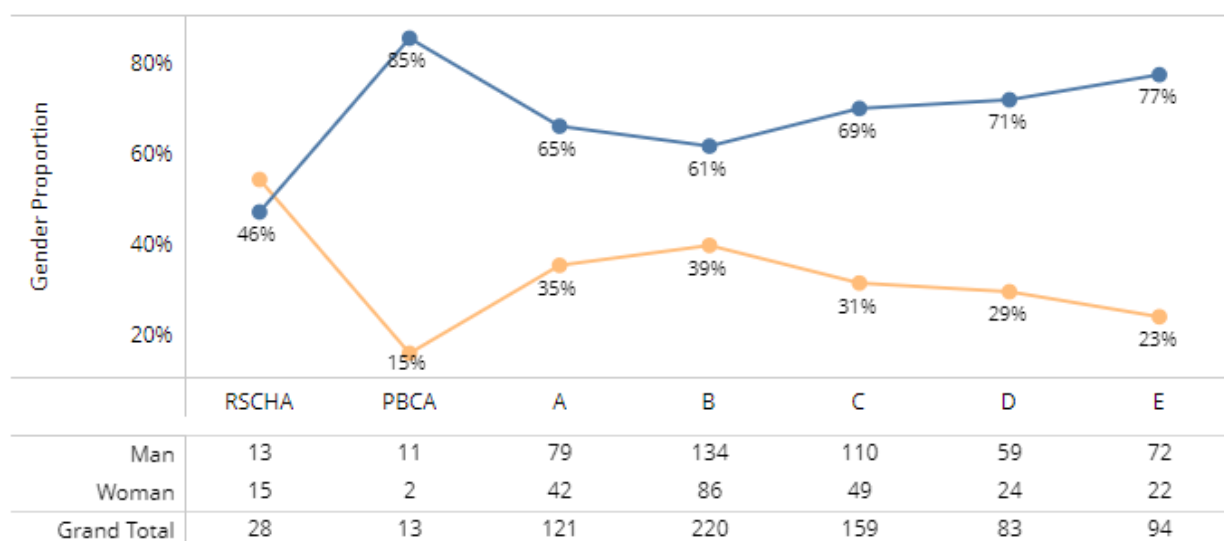| Year | Gender | # Headcount (Level C) | # Application | # Success Applications | Application rate | Success rate |
|------|--------|----------------------|---------------|------------------------|------------------|--------------|
| 2014 | W | 49 | 5 | 5 | 10.20% | 100.00% |
|      | M | 110 | 12 | 6 | 10.91% | 50.00% |
| 2015 | W | 51 | 6 | 4 | 11.76% | 66.67% |
|      | M | 109 | 6 | 4 | 5.50% | 66.67% |
| 2016 | W | 57 | 8 | 7 | 14.04% | 87.50% |
|      | M | 102 | 8 | 3 | 7.84% | 37.50% |
| 2017 | W | 54 | 7 | 4 | 12.96% | 57.14% |
|      | M | 105 | 7 | 4 | 6.67% | 57.14% |
| 2018 | W | 59 | 5 | 3 | 8.47% | 60.00% |
|      | M | 128 | 13 | 10 | 10.16% | 76.92% |
| 2019 | W | 65 | 9 | 6 | 13.85% | 66.67% |
|      | M | 141 | 19 | 13 | 13.48% | 68.42% |
| 2020 | W | 129 | 11 | 8 | 8.53% | 72.73% |
|      | M | 111 | 14 | 12 | 12.61% | 85.71% |
| 2021 | W | 62 | 5 | 5 | 8.06% | 100.00% |
|      | M | 108 | 12 | 8 | 11.11% | 66.67% |
| 2022 | W | 57 | 10 | 4 | 17.54% | 40.00% |
|      | M | 80 | 11 | 7 | 13.75% | 63.64% |

*Table 6 :Level E Application and success rates by gender (2014 – 2022)*

| Year | Gender | # Headcount (Level D) | # Application | # Success Applications | Application rate | Success rate |
|------|--------|----------------------|---------------|------------------------|------------------|--------------|
| 2014 | W | 24 | 3 | 1 | 12.50% | 33.33% |
|      | M | 59 | 6 | 4 | 10.17% | 66.67% |
| 2015 | W | 27 | 6 | 1 | 22.22% | 16.67% |
|      | M | 63 | 6 | 1 | 9.52% | 16.67% |
| 2016 | W | 30 | 7 | 6 | 23.33% | 85.71% |
|      | M | 65 | 5 | 2 | 7.69% | 40.00% |
| 2017 | W | 31 | 4 | 2 | 12.90% | 50.00% |
|      | M | 66 | 4 | 3 | 6.06% | 75.00% |
| 2018 | W | 41 | 3 | 2 | 7.32% | 66.67% |
|      | M | 75 | 6 | 5 | 8.00% | 83.33% |
| 2019 | W | 42 | 5 | 4 | 11.90% | 80.00% |
|      | M | 79 | 6 | 4 | 7.59% | 66.67% |
| 2020 | W | 45 | 9 | 7 | 20.00% | 77.78% |
|      | M | 94 | 9 | 6 | 9.57% | 66.67% |
| 2021 | W | 39 | 6 | 6 | 15.38% | 100.00% |
|      | M | 77 | 9 | 6 | 11.69% | 66.67% |
| 2022 | W | 38 | 10 | 7 | 26.32% | 70.00% |
|      | M | 80 | 11 | 7 | 13.75% | 63.64% |

In conjunction with improving our recruitment processes, the proportion of women at Level E at Swinburne increased from 23.4% in 2014, to 27% in 2017 (when our self-assessment for SAGE was undertaken) to 36% in 2022.



*Figure 9 : 2014 Academic headcount by academic level*

## Academic staff (headcount) by academic level

Year : 2022  |  Contract Type : Fixed-term & Ongoing  | STEMM & non-STEMM



| | RSCHA | PBCA | A | B | C | D | E |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Man | 4 | 10 | 96 | 127 | 108 | 80 | 94 |
| Woman | 16 | 4 | 81 | 118 | 57 | 38 | 53 |
| Grand Total | 20 | 14 | 177 | 245 | 165 | 118 | 147 |
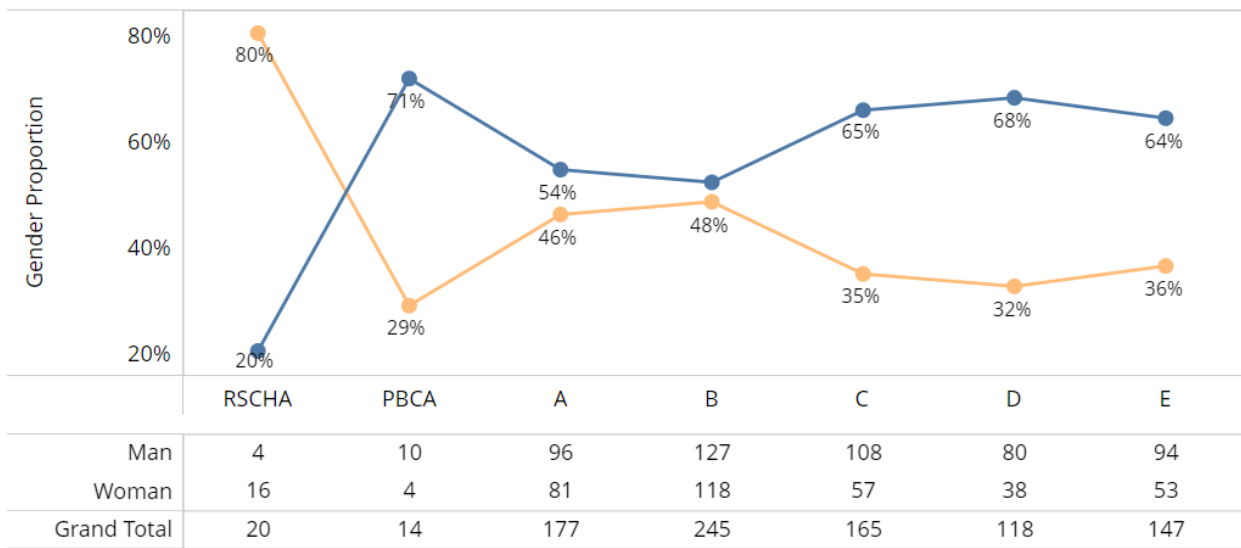
Gender
- Man
- Woman

*Figure 10 : 2022 Academic headcount by academic level*

# IMPACT

There is a strong sentiment at Swinburne that the SWAN Academic Promotions Program has improved the lived experience for Academic women by providing a greater sense of belonging, confidence to progress their academic careers and opportunities to collaborate across disciplines that were not previously there.

To measure the impact of the program on the key barriers identified, including improved understanding of the process and readiness to apply, the perception of transparency and fairness of the promotions process and access to support, we have drawn on several inputs including:

- o SWAN method of evaluation including qualitative feedback from participants, and academic papers including *'Building belonging: A grassroots peer-support network for academic women'*[3], and *'A tale of three associate professors: A grassroots approach to supporting women in higher education'*,[4]
- o University wide surveys –
  - Equity & Inclusion staff survey 2017 (in preparation for Athena SWAN Bronze application, 242 academic staff completed the survey: 49.5% women, 47.3% men and 3.2% gender diverse. Unfortunately a breakdown of gender is not provided for individual survey responses)
  - 2021 SAGE Culture survey (designed to review the implementation of the 2019 – 2021 SAGE Action plan: 237 academic staff completed the survey 43.5% women 39.2% men and 17.3% preferring not to say
- o 2021 SAGE focus groups (2 groups of 12)
- o People & Culture surveys (2017 – 2020) evaluating staff experience of applying for promotion.

## IMPACT 1 – Understanding of process and readiness to apply

*Table 7 :Impact 1- Feedback on improved understanding of process and readiness to apply from SWAN survey*

| Experience/Feedback | Demonstrated impact |
|---|---|
| *"The more I spoke with colleagues (female and male alike) and the more I considered my current performance, the more I realised that to NOT try would be a greater reflection of my insecurities than of my actual readiness. I'm very pleased I did it, regardless of what the ultimate outcomes may be" (SWAN participant)* | Feedback from women participating in the SWAN program spoke to their improved understanding of both the academic promotion process and their improved understanding of their readiness to apply. |

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[3] Beaudry, J; Lemon, N; Scheepers, H; Marcello, F; Wilding, E; Agius, C; Taffe, S; Loch, B; Kilborn, V. (2021) 'Building belonging: A grassroots peer-support network for academic women', in N. Lemon (ed) Healthy Relationships in Higher Education: Promoting Wellbeing Across Academia, London: Routledge, pp. 79-91.

[4] Thong, C; Wheeler, M. A; Mackelprang, J. L; Shafiei, M; Scheepers, H; Kilborn, V. (2023) 'A tale of three associate professors: A grassroots approach to supporting women in higher education,' *Australian Journal of Management*. https://doi.org/10.1177/03128962231188453

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *"The level of transparency, honesty and collegiality that the mentors and organisers bring to the sessions. It felt like this is what you really need to know"(2018 SWAN participant)* | | | | | | |

*Table 8: Relevant responses from the 2017 and 2021 University wide culture surveys, percentages reflect the proportion of staff who responded 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to the survey question.*

| Survey question | Favourable response 2017 (All staff) | Favourable response 2021 | | | | All staff difference, 2021 vs 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | All staff | Men | Women | Prefer not to say gender | |
| I am familiar with the University's criteria for promotion. | 81% | 69% (−12%) | 74% | 68% | 61% | We are not clear on the drivers of this 12% reduction in favourable responses. Swinburne developed a dedicated intranet page in 2019 and maintained regular notifications and briefings about academic promotion during COVID 19. |
| I feel there is sufficient guidance regarding promotion. | 55% | 49% (−6%) | 53% | 51% | 27% | Although there is a 6% reduction in favourable responses there is only 2% difference between men and women's responses which is the lowest gender gap between men and women of all relevant survey responses. This is likely attributed to the guidance women receive through the SWAN program. |

The SWAN survey data indicated that participants felt that they had a deeper understanding of the process and their readiness to apply through the relationships developed in the SWAN Program. It appears as though this has also had a positive impact on the gender gap between men and women's responses outlined in Table 8. Further investigation is required to better understand why academics who preferred not to identify their gender responded less favourably and how they can be better supported.

# IMPACT 2 - Process – transparency and fairness

*Table 9: Impact 2 Process – transparency and fairness from SWAN and People and Culture (P&C) surveys*

| Experience/Feedback | Demonstrated impact |
|---|---|
| *"Really enjoyed meeting others outside my Faculty to get awareness of how things happen in other faculties. This helped remove the incidence of groupthink that I suspect could have happened without this exposure"* (SWAN Promotions participant 2018) | The SWAN promotions program has increased transparency through sharing experiences and examples of successful application rates. |
| Between 2017 and 2020 satisfaction with the academic promotion process increased from 73% to 80% in 2020 (this peaked in 2019 with a satisfaction rate of 90%). Unfortunately, gender was not recorded as part of this survey. (P&C survey) | Unfortunately, the P&C survey was more focused on evaluating the administration of the academic promotions process rather than perceptions of transparency and fairness, so we cannot make a strong connection here. |

*Table 10 : Relevant responses from the 2017 and 2021 University wide culture surveys, percentages reflect the proportion of staff who responded 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to the survey question.*

| Survey question | Favourable response 2017 (All staff) | Favourable response 2021 | | | | All staff difference, 2021 vs 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | All staff | Men | Women | Prefer not to say gender | |
| My abilities are fairly assessed by the academic promotions process | 45% | 45% | 58% | 44% | 15% | We do not have clear data that helps us to better understand why the response to this question has not improved. We suspect that the difference between responses from men, women, and academics who prefer not to identify their gender relates to how performance opportunities were considered and assessed. |

The SWAN survey data shows that through sharing experiences women felt they had a greater awareness and insight about the process, but there was limited feedback on perceptions of fairness. Although the survey responses in Table 10 did not demonstrate an improvement in response to perceptions of a fair assessment of abilities between 2017 and 2021, it is worth noting that these responses remained consistent when the majority of relevant survey responses in 2021 were significantly less favourable than 2017 results.

In 2021, there was a 14% difference between men and women's responses with men responding more favourably. Academics who preferred not to identify their gender responded least favourably (15%) which will require greater focus in the future. A further analysis of the difference in success rates between applicants who presented a PRTO case in 2022 has demonstrated that the use of PRTO is producing equitable outcomes. More work is required to ensure that changes that have been made to improve the academic promotions process (such as the application of PRTO) are more broadly communicated. We expect that this response will improve in the next survey.

## IMPACT 3 - Support – access to networks

*Table 11: Impact 3 Support – access to networks from SWAN survey*

| Experience/Feedback | Demonstrated impact |
|---|---|
| *"The peer Promotions Program created a wonderful trusting environment where you can share stories and questions and fears and ideas in a safe and supportive space with women outside your normal working group. This broadens your mind for the promotion process" (SWAN participant)*<br><br>*"With a disrupted career due to maternity leave, it was good to hear how other people directed their careers" (SWAN participant)*<br><br>*"The strategies and ideas provided were useful not just in writing up an application, but in planning my activities to achieve future promotions" (SWAN participant)*<br><br>*"At times, due to the additional workload caused by COVID, I considered not applying [for promotion] as things were quite challenging this year. However, the support of this program helped to get me across the line in terms of submission". (2021 SWAN Participant)*<br><br>*"COVID-19 doubled my work at Swinburne, and I very nearly did not apply for promotion. It was only because of the structured writing sessions and the encouragement received through the SWAN program that I ended up submitting an application this year". (2021 SWAN Participant)*<br><br>Unsolicited feedback from the 2019 P&C promotions survey included:<br><br>*"the SWAN program is amazing – without it I wouldn't have been able to apply. Particularly the mentoring and peer support"*<br><br>*"SWAN network sessions were VERY important"*<br><br>*"My SWAN mentor provided fantastic support through this whole process".* | This feedback demonstrates that SWAN has achieved their goal of providing a supportive environment for women that was of value to them.<br><br>2021 SAGE focus groups agreed that the SWAN promotion support has kept application and success rates very positive and that SWAN is effective in providing mentoring and career development support.<br><br>This impact has not been experienced by all diversity groups, so it has been recommended that SWAN be expanded to provide targeted support to priority diversity groups. |

*Table 12 : Relevant responses from the 2017 and 2021 University wide culture surveys, percentages reflect the proportion of staff who responded 'agree' or 'strongly agree' to the survey question.*

| Survey question | Favourable response 2017 (All staff) | Favourable response 2021 | | | | All staff difference, 2021 vs 2017 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | All staff | Men | Women | Prefer not to say gender | |
| I receive encouragement and support from my manager around the academic promotions process | 67% | 47% (-20%) | 59% | 43% | 26% | This significant reduction of 20% may be attributed to COVID 19, the introduction of the Horizon 2025 strategy and an organisational change that included voluntary redundancies and resulted in 118 academic staff leaving Swinburne. This is consistent with a reduction in respondents' agreement to other career development questions such as 'I am encouraged to undertake further training and pursue personal development' (56% agreeable in 2017 to 45% agreeable in 2021) and 'My department supports me to attend conferences' (45% agreeable in 2017 to 34% agreeable in 2021). |
| When I apply for promotion, I receive appropriate and useful feedback | 39% | 50% | 62% | 50% | 29% | 11% improvement which may be attributed to feedback and advocacy from the SWAN program and a commitment from the promotions panel to provide useful feedback which positively impacts all promotion applicants. |

There appears to be a gap between the level of support provided by the SWAN program and direct support from the manager. In 2021, there was a 16% difference between men and women's responses regarding receiving encouragement and support from their manager with men responding more favourably.We aim to close this gap by increasing manager capability to have more direct and proactive conversations about development planning and encouraging women to commence preparation and/or apply for promotion. Further work is also required to better understand and meet the needs of academic women from marginalised communities.

# FINAL REFLECTIONS

The improved promotions experience at Swinburne has been strongly driven by grassroots support from SWAN starting in 2015, with effective institutional support for SWAN commencing a few years later in 2018, with total integration of SWAN and the SAGE process only occurring in late 2022. The changes to the process show steady improvement but the results are not always linear. University support including funding and workload for SWAN is now firmly established. Improvements such as the recently introduced performance relative to opportunity page has benefited a wide range of staff seeking promotion at the university, including 28% of male applicants in 2022. The small but important number of promotion applications from non-binary applicants in recent years is another positive impact of SWAN's promotion support program, as well as Swinburne's policies.

The SWAN program has also influenced the development of support programs at other Universities. The external publications listed below provide insightful reflections on the challenges and triumphs in developing these programs.

- Beaudry, J; Lemon, N; Scheepers, H; Marcello, F; Wilding, E; Agius, C; Taffe, S; Loch, B; Kilborn, V. (2021) 'Building belonging: A grassroots peer-support network for academic women', in N. Lemon (ed) Healthy Relationships in Higher Education: Promoting Wellbeing Across Academia, London: Routledge, pp. 79-91.
- Thong, C; Wheeler, M. A; Mackelprang, J. L; Shafiei, M; Scheepers, H; Kilborn, V. (2023) 'A tale of three associate professors: A grassroots approach to supporting women in higher education,' *Australian Journal of Management*. https://doi.org/10.1177/03128962231188453

# FURTHER ACTION

| Reference | Rationale/ Evidence | Actions & Outputs | Timeframe (start & end) | Person/Group responsible for implementing action | Senior Leader accountable for action delivery | Desired Outcomes/ Targets/ Success Indicators |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Section 3.2 2022 – 2025 SAGE Action Plan | Women, academics level B & C, and staff with a disability were significantly more dissatisfied across all survey questions, including appraisal and performance, career support and development, and promotions. | **Support the career progression of priority diversity groups**<br><br>Partner with our other University Staff Networks including the Ally Network, Indigenous Staff Network and Accessibility Networks to better understand the systemic barriers to their career progress and co-create programs and/or recommendations for structural/process change that will support their needs. | Commence 2024 | Organisational Development Team | SDVC A, PVC Indigenous Engagement | Increase in favourable survey responses from staff living with disability<br><br>Increase in promotion applications and success rates from diverse cohorts. |
| Section 3.1<br><br>2022 – 2025 SAGE Action Plan | 2021 SAGE gender equity survey showed a ~20% decrease in staff satisfaction with manager encouragement and support for career development and promotion compared to 2017 survey results. The survey highlighted gaps in manager capability in having effective career and performance development conversations | **Build manager capability in having effective career conversations and supporting career development** –<br><br>Academic managers complete leadership fundamentals training to build capability in giving effective performance feedback, career conversations, supporting career development and promotion, including supporting staff returning from career breaks. | Commence 2023 | CPO develop training, Academic leaders accountable for attendance | Executive Group, Senior Leaders | 90% of Academic managers complete Leadership Fundamentals training. SAGE gender equity survey has a ≥ 15% increase in positive results from women academics across all levels and staff with a disability for the survey categories appraisal and performance; career development; and academic promotions. |
| Section 3.3 | Intersectional gender equity data of promotions applicant and success rates is currently not captured. | **Enhance the promotions process and reporting** | Commence 2024 | Diversity & Inclusion, Talent and Analytics Team | SDVC A & CPO | Intersectional demographic data from promotions reported on. |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2022 – 2025 SAGE Action Plan | From 2017 to 2021, there has been no shift in staff satisfaction of the perceived fairness in assessments completed by the academic promotions panel (45% positive response rate). | Enhance the collection and analysis of intersectional demographic data on promotions to gain deeper insights, identify trends and improve performance.<br><br>Consult with staff with regard to the perceived fairness in assessments completed by the academic promotions panel. In light of feedback received review the academic promotions process to address perceptions | | | | Perceptions of the fairness of assessments completed by the academic promotions panel improve by at least 10% at the next SAGE equity survey |