



SAGE Athena Swan

Institutional Context

Ngala kwop biddi.
Building a brighter
future, together.

2024



Acknowledgement of Country

Murdoch University acknowledges the Whadjuk and Binjareb people of the Noongar nation as the traditional custodians of this land and its waters and that Murdoch University stands on Noongar Country.

Murdoch University pays its respects to Noongar elders, past and present, and acknowledges their wisdom and advice in teaching and cultural knowledge activities.



SAGE

SCIENCE IN AUSTRALIA
GENDER EQUITY

SAGE Cygnet Award Application

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Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
AWM	Academic Workload Model
ASBAP	Athena Swan Bronze Action Plan
AWE	Access, Wellbeing and Equity
AWEI	Australian Workplace Equity Index
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
DCA	Diversity Council Australia
Domestic students	Refers to the domestic students on Western Australian campuses only
DVC	Deputy Vice Chancellor
EDI	Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
EDI Sub-strategy	Refers to Sub-strategy 2023-2030 – Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
EDIC	Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee
ELS	[College of] Environmental and Life Sciences
Engine Room	A smaller working group of GEMM members tasked with progressing Athena Swan KPA and Cygnet Awards
First Nations	People of Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GEMM	Gender Equity Monitoring and Management (GEMM) Committee
Headcount	Discrete individuals based on unique position occupancy
HCM	Human Capital Management
KPA	Key Priority Areas
LASS	[College of] Law, Arts and Social Sciences
LGBTIQA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer or Questioning, Asexual or Agender, and others
MUEA 2023	Murdoch University Enterprise Agreement 2023
Murdoch	Murdoch University
Ngala Kwop Bidji	Refers to Strategy 2023-2030: Building a Brighter Future, Together. Ngala Kwop Bidji.
Onshore, international students	Refers to international students on Western Australian campuses only
PVC	Pro Vice Chancellor
SAGE	Science in Australia Gender Equity
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SM	Student Management
STEM	[College of] Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
STEMM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine
The University	Murdoch University
Transnational staff	Transnational staff not directly employed by Murdoch University, and therefore not included in workforce analysis.
VC	Vice Chancellor and President
WA	Western Australia
WA campuses	Includes Murdoch University's Perth, Rockingham and Mandurah campuses
Workday	Murdoch University's Human Capital Management system

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1 Introduction and Strategic Plans

In 1974, Murdoch University (Murdoch/ The University) was established as Western Australia's (WA) second university in Boorloo (Perth) on the traditional lands of the Whadjuk Noongar people. With a global footprint operating across three domestic campuses in WA (Perth, Rockingham and Mandurah) and two international campuses in Singapore and Dubai, Murdoch serves an academic community of approximately 24,900 students and employs more than 3,500 staff.

The University has transformed lives and society through accessible education and groundbreaking research. Murdoch is committed to environmental conservation, social justice and inclusion, tackling societal and environmental challenges while creating educational pathways for those previously excluded from higher education.



Figure 1: Boola Katijin located at the Boorloo (Perth) Campus

1.1 Strategic Plan 2023-2030

Following the appointment of Vice Chancellor and President (VC) Professor Andrew Deeks and extensive consultations across the university and community, Murdoch initiated the development of a new strategic plan to reflect its evolving priorities.

Launched in late 2022, **Strategy 2023-2030: Building a Brighter Future, Together. Ngala Kwop Biddi**. (Ngala Kwop Biddi) ¹ centres around three key themes (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), First Nations, and Sustainability). These themes are embedded in the University's core activities (Education, Research, and Engagement) and supported by key enablers (People, Processes, and Facilities), as presented in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Strategic themes outlined in Strategy 2023-2030: Building a Brighter Future, Together. Ngala Kwop Biddi.

1.2 EDI Sub-strategy 2023-2030

The inclusion of EDI as a theme in **Ngala Kwop Biddi** signalled a renewed commitment to EDI and its importance across all aspects of university business. In early 2023, a dedicated Pro Vice Chancellor (PVC) for EDI was appointed to the university and Senior Leadership Team (SLT). The PVC EDI is responsible and accountable for all EDI functions including the development and implementation of an EDI Sub-strategy and maintaining and progressing Athena Swan accreditation.

The **Sub-strategy 2023 – Equity, Diversity and Inclusion** (EDI Sub-strategy)² builds on commitments defined in **Ngala Kwop Biddi**, outlining a clear roadmap to achieving the strategic objectives. Murdoch is dedicated to building a welcoming, diverse, and inclusive community and an environment which is equitable and safe, where all members of our community can realise their potential. The EDI Sub-strategy focuses on raising the voice, value and agency of four priority stakeholder communities through seven key priority areas, as presented in Table 1.

¹ Murdoch University (2023). *Strategy 2023-2030. Building a Brighter Future, Together. Ngala Kwop Biddi*. Murdoch University, p12. Available from <https://www.murdoch.edu.au/explore/our-strategy>.

² Murdoch University (2024). *Sub-Strategy 2023-2030 – Equity, Diversity and Inclusion*. Murdoch University, p16. Available from <https://www.murdoch.edu.au/strategy/edi/strategy>.

Table 1: Priority Stakeholder Communities and Key Priority Areas outlined in EDI Sub-strategy

Priority Stakeholder Communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Nations Australians • Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities • People with disabilities and/or who are neurodiverse • Members of the LGBTIQ+ community
Key Priority Areas
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Further diversify our student and staff body. 2. Build a culturally safe and inclusive study and work environment. 3. Engage proactively in EDI initiatives, regularly tracking and reporting on university commitments. 4. Develop/ increase intercultural competency skills amongst students and staff. 5. Improve accessibility across campus. 6. Develop and nurture an interdisciplinary community of practice for research and encourage projects to consider social impact. 7. Collaborate with external stakeholders to develop reciprocal EDI initiatives with impact beyond the University.

1.2.1 Athena Swan Accreditation in Strategic Plans

Athena Swan is recognised as an important driver of EDI progress in both **Ngala Kwop Biddi** and the EDI Sub-strategy, with a clear commitment to engaging proactively with SAGE Athena Swan, and regularly tracking and reporting on university initiatives.

1.3 University Governance

Murdoch University’s academic and operational activities are governed by a clear hierarchical structure, led by the VC and supported by the SLT, which oversees the university’s strategic direction. The SLT includes 15 leaders with a balanced representation of women (Table 2).

Table 2: Membership of Murdoch University’s Senior Leadership Team

Senior Leadership Team Membership
Vice Chancellor
Chief Experience Officer
Chief Financial Officer
Chief People Officer <i>Woman lead</i>
DVC Education
DVC Global Engagement
DVC Research and Innovation
PVC College of Business <i>Woman lead</i>
PVC College of Environmental & Life Science <i>Woman lead</i>
PVC College of Health and Education
PVC College of Law, Arts & Social Sciences <i>Woman lead</i>
PVC College of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics <i>Woman lead</i>
PVC Equity, Diversity and Inclusion <i>Woman lead</i>
PVC First Nations <i>Woman lead</i>
PVC Sustainability

Represented on the SLT are five academic colleges (Figure 3), each led by a PVC, which are central to the University’s educational and research activities. In addition to the colleges, the University has four dedicated research institutes, overseen by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) Research and Innovation. These institutes have a strong research focus, with staff drawn from both the academic schools and dedicated researchers

employed directly by the institutes. This structure ensures a collaborative approach, allowing the University to maintain its focus on both teaching and high-impact research at local and global levels.



Figure 3: Academic Structure Organisational Chart

In addition to academic operations, Murdoch's Senate functions as the governing body, consisting of members appointed in line with the University's governance policies³. Achieving a 50% female representation on the Senate was a notable achievement in 2021, aligning with the University's commitment to gender equity. Chaired by the Chancellor, Murdoch appointed a woman to the role in 2023 – the first time in its almost 50-year history.

The EDI Committee (EDIC) provides central oversight of several Advisory Groups, Working Groups and Communities of Practice to drive impactful, university-wide change (Figure 4). Chaired by the PVC EDI, EDIC is comprised of 25 persons representative of priority stakeholder communities, SLT, Professional Services teams, Advisory Groups and the Student Guild. Through the PVC EDI, EDIC provides advice and recommendations to SLT in relation to and in support of operationalisation of **Ngala Kwop Biddi** and the EDI Sub-strategy.

³ Murdoch University Act 1973 (Western Australia) s12.

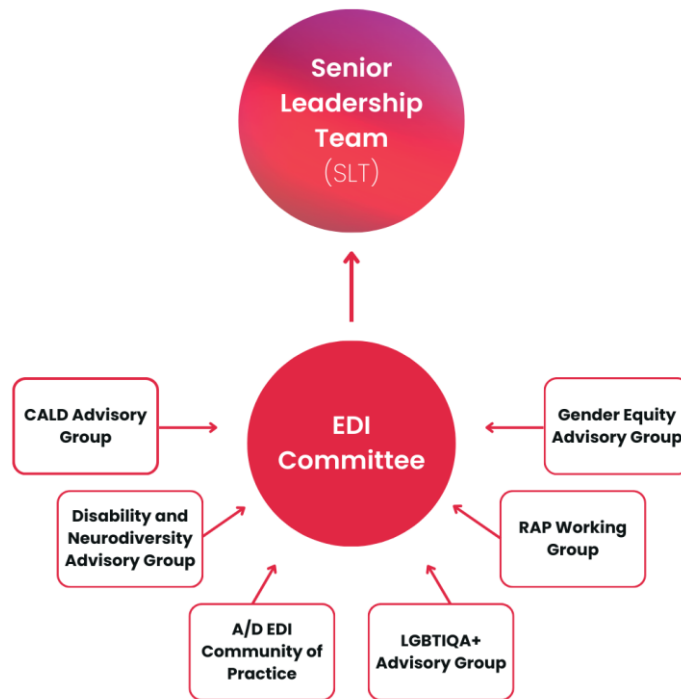


Figure 4: EDI Committee Governance and Reporting

This report concentrates predominantly on WA campus’ data and activities, including relevant information regarding international campuses where relevant and appropriate.

2 Demographic Profile

Staff and student data reported in the Demographic Profile are accurate as of August 2024, predominantly concentrating on WA campuses and activities. Information regarding international campuses is included where relevant and appropriate.

2.1 Staff Profile

Murdoch’s Human Capital Management (HCM) system was updated in 2022, with improved gender identity options available to staff to better reflect Murdoch’s diverse staff community (Table 3).

Table 3: Gender identity options in Workday

Gender Identity
Gender non-conforming
I have a different gender identity than the other options
Man
Non-binary
Prefer not to disclose

Murdoch recognises and celebrates the unique nuances of each gender identity category however, for the purposes of this report, the terms *man*, *woman* and *non-binary/other* are used to describe the gender identities of staff. This approach ensures that staff whose gender does not fall within binary terms can remain unidentifiable and be included in data comparisons.

Murdoch University employs more than 3,500 staff members, with professional staff comprising 53% of employees (Table 4). Women represent almost two-thirds of employees overall (63%), accounting for 57% of academic staff and 68% of professional staff. More than 1% of staff identify as non-binary or gender diverse.

Table 4: Gender distribution of staff by role type

Role Type	Female		Male		Non-Binary / Others		TOTALS	
	Head Count	%	Head Count	%	Head Count	%	Head Count	%
Professional	957	68%	705	30%	8	2%	1864	53%
Academic	1275	57%	556	42%	33	<1%	1670	47%
TOTAL	2232	63%	1261	36%	41	1%	3534	100%

Murdoch's workforce is diverse, comprising staff from 87 countries and almost half (46%) born in countries outside of Oceania (Table 5). First Nations staff account for 2% of employees, with a further 3.4% of staff reporting a disability or long-term health condition and 1.4% as belonging to the LGBTIQ+ community.

Table 5: Demographic diversity of Murdoch University staff

Demographic	Proportion (%)
Country of Birth – Africa	5.5%
Country of Birth – Asia	4.2%
Country of Birth – Americas	22%
Country of Birth - Europe	15%
Country of Birth - Oceania	54%
First Nations	2.0%
Disability or long-term medical condition	3.4%
LGBTIQ+	1.4%

Women account for an equitable proportion of academic roles in three of the five Colleges, being under-represented in the College of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) (32%) and over-represented in the College of Health and Education (73%) (Table 6).

Table 6: Binary gender distribution of Academic staff across Murdoch Colleges

College ^{a,b}	Female Head Count	% Female in College	Male Head Count	% Male in College	TOTALS
College of Business	58	45%	71	55%	129
College of Environmental and Life Sciences (ELS)	222	60%	148	40%	370
College of Health and Education	285	73%	104	27%	389
College of Law, Arts and Social Sciences (LASS)	183	61%	118	39%	301
College of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)	79	32%	169	68%	248

^a Excludes academic staff belonging to Global Engagement, Education (Enabling) and Research & Innovation portfolios

^b Excludes non-binary and gender diverse staff to avoid identification

Gender parity is observed for women at lower academic levels (Figure 5), while only 37% of senior academic roles (Associate Professor and Professors combined) are held by women.

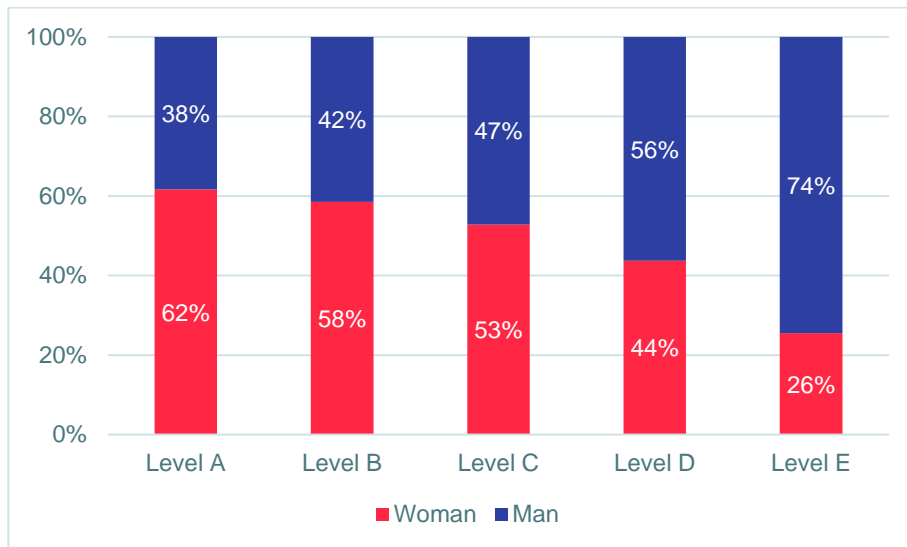


Figure 5: Binary gender distribution of academic staff (continuous and fixed term) by position level

The University has 1841 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) staff. By headcount, staff are predominantly employed on a part-time basis (63%), with women accounting for two-thirds (67%) of the part-time workforce (Figure 6). Participation of women and men in full-time employment is more equitable, with women accounting for 56% of full-time employees.

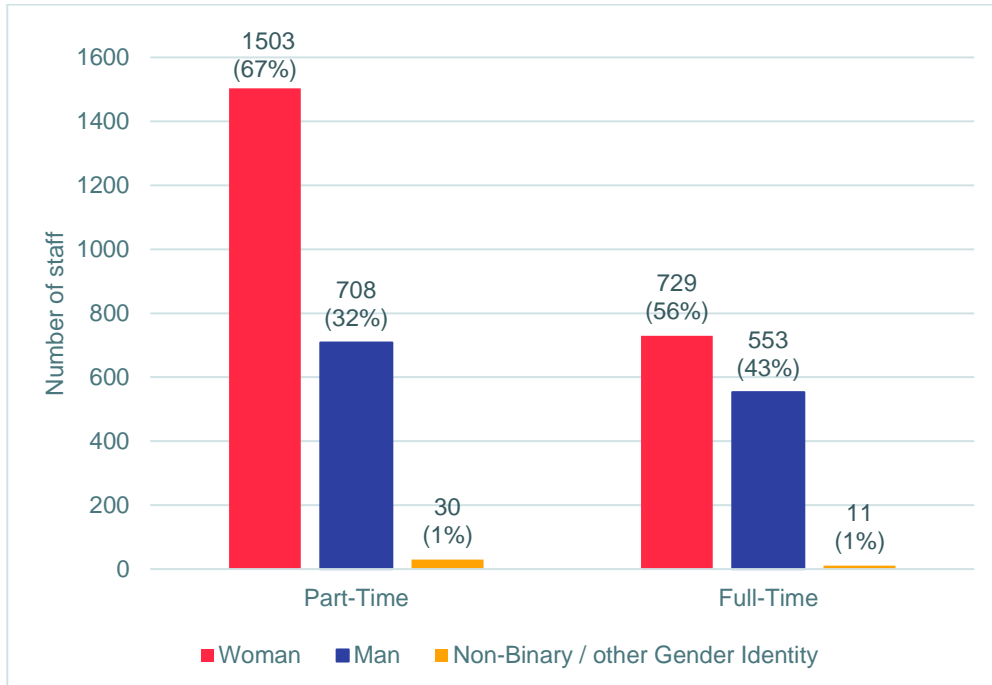


Figure 6: Gender distribution of Murdoch University employees by time type

2.1.1 Attraction and retention of Murdoch staff

Murdoch University's Enterprise Agreement (MUEA 2023), came into operation in March 2024, maintaining previous provisions and introducing several new initiatives closely aligned with **Ngala Kwop Biddi** (Table 7).

Table 7: MUEA 2023 entitlements to enhance staff wellbeing and experience

MUEA 2023 Entitlements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of Gender Affirmation Leave for all employees, providing 30 days of paid leave per calendar year (non-accruing) for any reason related to gender affirmation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of a Cultural Allowance for First Nations employees who voluntarily and formally take on cultural responsibilities in addition to their substantive duties.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintenance of Indigenous Language Allowance for all employees required by the University to use an Indigenous language in the course of their employment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A commitment to increase the number of First Nations employees to 3% of full-time equivalent staff (approximately 35 FTE)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An increase in paid Family and Domestic Violence Leave from five to 10 days (per 12-month period) for all employees.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An increase in Paid Partner Leave from five to 20 days for eligible employees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintenance of Paid Parental Leave entitlements, with 26 weeks leave available for eligible employees

2.2 Student Profile

Murdoch's Student Management (SM) system defines a student's gender as male, female or non-binary. For the purposes of this report, these terms are also adopted when reporting on the gender distribution of students. Murdoch acknowledges that the terms male and female are sex-based terms and recognises that the available options do not capture all identities.

In 2024, the University supported almost 25,000 students across WA and international campuses, with more than three quarters (79%) enrolled at a WA campus (Table 8). Female students account for 66% of domestic students, 51% of international onshore students and 58% of students overall.

Table 8: Murdoch Student Profile – All campuses

Student Cohorts	Female Head count	% Female	Male Head count	% Male	Non-Binary Head count	% Non-Binary	TOTALS¹	% of Total
Australia Domestic	7,148	66%	3,663	34%	48	<1%	10,859	44%
Australia International Onshore	4,478	51%	4,254	49%	<6	<1%	8,732	35%
Singapore – Transnational	2190	52%	2000	48%	0	0%	4,190	17%
Dubai – Transnational	529	48%	581	52%	<6	<1%	1,110	4%
TOTALS	14,345	58%	10,498	42%	48	0.2%	24,891	100%

(1) Totals do not include non-binary students where cohorts have less than six students

Murdoch's Domestic and International Onshore student body is diverse and reflective of its commitment to accessibility in education, with students hailing from more than 90 countries, 60% being female and more than half (55%) of the domestic cohort belonging to one or more equity groups (Table 9). Of Australian tertiary institutions, Murdoch leads First Nations enrolments by proportion of the domestic cohort, with 2.4% of enrolled students being First Nations.

Table 9: Domestic and International Onshore student demographics

Demographic	% All Students	% Domestic
Country of Permanent Residence – Africa	2%	-
Country of Permanent Residence – Americas	1%	-
Country of Permanent Residence – Asia	44%	-
Country of Permanent Residence – Europe	<1%	-
Country of Permanent Residence – Oceania	53%	-
First Nations	-	2.4%
Disability or long-term medical condition	12.4%	21.2%
Low socioeconomic status	-	21.1%
From a Regional or Remote Area	-	10.1%

The intersecting identities of Murdoch’s student population are illustrated in Figure 7.

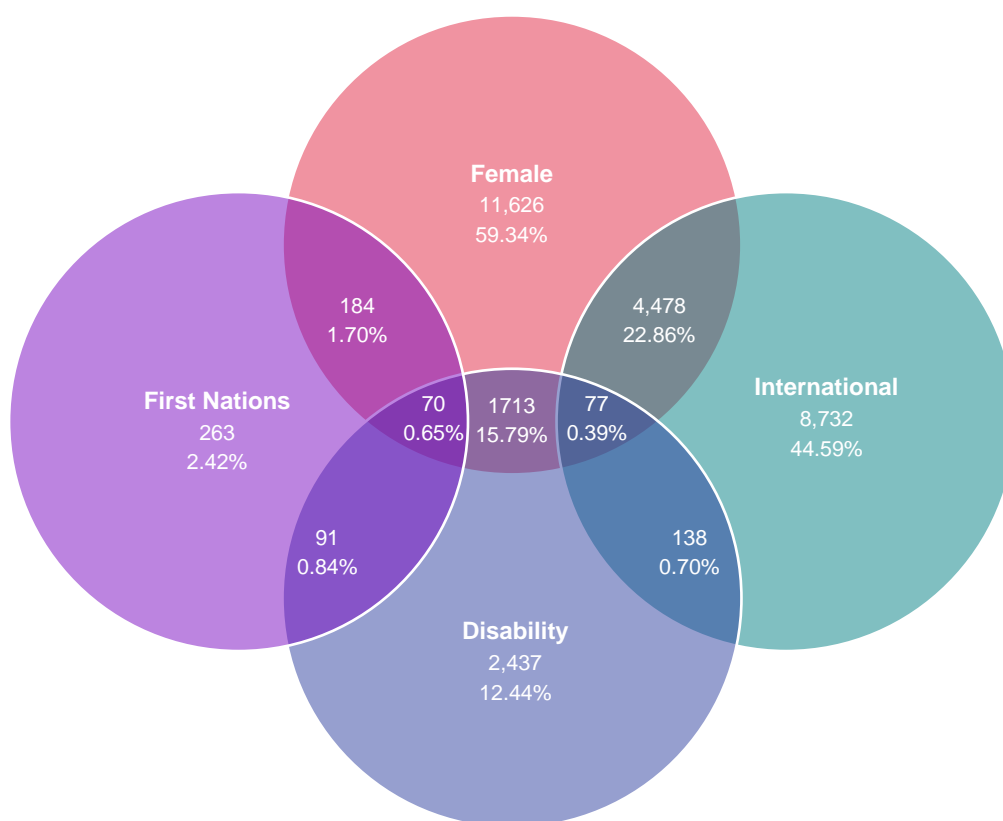


Figure 7: Intersecting identities of Domestic and International Onshore students

Bachelor’s Degrees are the predominant course type studied by Domestic and International Onshore students, representing more than half of enrolments (56%) and undertaken primary by female students (64%). Bachelor’s Honours and Higher Degrees by Coursework or Research demonstrate a more equitable gender distribution (Table 10).

Table 10: Domestic and International Onshore student enrolment by course and gender

Course^{1,2}	Female Head count	% Female	Male Head count	% Male	Non-Binary Head count	% Non-Binary	TOTALS³
Bachelor's Degree	6621	64%	3747	36%	28	<0.5%	10396
Bachelor's Honours Degree	95	50%	94	50%	<6	1%	189
Graduate Certificate or Diploma	415	68%	199	32%	<6	<0.5%	614
Higher Degree by Coursework	3482	52%	3210	48%	<6	<0.5%	6692
Higher Degree by Research	433	56%	338	44%	<6	<0.5%	771

(1) Excludes Enabling and Non-Award courses

(2) Students can be enrolled in multiple courses at the same time, or transfer courses within the academic year

(3) Totals do not include non-binary students where courses have fewer than six students

Females outnumber males in all Colleges and associated Schools except for the College of STEM, where they account for only 25% of enrolments (Table 11). In comparison, the College of ELS, and College of Health and Education, have 70% and 75% female student representation respectively.

Table 11: Domestic and International Onshore student enrolment by organisational level and gender

College / School ^{1,2}	Female Head count	% Female	Male Head count	% Male	Non-Binary Head count	% Non-Binary	TOTALS ³
College of Business⁴	2146	54%	1794	46%	0	0%	3940
College of Environmental and Life Sciences	1721	70%	729	30%	10	0.41%	2460
<i>College of Environmental and Life Sciences⁵</i>	158	57%	118	43%			276
<i>School of Agricultural Sciences</i>	387	71%	160	29%			547
<i>School of Environmental and Conservation Sciences</i>	309	70%	133	30%			442
<i>School of Medical, Molecular and Forensic Sciences</i>	471	70%	199	30%			670
<i>School of Veterinary Medicine</i>	396	77%	119	23%			515
College of Health and Education	3490	75%	1144	25%	7	0.15%	4641
<i>School of Allied Health</i>	441	56%	347	44%			788
<i>School of Education</i>	1120	73%	423	27%			1543
<i>School of Nursing</i>	1265	86%	210	14%			1475
<i>School of Psychology</i>	664	80%	164	20%			828
College of Law, Arts and Social Sciences	2735	61%	1714	38%	15	0.34%	4464
<i>School of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences</i>	1459	60%	973	40%			2432
<i>School of Law and Criminology</i>	951	68%	447	32%			1398
<i>School of Media and Communication</i>	325	53%	294	47%			619
College of Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics	623	25%	1907	75%	<6	<0.5%	2530
<i>School of Engineering and Energy</i>	171	23%	561	77%			732
<i>School of Information Technology</i>	431	25%	1295	75%			1726
<i>School of Mathematics, Statistics, Chemistry and Physics</i>	21	29%	51	71%			72
Graduate Research School	392	55%	326	45%	<6	<0.5%	718
<i>Graduate Research Office</i>	392	55%	326	45%			718

(1) Excludes Enabling and Non-Award courses

(2) Students can be enrolled in multiple courses at the same time, or transfer courses within the academic year

(3) Totals do not include non-binary students where courses have fewer than six students

(4) College does not have School levels

(5) Represents enrolments into generic BSc. and BSc (Hons) courses in the previous two-College academic structure. Course majors are not owned at a school level and represent predominantly disciplines from within the College of ELS.

3 Athena Swan Journey

3.1 Bronze Submission

In 2017, Murdoch became a member of Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE), undertaking a self-assessment as part the application for Bronze Award accreditation (Figure 8).

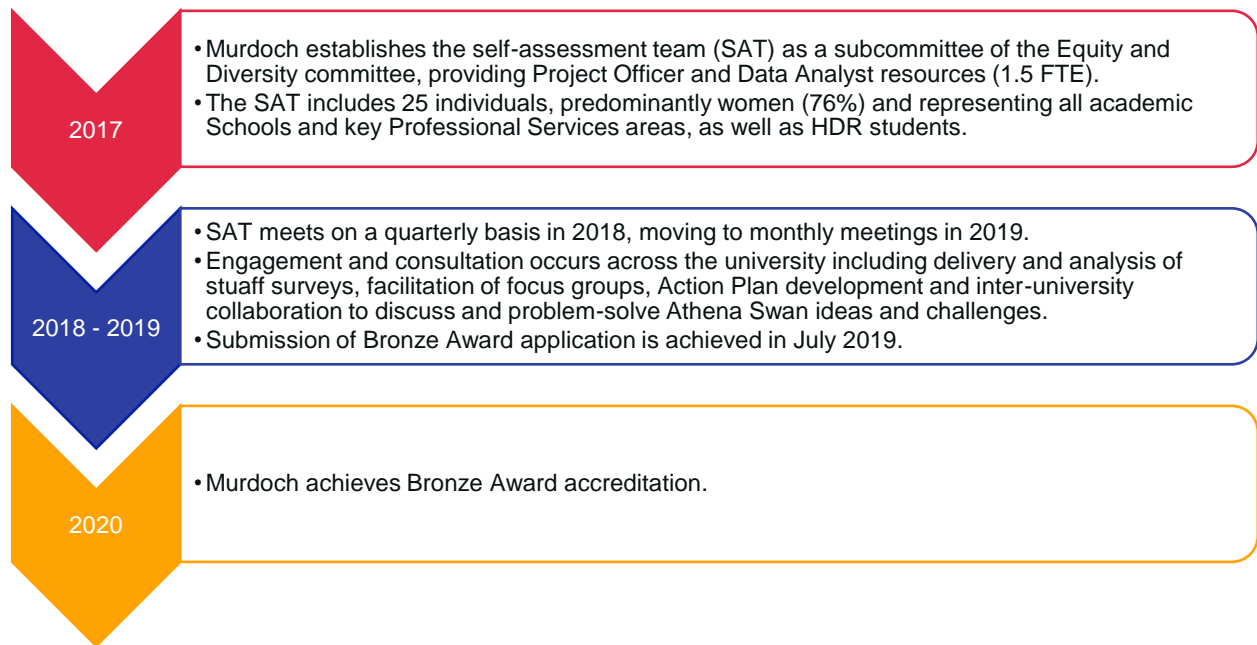


Figure 8: SAGE Athena Swan journey to Bronze Award accreditation

3.1.1 Key Findings and Action Plan

Murdoch’s Athena Swan Bronze Action Plan (ASBAP) outlined the key findings of the self-assessment and suggested solutions into seven themes (Figure 9 and Table 12).



Figure 9: Themes of Athena Swan Bronze Action Plan (2020)

Table 12: Athena Swan Bronze Accreditation Key Findings and Actions

Theme	Key Finding(s) and Broad Actions
Leadership and Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear accountabilities will be critical to cement leadership commitment and build management capacities for real progress on gender equity, including establishing gender equity priorities for Senior Leadership Group and University Leadership Group. • Growth in the pipeline of future female academic leadership requires appropriate training and development opportunities be made available, and a commitment from new and current leaders to embed EDI responsibilities and capabilities in their practice.
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A smaller, more gender-balanced and diverse committee of key influencers should be established with adequate resourcing to contribute to robust governance of Athena Swan (Gender Equity Monitoring and Management (GEMM) Committee). • Increasing the voices of female staff at all levels of leadership and governance (including part-time staff and those with caring responsibilities) must be balanced by workload compromises and inclusive meeting practices if 50% female participation targets are to be realised.
Organisational Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater recognition, celebration and communication of female academic and professional excellence through university awards, events and career development activities will support growth in gender equity. • Staff require further clarity and support in responding to inappropriate behaviour and reporting misconduct through delivery of workplace respect training initiatives and transparent communication of policies and procedures. • Murdoch's Parental Leave policy and entitlements are fair and competitive however information is difficult to access and understand, demonstrating a need to more comprehensive information for managers and staff. • Flexible work arrangements currently affect more women's careers than men, and there is scope to improve support, monitoring, communication and access for all staff. • Women predominantly take on caring responsibilities within their family structures and can be better supported through the provision of parenting rooms, subsidised care services and improved flexibility in parking options.
Equity and Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Murdoch can do more to include, understand, communicate with and respond to intersectional groups to better meet the educational, research and professional needs of marginalised groups in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine (STEMM). • Men receive monetary allowances and benefits proportionately more often and in higher values than women, indicating transparent data and policy is needed to manage gender disparity in discretionary allowances. • Intersectional groups have unique induction requirements; however, the effectiveness of induction and onboarding requirements is not well understood due to insufficient data.
Recruitment and Retention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women apply in lower numbers than men for academic positions and are more likely to be appointed at lower-level classifications, suggesting targeted advertising and recruitment strategies are required to attract sufficient female applicants. • Murdoch must commit to enhancing selection strategies, particularly within male-dominated fields, by ensuring fair gender representation on selection committees. • Promotion levels are low and proportionally lower for women than men, with staff feeling uncertain and unsupported in the application process, indicating improved communication and support in completing application form is required. • No consideration is given to "Performance Relative to Opportunity" to acknowledge an applicant's time out of the workforce due to caring responsibilities, which impacts more women than men. Development of guidelines and inclusion in the Promotion application form, in addition to building confidence in Promotions committee members to appropriately apply such consideration, will ensure a more equitable assessment of applicants' talents and performance.

<p>Support and Advance Women's Career Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's career progression in STEMM strikes a critical juncture at Level B, compared to Level D in non-STEMM, resulting in low representation at STEMM Levels C, D and E. • Murdoch must provide more women-focused career development opportunities to support their success in a flawed system (while also fixing the system) including the provision of a) networking, coaching and sponsorship opportunities; b) centrally funded schemes that support female academics whose research performance has been affected by caring responsibilities and/or working flexibly; and c) internal seed funding in STEMM disciplines and Research Institutes where women are under-represented for gender-diverse research and collaboration. • The Performance Development and Review process has scope for improvement to encompass long-range career and succession planning discussions that ensure career development opportunities for women are clearly identified.
<p>Data Integrity and Management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient data capture limits understanding of gender equity challenges at Murdoch, particularly the complexities and realities of staff with intersectional identities. • To support the achievement of EDI goals through evidence-based decision making, comprehensive dashboards integrating staff data, including research activity, require development and monitoring. • Robust and uniform processes for collecting, monitoring and evaluating staff data across disciplines and business areas should be developed and implemented to address the challenges encountered during the self-assessment process.

The GEMM Committee was established in late 2019 as a sub-committee of EDIC, replacing the SAT, to report and advise on gender equity across the university and to drive the implementation of the ASBAP. A smaller working group of GEMM members formed the Athena Swan Engine Room (Engine Room) providing central oversight across the Key Priority Areas (KPA) and Cygnet Award submissions.

3.2 Barriers to Progress

Several factors have impacted the scope and progression of Athena Swan at Murdoch in the years since achieving Bronze Award accreditation. Like many in the higher education and research sector, the University's finances, work practices and institutional priorities were heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Delays in progress were further compounded by significant changes to senior leadership, organisational structures and systems and gender equity governance.

To ensure a sustainable future for the University, various initiatives were introduced in late 2020 including offers of voluntary redundancy, changes to the Academic Workload Model (AWM) and a reassessment of academic courses, units and disciplines. Poor workplace culture and employee engagement were revealed in 2021, with core organisational issues identified and recommended for reform in 2022. Together with leadership transitions across both 2021 and 2022, including changes to the Chancellor, VC and the entire SLT, a recalibration of strategic priorities was required. Significant organisational changes occurred during this time and are described in Table 13.

Table 13: Organisational changes impacting progress of Athena Swan

Organisational changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Services teams were restructured in 2021, with reallocation of workload and priorities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The AWM was further refined in 2021, and a new model adopted in 2022. Further changes to Learning and Teaching metrics within the AWM were progressively adopted in late 2022 and 2023.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new College and School structure was introduced in 2022, creating five new Colleges with their associated schools, and replacing the larger and broader two-College structure adopted in 2019.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new HCM system (Workday) was implemented in 2022 to unify human resources capabilities and financial services systems, requiring significant resources and shifting focus away from long-term EDI objectives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A new university strategy (Ngala Kwop Bididi) was launched in 2022, replacing the Strategic Plan (2017-2027) and signalling a clear shift in the university's vision and priorities.

Murdoch's recognition of EDI as a strategic priority in **Ngala Kwop Bididi** reaffirmed the University's commitment to its EDI objectives and a new lens with which to evaluate EDI progress, impact and governance. Changes to Athena Swan governance and operations also impeded progress, as outlined in Table 14.

Table 14: Governance and operational changes impacting progress of Athena Swan

Athena Swan governance and operational changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal advisory groups requiring representation and capped participation from specific university teams, including the GEMM committee, were dissolved in 2022.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishment of Community Advisory/Working groups was undertaken across 2023-2024, resulting in a period of 9-18 months where EDI initiatives lacked a coordinated approach, making it difficult to track progress and hold stakeholders accountable.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attrition of employees has resulted in a loss of historical knowledge and insight into past actions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenging market conditions for recruitment of an EDI Manager resulted in a four-month position vacancy followed by reduced capacity due to government reporting priorities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Split management responsibilities reduced the capacity of Athena Swan Project Lead to progress initiatives.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The governance and responsibility for SAGE Athena Swan changed from Access, Wellbeing and Equity (AWE) to the PVC EDI in mid-2023.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Engine Room was dissolved in mid-2023, losing gender equity champions and Cygnet Award sponsors in the process.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The absence of a dedicated Gender Equity Project Coordinator to lead Athena Swan resulted in an approximate nine-month period of inactivity during the handover and recruitment period.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding for Athena Swan initiatives and project delivery was reduced due to changing university priorities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data collection and analysis of Murdoch's diverse staff population was limited, particularly regarding intersecting identities, due to changes in HCM systems and infrastructure.

Despite these challenges, Murdoch remains committed to meeting its expectations as a member of SAGE Athena Swan and as a Bronze Awardee.

3.3 Renewed Commitment to EDI at Murdoch

The appointment of a dedicated PVC EDI, expansion of the EDI team, and formation of EDIC and Community Advisory Groups has marked a turning point in the University's approach to addressing these challenges, providing much needed focus, resources and strategic direction. The EDI Sub-Strategy provides the foundation for achieving impactful and sustainable change moving forward, building upon the initiatives and activities delivered to date (Table 15).

Table 15: EDI milestones following achievement of Bronze Award accreditation

Milestone	Year(s)
Celebration of International Women's Day (internal events)	2024, 2023, 2022, 2021
Participation in Pride events (internal and external events)	2024, 2023, 2022, 2021
Financial support for Women in STEM Symposium and Seminar	2024, 2023, 2022, 2021
Achievement of Australian Workplace Equity Index (AWEI) Bronze Accreditation	2024
Naming of the first space honouring achievement of a woman at Murdoch University – Rosemary van den Berg Room	2024
Appointment of Gender Equity Projects Coordinator for Athena Swan	2024
Establishment of Reconciliation Working Group	2024
Attendance and participation at CEOs for Gender Equity Summit	2024
Establishment of Advisory and Community Groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CALD Advisory Group • Disability and Neurodiversity Advisory Group • Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer (or Questioning), Asexual and others (LGBTIQA+) Advisory Group • Karrak Network (First Nations Community Group) 	2023
Appointment of Associate Deans of EDI Community of Practice to champion, advocate and advance EDI initiatives	2023
Establishment of the EDI Projects and Operations team	2023
Publication of the Parental Leave Toolkit	2023
Provision of research grants for women in STEM disciplines	2023
Provision of Travel Bursary for gender minorities to attend Physics Conference	2023
New membership to Diversity Council Australia (DCA)	2023
Attendance and participation at SAGE Athena Swan Conference	2022, 2021
Sponsorship of Indigenous Women's Writing Retreat	2022, 2021
Provision of career development grants for women and gender diverse persons (e.g. Homeward Bound, GEMM Research Funding)	2022, 2020
Improvement in EDI data capture in HCM systems through introduction of Workday	2022
New membership to CEOs for Gender Equity (CGE)	2022
New membership to Pride in Diversity	2021
Delivery of Women in Research Mentoring Pilot Program	2021
Development of Achievement Relative to Opportunity Guidelines (AR2O)	2021

A Gender Equity Advisory Group and Athena Swan Academic Working Group have recently been re-established and are set to become active in 2025, guiding Murdoch's path to Silver Award accreditation. The development of a comprehensive EDI Dashboard, due in November 2024, will provide much needed insights into the University's diverse workforce. Further utilisation of Workday's features to capture additional EDI demographic information, and incorporation of this into the Dashboard, will support a greater understanding of staff with different and intersecting identities.