



SAGE

SCIENCE IN AUSTRALIA
GENDER EQUITY

SAGE Cygnet Award Application

Caring & Flexibility



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Name of Institution	The University of Sydney
Date of Application	31 October 2024
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	Current Cygnet	Barrier · List the Barrier addressed in this Cygnet · List the Barrier for Cygnets already submitted
[Mandatory] Institution-wide barrier		Limitations in our recruitment systems and processes, as well as a lack of strategic prioritisation of diversity in recruitment contributing to an under-representation of women and gender-diverse people applying for and being appointed to senior STEMM roles at the University.
[Mandatory] Sub-group barrier		Systems, processes and workplace culture that were not intentionally and visibly inclusive of the LGBTQIA+ community, and which were therefore unintentionally exclusionary.
[Please select] Institution-wide	✓	A gendered impact of caring responsibilities, arising from policies, processes, and workplace culture at the University of Sydney that did not consistently provide equitable access to leave, support, and resources for parents and carers working in academic and professional roles, potentially impacting retention, progression and workplace experience.
[Please select] Institution-wide		An increasing under-representation of women with seniority in academic roles, in part driven by inequitable access to development, as well as a lack of awareness and trust in the processes underpinning career progression at the University.
[Please select] Institution-wide/Sub-group barrier		Staff at the University lacked familiarity with and trust in processes to make disclosures and complaints around bullying, harassment, discrimination, and sexual misconduct.

Section	Word Count
Key Barrier	104
Evidence of Barrier	618
Activities and Outputs	111
Outcomes	1232
Impact	432
Total	2497

Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians

We, as Australia's first university, pay our deepest respects to the First Peoples of this Land. This Country hosts the longest continuing culture in the world, a culture where the practice of science is evident in the everyday world and a culture where the wisdom of women has been respected as a central part of the social fabric for more than 60,000 years.

Acknowledging that The University of Sydney's Camperdown campus sits on the lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and that we have campuses, teaching and research facilities located on the lands of the Gamaraygal, Dharug, Wangal, Darkinyung, Guringgai, Burramadagal, Dharawal, Gandangara, Gamilaraay, Barkindji, Bandjalang, Wiradjuri, Ngunawal, Gureng Gureng, and Gagadju peoples, who have for thousands of generations exchanged knowledge for the benefit of all.



Charlie Jackson, proud Gomeroi woman, grew up on Darkinjung country and currently lives on Gadigal land. Charlie is currently studying a Bachelor of Science (Health) and is looking at postgraduate medicine following an undergraduate degree. Charlie's dream is to work in paediatrics and work rurally.

STATEMENT FROM THE ARTIST

This artwork was created with the SAGE project intention in mind, pushing for gender and intersectional equity, diversity and inclusion. The mobs you see in the middle surrounding a larger circle represent groups of women gathering to share ideas, experiences and knowledge. The flow of the artwork represents nature, Mother Nature, and what women's business contributes to communities. The plant seen on the corners is the Sarsaparilla (Dharug people) which is a type of bush medicine. The leaves and stems are boiled in water which is then consumed. This relieves stomach pains, treating colds, coughs, bronchitis, arthritis, rheumatism and diabetes. This plant is now being sold and used for internal cancer treatment. This artwork seeks to recognise the larger acknowledgment of the Eora nation and the 29 clans; communities that continue to live, work and nurture, and paying respect to their elders past, present and future.

A Note on Language

Language is constantly changing but at any moment in time it is a powerful signal for inclusion. We are committed to ensuring that the language we use is both respectful and meaningful.

Please note that historical staff survey data collected for our SAGE Bronze application (2014-2017) and reproduced here conflates sex and gender. We have assumed male correlates to man and female to woman gender identities for the purpose of this document. We also acknowledge that this assumption may not fully represent the identities of the persons included in these datasets.

We have endeavoured to use language, questions, and response options that capture the broad community at the University but we acknowledge we may not always have been able to achieve this.

A Note on Style

There are some stylistic and language differences between graphs and tables shown in the 'Evidence of the Barrier' section and the 'Outcomes' section. For our Cygnets we have chosen to represent the 'Evidence of the Barrier' exactly as shown in our Bronze Application, to create a clear link between the two. As the Cygnets are a bridge between the barriers represented in the Bronze Application and the outcomes as a pathway to Silver, for the 'Outcomes' section we have adjusted some of the style to match current guidelines.

Acknowledgements

The SAGE team would like to thank the contribution of the University's Self-Assessment Team members; and the many others who contributed their ideas, reviewed drafts; provided guidance; ensured compliance and quality standards were met. There are too many to list individually, but this document was made possible by the collective contribution of many. We would also like to thank the interviewees and focus group participants who gave their voice to this Cynet.

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Glossary

D&I	Diversity and Inclusion
EDI	Equity, Diversity & Inclusion
EA	Enterprise Agreement
HASS	Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences
HR	Human Relations
IT	Information Technology
KIT	Keeping in Touch
M	Male
SAGE	Science in Australia Gender Equity
STEMM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, Medicine

KEY BARRIER

Through the SAGE Athena SWAN Bronze process (2014-2017) we identified a gendered impact of caring responsibilities, arising from policies, processes, and workplace cultures at the University of Sydney. We found these did not consistently provide equitable access to leave, support, and resources for parents and carers working in academic and professional roles, potentially impacting workplace experience, retention, and career progression. This was compounded by a lack of understanding of how existing provisions were impacting the lived experience of staff with caring responsibilities.

This Cygnet describes the progress, outcomes, and impacts of actions we have undertaken over the past five years to address these barriers.

EVIDENCE OF BARRIER

Whilst our SAGE Bronze application was largely focused on academic and professional women in Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine (STEMM), as was the remit of SAGE at that time, we recognise the outcomes and impacts of non-inclusive organisational cultures, systems, and processes are both broad and intersectional, and impact students as well. Accordingly, we are now seeking to be more inclusive in our data collection and strategic aspirations and initiatives.

In the timeframe assessed for our SAGE Bronze Application (2014-2017), men were not eligible to access the full parental leave provisions available to women, and there was a low uptake of parental leave by men (Table 1).

Further, the majority of staff with caring responsibilities were women, many of whom felt disadvantaged in their role at the University due to these responsibilities, particularly at the critical mid-career C and D levels.

The 2017 Culture Survey identified several commonly reported barriers that led to feelings of exclusion among academic women with caring responsibilities. These barriers typically included not being able to travel for work (88% of level D), not being able to speak at/or attend conferences (85% of level D), not being able to attend work-related events (77-89% at all levels), and not being able to attend social events with colleagues (73-93% at all levels)

Sub-barriers contributing to the key barrier included:

1. Inequities and inconsistencies in our provisions and support for staff taking parental/carers' leave

- Information about provisions and support for staff going on leave was inconsistently communicated to staff, managers, and senior leaders, resulting in patchy implementation, reduced engagement, and workload issues; and feelings of a lack of support and exclusion as reported by staff whilst on leave (**Actions 5.3.1 – 5.3.3**).
- Twelve months of continuous service was required for staff to qualify for the 14 weeks full pay parental/maternity/adoption leave, or 24 months to qualify for the University's enhanced provisions, Primary Carer Leave (an additional 22 weeks full pay). These eligibility requirements disproportionately impacted new hires on fixed-term contracts and/or paid from research grants (**Action 5.3.5**).

Table 1 Male utilisation of parental leave (2014-2018)

M = male (see Note on Language)

Academic Staff	2014			2015			2016			2017		
	M	In post	% M									
STEMM												
Level A	11	282	3.9	12	253	4.7	17	250	6.8	12	284	4.2
Level B	7	211	3.3	12	207	5.8	10	211	4.7	14	231	6.1
Level C	7	229	3.1	6	229	2.6	6	217	2.8	10	206	4.9
Level D	4	219	1.8	5	218	2.3	1	223	0.4	6	241	2.5
Level E	1	278	0.4	4	280	1.4	4	295	1.4	3	313	1
Total	30	1219	2.5	39	1187	3.3	38	1196	3.2	45	1275	3.5
Non-STEMM												
Level A	1	33	3	1	34	2.9	2	42	4.8	3	60	5
Level B	6	123	4.9	4	125	3.2	4	125	3.2	6	119	5
Level C	3	147	2	4	135	3	1	126	0.8	3	136	2.2
Level D	3	81	3.7	1	86	1.2	1	97	1	5	92	5.4
Level E	1	119	0.8	1	124	0.8	1	125	0.8	1	135	0.7
Total	14	503	2.8	11	505	2.2	9	515	1.7	18	542	3.3
Professional Staff	2014			2015			2016			2017		
	M	In post	% M									
STEMM												
Level 1-5	4	137	2.9	5	127	3.9	2	117	1.7	5	121	4.1
Level 6-7	4	188	2.1	6	192	3.1	14	188	7.4	6	193	3.1
Level 8-10	4	99	4	2	95	2.1	6	100	6	1	92	1.1
>Level 10	0	7	0	0	7	0	0	8	0	0	9	0
Other	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Total	12	433	2.8	13	423	3.1	22	414	5.3	12	415	2.9
Executive + Non-STEMM												
Level A	4	205	205	8	194	4.1	3	185	1.6	6	194	3.1
Level B	14	294	294	16	292	5.5	12	336	3.6	20	368	5.4
Level C	13	259	259	18	257	7	18	262	6.9	14	277	5.1
Level D	3	137	137	3	145	2.1	13	152	8.6	7	159	4.4
Level E	0	11	11	0	13	0	1	15	6.7	0	17	0
Total	34	906	3.8	45	901	5	47	950	4.9	47	1015	4.6

- The University had a “claw-back” requirement that staff who accessed enhanced Primary Carer Leave must return to work for a period of at least 26 weeks or they were financially liable for the enhanced component of their leave, potentially pressuring staff to return to work, or planning their leave to work around University policies and provisions (**Action 5.3.5**).
- Incoming provisions in the 2018-2020 Enterprise Agreement (EA) allowed for partners employed at the University to share up to 10 weeks of the 14 weeks parental, maternity, or adoption leave and 22 weeks enhanced Primary Carer Leave, however we did not yet have insight into potential uptake of those provisions (**Action 5.3.10**).

2. Inequities and inconsistencies in our provisions and support for staff with caring responsibilities

- Carers’ Re-engagement Schemes of up to \$25,000 for academic staff who had taken a break of longer than six months in the previous two years due to caring responsibilities were not consistently available to staff across different faculties at the University (**Action 5.3.7**).

- The University did not have a Childcare Strategy to support staff and students seeking accessible and practical childcare arrangements upon return to work (**Action 5.3.14**).
- Travel support provided to carers was not consistently available to staff across different faculties at the University (**Action 5.3.15**).
- The University did not have a policy around core hours for meetings and social gatherings (**Action 5.4.12**).

3. A lack of understanding of the impact of existing and new schemes and provisions

- We had not evaluated the effectiveness of support and re-engagement programs and schemes upon return to work from parental leave (**Actions 5.3.6**).
- We did not have a clear understanding of the factors contributing to staff returning to work and their intention to stay (**Actions 5.3.9**).
- We did not have a clear understanding of the consistency or experience of staff taking up flexible work arrangements due to caring responsibilities, or the impact of transitioning between part-time and full-time employment (**Actions 5.3.11-5.3.13**).

ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

To address the barriers above, we developed several actions designed to: **(1)** raise awareness for staff, managers, and senior leaders about parental leave provisions and increase consistency of implementation and access (Table 3); **(2)** raise awareness about provisions for staff with caring responsibilities and increase consistency of implementation and access (Table 4), and; **(3)** better understand the needs of staff with caring responsibilities and impact of existing arrangements (Table 5).

Actions were largely operationalised by the University's Human Resources (HR) Workplace Relations Policy team and Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) team, with consultation and/or in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, and subject matter experts. Challenges faced during implementation are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 Challenges faced during implementation

Bronze Action Plan Reference	Challenge	Strategies
5.3.3, 5.3.9, 5.3.10, 5.3.12	Our SAGE Bronze Action Plan contained a set of actions regarding regular engagement with staff and managers around parental and carer's leave via focus groups. Planned implementation was disrupted by the pandemic and potential opportunities to conduct online engagement were not realised during the whole of this period although the University reached out via surveys and we conducted broad focus groups in 2023/24.	For this Cygnet we were able to realise the opportunities offered via online platforms such as zoom, as we undertook focus group discussions using this approach. This will continue to be a primary approach to collecting information on parent's and carer's leave.

Table 3 Progress and outputs of actions designed to raise awareness and reduce inequities and inconsistencies in provisions and support for staff taking parental leave

SAGE Bronze Action ID	Progress	Outputs
<p>5.3.1 Deliver a communication campaign to educate staff and their managers about new EA provisions, parental leave toolkits and Keeping in Touch (KIT) day provisions.</p>	<p>Complete. Our intranet site for parents and carers, including a comprehensive Parental Leave Toolkit and related resources, is updated regularly, and we communicate new provisions and updates in Staff News as required.</p>	<p>2018-2021: The parental leave changes negotiated in the 2018-21 EA were well publicised during the negotiations via frequent news items and an intranet page that was accessible to all staff and managers. Information sessions and articles were available to inform staff of the EA changes prior to the all-staff vote. Once the EA was certified, items on the changes were also included in the Managers news which is circulated to all managers including Heads of School and other academic leaders.</p> <p>Parental leave information is accessible to all staff and leaders on the intranet, including the updated Parental Leave Toolkit, Manager's Toolkit and check lists for managers. The information includes information on accessing up to 10 paid whole or partial KIT days during parental leave for staff to participate in work activities and facilitate their return to work.</p> <p>Indications of staff and manager accessing information from the intranet (January 2021-December 2023)</p> <p>Intranet Pages</p> <p>Parental Leave Toolkit HTML: 4157 unique visitors & 9573 page views; 1116 downloads</p> <p>Parental Leave Managers' Toolkit: 572 unique visitors & 868 page views; 52 downloads</p> <p>The number of visits and downloads exceeds the number of staff taking parental leave over this period, indicating good awareness of the resource and potentially use of the resources in future planning. Note that Managers are encouraged to utilise the general toolkit resources as well as manager resources. Managers can also access the Managers' Toolkit online as an intranet page without the need to download it.</p>

		<p>Staff News Articles 2018-2023: 0.8% (19/2325) Staff News articles shared information for parents and carers. Of these, 3/19 contained images of women with children; 4/19 included a mix of genders; 2/19 included images of a child only; 5/19 images included racial diversity, and; 10/19 included no imagery.</p> <p>Parental Leave Imagery In 2023 the Parental Leave Toolkit was updated with the new EA. Of the images in the Toolkit: 3/12 images included women and children; 2/12 included images of men with children; 2/12 images included a mix of genders, 4/12 images included a child only, 6/12 images included racial diversity, and 2/12 images included LGBTQIA+ representation.</p> <p>Action 1: Provide additional resources and ongoing monitoring and reporting.</p>
<p>5.3.2 Engage with Heads of School Committee to educate about the new EA provisions, parental leave toolkits and KIT day provisions.</p>	<p>Complete: Changes were communicated directly to Managers and Heads of Schools.</p>	<p>2023: For implementation of the 2023 – 2026 EA, the Director Workplace Relations ran a series of EA information sessions / webinars with Q&A for managers, which covered the changes to Parental leave provisions. These sessions included a number of Heads of Schools. The Provost also ran an EA “round up” session for Heads of Schools. In addition to these sessions, Parental Leave information is readily available for Heads of Schools and other leaders.</p>
<p>5.3.3 Rerun parental leave focus groups with staff and Heads of Schools to identify any remaining issues and communicate results to staff.</p>	<p>Altered and Complete. We ran focus groups in 2023 inviting staff with caring responsibilities to reflect on the provisions and culture at the University. These are discussed in the impact section. However, Heads of Schools were not specifically targeted as a group.</p>	<p>2023: 12 focus groups (66 participants). Results used to inform impact and further actions of this document.</p>

<p>5.3.5 Develop a business case to identify resource implications for sub-actions:</p> <p>5.3.5.1 Reducing the initial qualification period for accessing enhanced primary carer leave from 24 months (originally 5.3.4 in Bronze Action Plan)</p> <p>5.3.5.2 Recognising inter-University transfers</p> <p>5.3.5.3 Ensuring on-costs for staff on parental leave are not transferred back to the grant holder Removing claw-back requirement (originally 5.3.8 in Bronze Action Plan)</p>	<p>Altered & Complete. SAGE made a submission to the 2023-26 EA negotiation team, successfully advocating for these changes.</p> <p>5.3.5.2 was removed as it required inter-university cooperation and was unfeasible during this period. We have included further exploration of this in the Cygnet Action Plan.</p>	<p>2023: The University's endorsed final package of parental leave enhancements in our 2023-26 EA included:</p> <p>5.3.5.1 Access to full Primary Carer Leave after 12 months service and removal of the re-eligibility period for a subsequent period of parental leave;</p> <p>5.3.5.3 On-cost no longer transferred back to grant holders but rather resourced via a central cost centre (actioned pre-EA, January 2023)</p> <p>5.3.5.4 Removal of the 6-months return to work period when accessing Primary Carer Leave</p> <p>Action 2: Monitor whether there is an increase in the number of fixed-term staff taking enhanced primary carer leave following the removal of the claw-back requirement.</p>
<p>5.3.10 Evaluate, update, and explore staff experiences of expanded partner leave provisions. Promote case studies to staff.</p>	<p>Altered and complete. Plans to explore staff experiences of expanded partner leave provisions were disrupted by the pandemic and then by 100% turn-over of the SAGE Program Office, who would coordinate this, and introduction of the 2023-2026 EA.</p> <p>We subsequently ran focus groups in 2023 inviting staff with caring responsibilities to reflect on the provisions and culture at the University. These are discussed in the impact section.</p> <p>One example case study of partner leave is included on our parental leave intranet page.</p>	<p>2023: 12 focus groups (66 participants). Results used to inform impact and further actions of this document.</p>

Table 4 Progress and outputs of actions designed to raise awareness and reduce inequities and inconsistencies in provisions and support for staff with caring responsibilities

SAGE Bronze Action ID	Progress	Outputs
5.3.7 Ensure equitable access to the Carers Re-engagement Scheme.	Incomplete. The SAGE Program Office advocated with each Faculty to offer a Carers Re-engagement Scheme; however, this is currently only offered in Science and Engineering, meaning there are still inequities for staff across different faculties.	<p>An alternative offered by the University since 2022 may be suitable for some new parents. A staff member who gives birth to or adopts a child may take all or part of their Primary Carer Leave (up to 22 weeks) as a parental leave return to work allowance to facilitate their re-entry into the workplace. Examples of how the allowance may be used include offset associated costs such as childcare; make up for working reduced hours in a gradual return to work; or support staff in re-establishing their academic or professional career.</p> <p>2022-2023: 20 members of staff have utilised their Primary Carer Leave as a Return-to-Work Allowance. A total of 502 women took Primary Carer Leave over this period, indicating a very low uptake of this scheme (4%).</p> <p>Action 3: Review and evaluate current communication around the Return-to-Work Allowance and whether it needs to be better communicated as an option for staff.</p>
5.3.13 Showcase diverse examples of male and female staff that utilise flexible work arrangements due to caring responsibilities.	Incomplete: The University's Marketing and Communications Team endeavours to showcase diverse examples in imagery and communications, however an audit in March 2024 revealed that while we include diversity in our images around staff with caring responsibilities and/or working flexibly, men are still under-represented.	<p>An audit of Staff News articles about utilising flexible work arrangements 2018-2023 revealed that 1.5 % of articles (34/2202) communicated information about support for staff with caring responsibilities and/or staff working flexibly. Of these: 20 included no imagery, 4 contained a mix of genders in the imagery, 1 included imagery of men only (with children), 7 included imagery of women only (4 with children, 1 with pet), 1 included imagery of children only, 1 included imagery of pets only, 5 images included racial diversity, 1 included imagery of elder care</p> <p>The general narrative of these articles was not gendered.</p> <p>We note that beyond images and articles, the University also promotes men working flexibly, such as International Women's Day, where senior men have spoken of shared carer responsibilities.</p> <p>Action 4: Better diversity in the images used in Staff News articles about parents and carers, and staff working flexibly.</p>
5.3.14 Assign champions to lead a working group to develop a	In progress: The development of a Childcare Strategy was well	<p>As of August 2024, six of the seven key initiatives of the Childcare Strategy identified via staff consultation are complete or in progress, and one has been paused:</p>

<p>childcare strategy and a business plan to meet the childcare needs of staff and students. [Includes assessment of Action 5.2.15 ensure equitable access to travel support for carers in all faculties and make available to all academic staff (both continuing and fixed term)].</p>	<p>underway 2019-2020, with staff consultation and communications in progress when the pandemic hit. At this point work on the Childcare Strategy was paused until 2023, when it was revitalised, with a cross-functional team updating the Strategy. We are now in the final stages of transitioning the Childcare Strategy into business as usual.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearer and easy support for carers seeking childcare: In progress. We have an Intranet site with resources and information for staff with caring responsibilities that was updated in 2024. We are increasing support for the Parents and Carers Network and communicating out to staff. Increased and priority childcare places near the University: In progress. We are currently exploring additional childcare centres within proximity to the University and whether they are willing to enter MOUs with the University. Financial support for students: Completed/ongoing - business as usual (BAU) via student bursaries that can be accessed to support childcare arrangements during peak periods for both coursework and higher degree research (e.g. during exams or reviews). A flexible-friendly culture: Completed/ongoing BAU via the revamped Flexible Work Policy Travel support for staff: In progress. We are finalising guidelines with respect to travel support for staff to be implemented on a local level. Salary sacrifice: Completed/Removed – not feasible under Australian Tax Office rules Childcare at Westmead: Paused for land negotiations
<p>5.4.12 Encourage all schools to consult with staff to develop appropriate core-hours guidelines.</p>	<p>Complete. The University has core-hours guidance embedded in our EA, with the ordinary span of hours 7am to 7pm, Monday to Friday. Core hours are a maximum of six hours per ordinary day and are established or varied by a manager after consultation with staff in the work area. They may vary for different staff members within a work unit to suit operational requirements.</p>	<p>The University encourages each area to implement periods of minimal to no meetings. Furthermore, clause 225 in our 2023-26 EA protects the right for staff to disconnect.</p>

Examples of other actions to decrease workplace barriers for staff with caring responsibilities developed post SAGE Bronze

Action	Progress	Outputs
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<p>Updated Flexible Working Arrangements Policy & resources</p>	<p>Following consultation with our staff unions and colleagues, the Flexible Working Arrangements Policy was revised to make it more contemporary and balanced, building on the gains made in flexible work throughout the COVID-19 pandemic response.</p> <p>The updated Flexible Working Arrangement Policy incorporates feedback from staff consultation, which included dedicated focus groups, feedback gathered via the 2021 return-to-campus staff pulse survey (see Table 3, action 5.3.12), and individual staff feedback received via all-staff consultation communicated in Staff News. Flexible working conditions were then embedded in our 2023-26 EA (clause 206-214).</p>	<p>2020: Key changes to the flexible work policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff no longer have to formally document work from home or remote work arrangements (i.e. flexible arrangements that do not have a payroll impact). • Greater balance between the needs of staff and operational requirements. • An approach based on agreement to flexibility unless otherwise indicated by business requirements. • Inclusion of longer-term casual staff (casual staff engaged on a regular and systematic basis for at least 12 months) • The introduction of modified working times for teaching academic staff in accordance with the Curriculum Timetabling Policy. The Flexible Working Arrangements Policy includes the option for academic staff with teaching allocation to be able to have approved times when they are not available for teaching during normal daytime teaching hours (i.e. modified working times). • A new responsibility section added to clearly outline both manager and staff responsibilities in working together to enhance and develop flexible ways of working. <p>Supporting resources include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A staff guide offering guidance on how to approach a flexible working arrangement. • A guide for managers outlining flexible work options, principles and manager expectations. • A discussion guide for managers to help them lead conversations with their team to enhance the way they work together. • Formal flexible working arrangement forms available to staff online.
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Table 5 Progress and outputs of actions designed to increase our understanding of the impact of existing and new provisions and support for staff with caring responsibilities

SAGE Bronze Action ID	Progress	Outputs
5.3.6 Review programs and evaluate feedback and report on effectiveness of Parents and Carers programs.	<p>Complete. Commencing in 2018, the University partnered with Parents At Work, an online platform with workshops/podcasts/webinars, support groups, online meet-ups. The program aims to create consistency in the experience University of Sydney parents have when they transition to and from parental leave. The program helps make flexibility a reality for parents and carers, better integrating work/life commitments, and encouraging more men to engage in taking parental leave to continue the journey towards true gender equality.</p>	<p>March 2020: 445 University subscribers December 2020: 507 University subscribers April 2021: 533 University subscribers November 2021: 573 University subscribers 2022: 597 University subscribers December 2023: 660 University subscribers</p> <p>Feedback provided by staff to Parents At Work, found the majority agreed the content and resources exceeded expectations, noting they would recommend it to other parents. In 2024, the University's D&I team is currently in discussions about ways to refresh and build our relationship with Parents At Work.</p>
5.3.9 Develop a survey and run focus groups for staff who did and who did not return from maternity/adoption leave and Primary Carer leave.	<p>Altered and incomplete. The roll-out of the University's new in-house exit survey platform, which will be a primary mechanism to obtain information from staff who did not return from Parental Leave, was delayed due to the pandemic, but has since been reactivated with anticipated launch in mid-2024. This means we have not been able to evaluate why staff do not return from parental leave.</p>	<p>2023: We ran 12 focus groups (66 participants) in 2023 inviting current and past staff with caring responsibilities to reflect on the provisions and culture at the University (no past staff members participated). These are discussed in the impact section.</p>
5.3.11 Record the reason/s staff are employed part-time in the new HR technology.	<p>Removed. Was identified that this was not possible to collect within the version of Workday owned by the University.</p>	<p>Not applicable</p>
5.3.12 Include flexible work and transitioning between part-time and full-time work questions in staff/Heads of School parental leave focus groups.	<p>Altered and Complete. Plans to explore staff experiences of flexible work and transitioning between part-time and full-time employment were disrupted by the pandemic and then by 100% turn-over of the SAGE Program Office, who would coordinate this, and introduction of the 2023-2026 EA.</p> <p>In September 2021, the University sent a short survey to all continuing, fixed-term, and casual staff to</p>	<p>2021: Staff Pulse Survey on flexibility. Aggregated data on survey responses was provided to professional service unit and faculty leaders at the Director and Head of School level, to be shared with colleagues within those local areas for discussion. Faculty and PSU leaders were then asked to consider what specific actions to take as a result of the feedback received. These were incorporated into University-wide plans as well as communicated locally.</p>

	<p>understand how stay-at-home restrictions imposed by the NSW Government were impacting them and their work. The Vice-Chancellor emailed all staff on 20 October 2021 to provide an overview of key results.</p> <p>We also ran focus groups in 2023 inviting staff with caring responsibilities to reflect on the provisions and culture at the University. These are discussed in the impact section.</p>	<p>The following actions were taken at the University level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The continued ability to work flexibly came through strongly in responses from colleagues around what would be most important in returning to campus, and this is something that has been maintained, as the benefits of a flexible approach to working are now well-known and widely accepted. • AP&D and PP&D processes for 2021 and 2022 were adjusted to take into account these years' extraordinary circumstances. • A broader wellbeing framework, the Staff Health and Wellbeing Program 2023-26, was developed to strengthen the focus on mental and physical health across our community.
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OUTCOMES

Shifts in inclusion often reflect the impact of multi-faceted interventions over time, so it can be difficult to draw clear causality between Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) actions and outputs, and their outcomes and impacts. We have therefore sought to demonstrate the outcomes of our actions to mitigate barriers faced by staff embarking on parental leave, and those working with caring responsibilities, using eight high-level markers (Table 6). Collectively, these markers indicate the barriers identified in our Bronze application have been mitigated by the outputs of actions outlined in Tables 3-5.

Table 6 Markers for mitigation of barriers

Sub-barrier	Markers for mitigation/removal
1. Inequities and inconsistencies in our provisions and support for staff taking parental/carers' leave	1a We see an increase in the percentage of men taking parental leave, particularly the enhanced Primary Carer Leave, compared to 2017 following the introduction of all gender Primary Carer Leave in 2018-21 EA provisions. 1b We see an increase in the number of staff accessing KIT days.
2: Inequities and inconsistencies in our provisions and support for staff with caring responsibilities	2a We see an increase in the percentage of men taking carers' leave. 2b We see no difference in levels of workplace engagement and satisfaction in our staff surveys between staff with and without caring responsibilities. 2c We see an increase in the percentage of men working part-time compared to 2017. 2d We see no difference in levels of workplace engagement and satisfaction in our staff surveys between staff working part-time or full-time.
3: Lack of understanding of the impact of existing and new schemes and provisions	3a We understand more about the effectiveness of the Parents At Work program. 3b We understand more about the current lived experience of staff balancing work and caring responsibilities (covered in Impact section).

1. Inequities and inconsistencies in our provisions and support for staff taking parental/carers' leave

1a Gender breakdown of staff taking parental leave

Viewed year-by-year since the new provisions were introduced in 2018, the largest increases in men accessing parental leave have been, generally, in STEMM faculties and in academic roles (Figures 1-2). More women are also accessing leave, particularly post-COVID, however the increases have been greater for men (Table 7). This suggests the new equal provisions are taking effect, although work remains to normalise uptake of parental leave across genders.

Between 2014-17, an average of 3.5% of men accessed parental leave (Table 1). Since equal parental leave provisions were implemented in 2018, there has been a 22.8% increase in men accessing parental leave, with 7% of men accessing parental leave in 2023 (Table 7). The average percent of men accessing parental leave, however, remains lower than women over the same timeframe, with 11% of women accessing parental leave in 2023.

Action 5. (1) Survey men in academic and professional roles to understand barriers to taking up provisions (2) Feature men who have taken parental/carers leave in staff news profiles or similar.

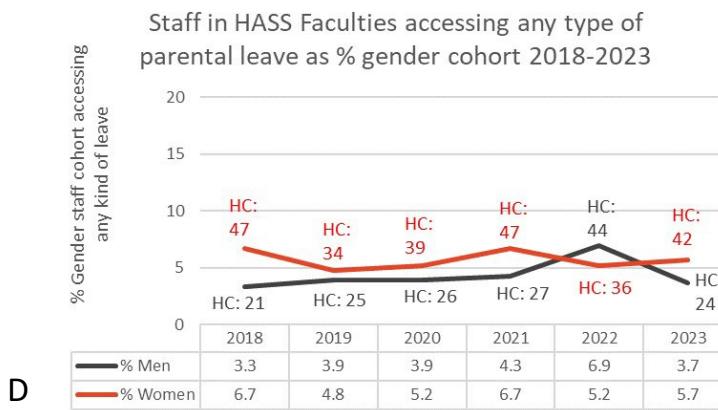
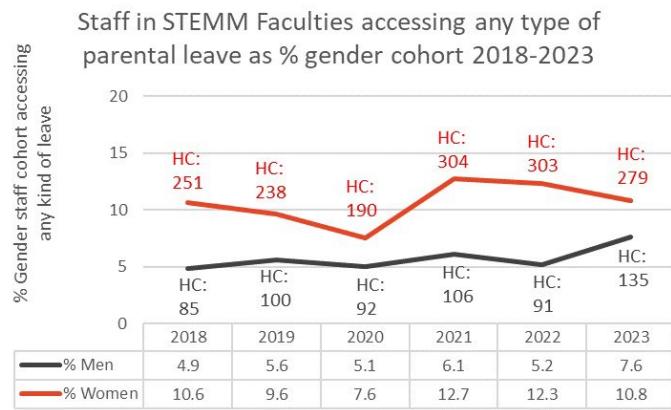
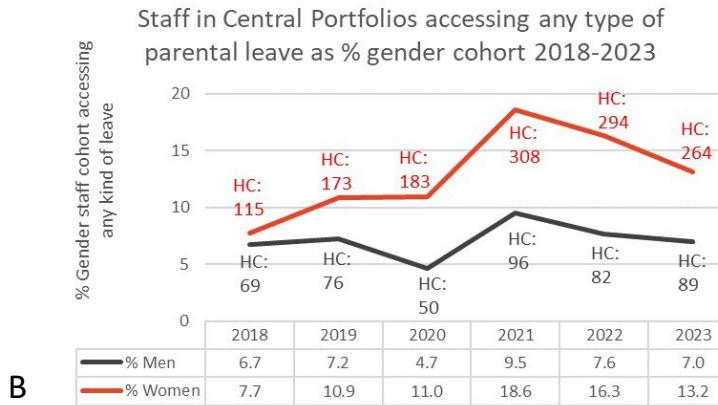
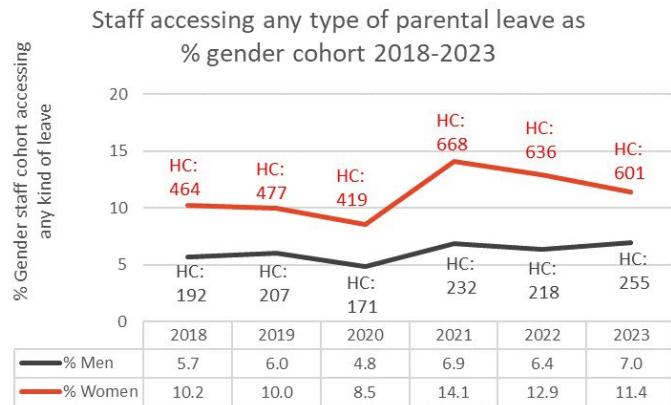


Figure 1 Percent men and women in (a) all University (b) Central Portfolios (c) STEMM Faculties (d) HASS Faculties accessing any kind of parental leave 2018-2023

HC = Headcount. Data extracted from HR Diversity Dashboard 23 June 2024 and correct at time of extraction.

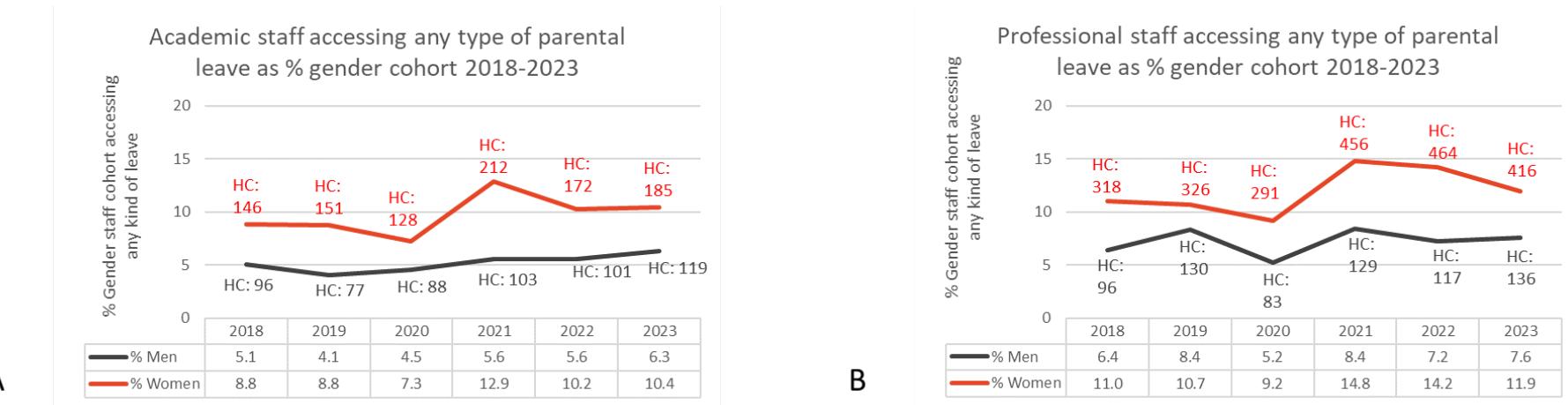


Figure 2 Percent (a) academic staff (b) professional staff accessing any kind of parental leave 2018-2023

HC = Headcount. Data extracted from HR Diversity Dashboard 23 June 2024 and correct at time of extraction.

Table 7 Percent change in percent men accessing parental leave 2023 compared to 2018 across roles and faculties

HC = Headcount. Data extracted from HR Diversity Dashboard 23 June 2024 and correct at time of extraction.

	2018 HC Men Parental Leave	2018 % Men Parental Leave	2023 HC Men Parental Leave	2023 % Men Parental Leave	Δ% Change Men 2018 v 2023	2018 HC Women Parental Leave	2018 % Women Parental Leave	2023 HC Women Parental Leave	2023 % Women Parental Leave	Δ% Change Women 2018 v 2023
All	192	5.7	255	7.0	22.8%	464	10.2	601	11.4	11.8%
Central Portfolios	69	6.7	89	7.0	4.5%	115	7.7	264	13.2	71.4%
STEMM Faculties	85	4.9	135	7.6	55.1%	251	10.6	279	10.8	1.9%
HASS Faculties	21	3.3	24	3.7	12.1%	47	6.7	42	5.7	-14.9%
Academic	96	5.1	119	6.3	23.5%	146	8.8	185	10.4	18.2%
Professional	96	6.4	136	7.6	18.9%	318	11.0	416	11.9	8.2%

Since the introduction of Primary Carer Leave for men, there has been a substantial increase in uptake of this longer-term leave by men who have accessed parental leave of any type (5.7% in 2018 to 22% in 2023) (Figure 3), a signal for the positive impact of equal parental leave in normalising equitable participation in early childcare. However, we note that post-pandemic the average number of Primary Carer Leave hours taken by men exceeds the average of women. Primary carer leave is pro rata and hence if staff are working part time, they receive less entitlements. Further, Primary Carer Leave can be availed at 100% or 60% and hence if the cohort that is taking it on 60% would have less hours even their headcount is more. Both of these may account for the greater number of hours accessed by men, but does not fully explain why this difference has arisen post-pandemic.

Action 6: Undertake a deep dive into Primary Carer Leave data segmented by role, age, and employment contract, to better understand the decrease in average hours accessed by women compared to men post-pandemic and take further action if necessary.

The proportion of men accessing unpaid parental leave has risen from 0.2% in 2018 to 0.4% in 2023, although many more women are accessing unpaid leave than men overall (data not shown).

1b Uptake of Keeping In Touch days

Women have accessed more KIT hours than men since 2018 (women total = 7229 KIT hours; men total = 684 KIT hours), which would be anticipated given KIT days are only accessed in longer-term leave types, and more women than men have accessed the longer Primary Carer leave overall. Both men and women, however, have shown a positive trend of accessing more KIT hours since 2018 (women 546 KIT hours in 2018 v 1810 in 2023; men 0 KIT hours in 2018 v 243 in 2023), suggesting KIT now has greater visibility.

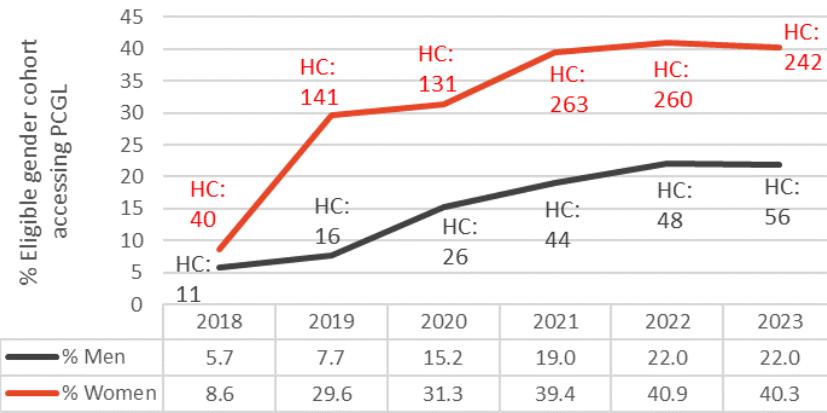
2. Inequities and inconsistencies in our provisions and support for staff with caring responsibilities

2a Gender breakdown of staff taking carers' leave

Carers' leave was not recorded in our Bronze Application in a way that can be directly compared to our 2018-23 data, however similar trends remain with respect to a greater proportion of women than men accessing carers' leave, although men access greater hours overall. A greater percentage of Professional staff access Carers' leave compared to Academic, but Academic staff tend to access longer timeframes overall (Figure 4).

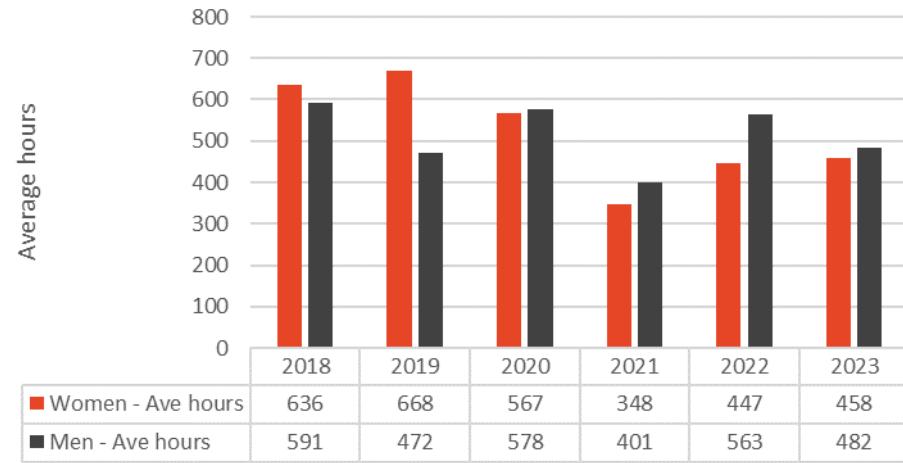
During the 2020-21 lockdowns, staff with caring responsibilities were able to take one day leave per week via flexible working arrangements rather than applying for carers' leave, reflected in the overall drop over this period. However, this drop also coincides with the introduction of much greater flexibility for professional staff that was not routinely available pre-COVID and may reflect a trend for professional staff to "work through" at home rather than take extended carers' leave, consistent with some of the experiences shared by staff in our focus groups (see Impact section).

Staff accessing Primary Carer Leave as % eligible
gender cohort 2018-2023



A

Average hours Primary Carer Leave taken



B

Figure 3 (a) Percent men and women accessing Primary Carer Leave 2018-2023 (b) Average hours taken

HC = Headcount. Data extracted from HR Diversity Dashboard 23 June 2024 and correct at time of extraction. Eligible gender cohort = staff who have accessed any kind of parental leave by gender.

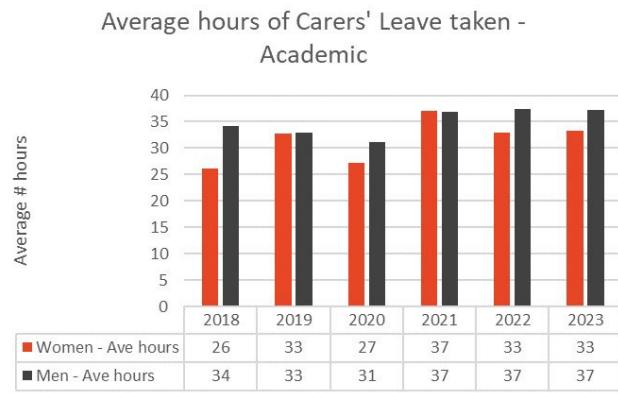
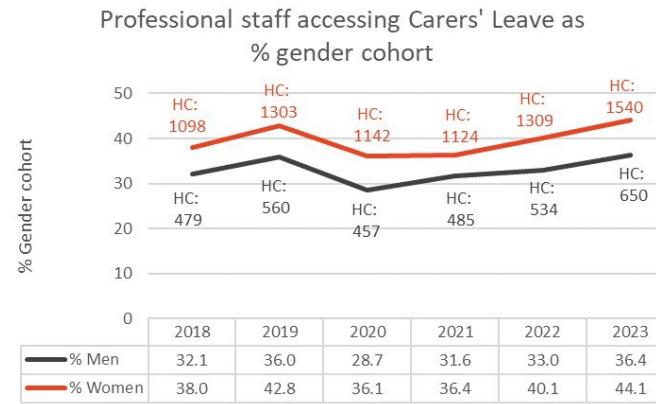
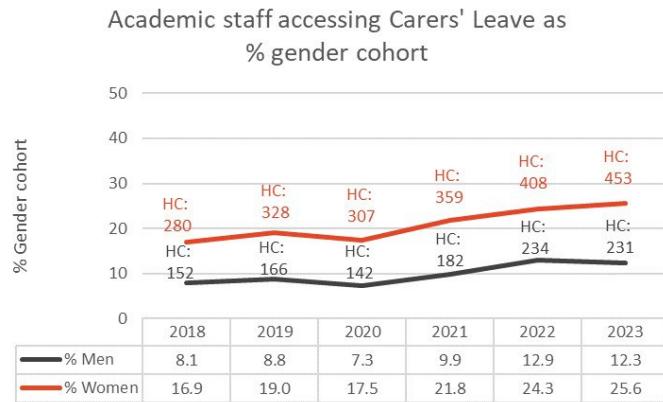


Figure 4 Percent gender cohort and average hours of Carers' Leave taken by (a & b) Academic and (c & d) Professional men and women 2018-23

HC = Headcount. Data extracted from HR Diversity Dashboard 23 June 2024 and correct at time of extract

2b Workplace engagement and satisfaction of staff with caring responsibilities

The 2017 Culture Survey reported that staff with caring responsibilities felt disadvantaged at work. Largely due to the pandemic and a change of survey platform, the University has not repeated the Culture Survey and therefore we do not have direct comparisons to the 2017 questions. However, by comparing the responses between staff with and without caring responsibilities to questions relating to engagement, access to development, and flexible working, in more recent surveys, we can gauge whether staff with caring responsibilities continue to experience and feel disadvantaged.

In 2021, the University ran a Pulse Survey on flexible working as we transitioned into post-pandemic arrangements. Of the 4892 staff who responded (39% response rate, 40% academic, 60% professional), the University was rated favourably with respect to collaboration (77%) and communication (82%) during the pandemic, manager support (81%), and overall engagement (74%). However, respondents with caring responsibilities rated lower than their colleagues on balancing work and personal commitments, and coping with disruptions, and also rated higher on-the-job stress.

Post-pandemic, the 2023 Staff Engagement Survey showed these feelings of disadvantage have diminished but not entirely, with staff with caring responsibilities still impacted by workload and feeling less connected.

Academic staff were generally less positive about their workplace experience than Professional staff (Table 8). Professional staff with caring responsibilities rated lower on questions around workload, wellbeing, and recognition.

Although some responses are not available due to group confidentiality parameters set up in our Culture Amp platform, women academics at Level D with caring responsibilities are feeling the crunch compared to men with caring responsibilities (Table 9). This trend was less evident but still present for senior Professional women (Tables 10).

Action 7. Undertake a deep dive into staff engagement survey results by School, including free text comments, to better understand the barriers to accessing resources for teaching and research women, particularly for women at Level D.

Table 8 Comparison of responses from academic¹ and professional staff with and without caring responsibilities to 2023 Staff Engagement Survey questions relating to engagement, development, and flexible working

Orange shading = Gender with caring responsibilities $\leq 5pp$ compared to same gender with no caring responsibilities; Green shading = Gender with caring responsibilities $\geq 5pp$ compared to same gender with no caring responsibilities; Green font = Women 5pp \geq Men; Red font = Women 5pp \leq Men; pp = percentage points; n = number (headcount)

	All Academics			Academics with Caring Responsibilities			Professional Staff with No Caring Responsibilities			Professional Staff with Caring Responsibilities		
	Overall (n=1.7K)	Women (n=896)	Men (n=833)	Overall (n=952)	Women (n=532)	Men (n=419)	Overall (n=1.6K)	Women (n=1.0K)	Men (n=520)	Overall (n=1.6K)	Women (n=1.1K)	Men (n=471)
I would recommend the University of Sydney as a great place to work	54	56	51	54	57	N/A	81	82	79	80	81	78
I see myself working at the University of Sydney in two years' time	65	67	63	68	69	N/A	70	70	70	74	75	71
I am appropriately involved in decisions that affect my work	36	36	36	35	36	N/A	59	59	60	57	57	57
I receive appropriate recognition for good work at the University of Sydney	47	48	46	48	48	N/A	64	64	66	61	59	65
My supervisor (or someone in management) has shown a genuine interest in my career	61	66	56	62	66	N/A	66	67	64	61	61	62
My supervisor genuinely cares about my wellbeing	71	73	70	72	74	N/A	85	86	83	82	81	83
My supervisor keeps me informed about what is happening at the University	56	59	54	57	59	N/A	72	71	72	72	72	72
I feel I am part of a team	59	64	54	60	65	N/A	81	82	78	81	81	79
Workloads are divided fairly amongst people where I work	32	31	33	32	31	N/A	50	49	52	48	48	49
We are genuinely supported if we choose to make use of flexible working arrangements	62	65	59	64	65	N/A	69	68	73	72	71	75
I believe staff wellbeing is a priority at the University of Sydney	36	34	37	35	34	N/A	61	60	64	63	62	66
Generally I believe my workload is reasonable for my role	38	35	42	36	33	N/A	65	65	66	61	60	63

¹ Note: The Culture Amp platform does not show responses from the next largest group where there is any possibility of identifying responses from a group fewer than 10. Further, academics without caring responsibilities were not available due to privacy settings and therefore the responses of academics with caring responsibilities are compared to all academics.

Table 9 Responses from academic staff with (A) no caring responsibilities and (B) caring responsibilities by level to 2023 Staff Engagement Survey questions relating to engagement, development, and flexible working

Orange shading = Gender with caring responsibilities (B) \leq 5pp compared to same gender with no caring responsibilities (A); Green shading = Gender with caring responsibilities (B) \geq 5pp compared to same gender with no caring responsibilities (A); Green font = Women 5pp \geq Men; Red font = Women 5pp \leq Men; pp = percentage points; n = number (headcount)

	Level C			Level D			Level E		
	Overall (n=128)	Women (n=70)	Men (n=58)	Overall (n=113)	Women (n=62)	Men (n=51)	Overall (n=163)	Women (n=94)	Men (n=69)
I see myself working at the University of Sydney in two years' time	65	61	71	66	63	70	73	76	68
I am appropriately involved in decisions that affect my work	41	44	36	33	40	24	36	37	34
I have access to the resources I need to do my research well	43	44	41	42	52	31	43	52	32
I have access to the resources I need to do my teaching well	51	53	48	42	45	39	43	44	42
I have enough autonomy to perform my job effectively	72	71	72	65	66	65	69	67	71
I receive appropriate recognition for good work at the University of Sydney	39	41	38	46	45	47	50	53	46
I have access to the learning and development I need to do my job well	54	60	47	63	69	54	58	58	57
I believe there are good career opportunities for me at the University of Sydney	45	49	40	49	50	47	50	49	50
The University of Sydney is a great place for me to make a contribution to my development	49	58	38	54	53	55	49	49	48
We are genuinely supported if we choose to make use of flexible working arrangements	62	72	50	58	61	54	61	57	67

A

	Level C			Level D			Level E		
	Overall (n=225)	Women (n=137)	Men (n=88)	Overall (n=198)	Women (n=115)	Men (n=83)	Overall (n=223)	Women (n=83)	Men (n=140)
I see myself working at the University of Sydney in two years' time	70	74	64	68	64	73	66	66	66
I am appropriately involved in decisions that affect my work	28	33	19	35	32	37	33	30	34
I have access to the resources I need to do my research well	36	34	39	38	31	48	37	33	40
I have access to the resources I need to do my teaching well	37	35	40	40	34	49	38	33	40
I have enough autonomy to perform my job effectively	67	69	63	66	63	70	63	67	60
I receive appropriate recognition for good work at the University of Sydney	43	47	38	44	46	40	53	53	54
I have access to the learning and development I need to do my job well	48	51	44	47	43	53	50	52	49
I believe there are good career opportunities for me at the University of Sydney	46	49	41	46	47	45	50	55	47
The University of Sydney is a great place for me to make a contribution to my development	50	56	41	52	48	57	52	59	49
We are genuinely supported if we choose to make use of flexible working arrangements	58	62	53	62	59	66	65	72	60

B

Table 10 Responses from professional staff with (A) no caring responsibilities and (B) caring responsibilities by level to 2023 Staff Engagement Survey questions relating to engagement, development, and flexible working

Orange shading = Gender with caring responsibilities (B) \leq 5pp compared to same gender with no caring responsibilities (A); Green shading = Gender with caring responsibilities (B) \geq 5pp compared to same gender with no caring responsibilities (A); Green font = Women 5pp \geq Men; Red font = Women 5pp \leq Men; pp = percentage points; n = number (headcount)

		HEO 1-4			HEO 5-10			SPS C & D		
		Overall (n=114)	Women (n=82)	Men (n=30)	Overall (n=1.3K)	Women (n=862)	Men (n=429)	Overall (n=33)	Women (n=17)	Men (n=16)
A	I see myself working at the University of Sydney in two years' time	71	73	67	70	70	70	61	59	63
	I am appropriately involved in decisions that affect my work	56	56	60	59	60	59	55	41	69
	I have access to the resources I need to do my job well	73	71	80	69	69	68	61	53	69
	I have enough autonomy to perform my job effectively	86	87	83	85	85	84	82	76	88
	I receive appropriate recognition for good work at the University of Sydney	61	63	57	63	63	65	79	76	81
	I have access to the learning and development I need to do my job well	67	68	63	68	69	66	73	82	63
	I believe there are good career opportunities for me at the University of Sydney	59	63	47	59	60	58	64	71	56
	The University of Sydney is a great place for me to make a contribution to my development	64	67	57	69	70	67	76	82	69
	We are genuinely supported if we choose to make use of flexible working arrangements	66	65	70	68	67	71	82	82	81

		HEO 1-4			HEO 5-10			SPS A & B			SPS C & D		
		Overall (n=67)	Women (n=44)	Men (n=23)	Overall (1.3K)	Women (923)	Men (345)	Overall (n=160)	Women (n=99)	Men (n=61)	Overall (n=75)	Women (n=45)	Men (n=30)
B	I see myself working at the University of Sydney in two years' time	79	80	78	76	77	73	72	70	75	59	60	57
	I am appropriately involved in decisions that affect my work	58	61	52	55	56	55	62	62	62	73	71	77
	I have access to the resources I need to do my job well	69	73	61	61	63	58	57	59	54	59	56	63
	I have enough autonomy to perform my job effectively	76	75	77	82	82	81	80	81	79	81	82	80
	I receive appropriate recognition for good work at the University of Sydney	55	55	57	59	58	62	69	71	67	77	71	87
	I have access to the learning and development I need to do my job well	67	64	74	64	65	62	73	76	69	68	64	73
	I believe there are good career opportunities for me at the University of Sydney	64	61	70	56	56	54	61	64	57	56	49	67
	The University of Sydney is a great place for me to make a contribution to my development	68	65	74	68	69	65	76	77	75	69	62	80
	We are genuinely supported if we choose to make use of flexible working arrangements	66	66	65	71	70	73	85	85	85	79	71	90

2c Gender breakdown of staff working part-time

Over the Bronze timeframe, an average of 11.7% men on fixed-term and continuing contracts were employed part-time compared to an average of 22% women. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the percentage of staff on continuing and fixed-term contracts employed on a part-time basis has increased for men and women (Figure 5) compared to 2014-17. The percentage of men employed part-time in 2023 was 18.3%, a 56% increase compared to Bronze. This change is greater than for women (35% increase since 2017), indicating that the measures the University has taken to normalise flexible working have had a positive outcome for all genders - particularly for men. Larger increases in part-time employment options were taken by staff on continuing contracts more so than staff on fixed-term contracts (Figure 6).

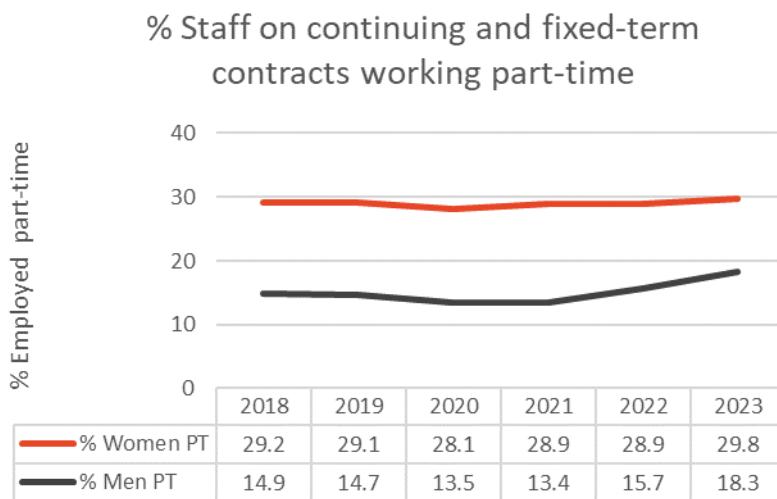


Figure 5 Percentage of staff on fixed-term and continuing contracts employed part-time 2018-2023

PT = Part-time. Data extracted from HR Diversity Dashboard 23 June 2024 and correct at time of extraction.

2d Workplace engagement and satisfaction of staff working part-time

In our 2021 Pulse Survey on flexible working during and post-pandemic, many staff indicated they wished to see the flexible working gains continue into the future. In our 2023 Staff Engagement Survey, approximately two-thirds of respondents felt they would be truly supported if they wished to make use of flexible working arrangements, and showed few differences compared to full-time staff (Table 11).

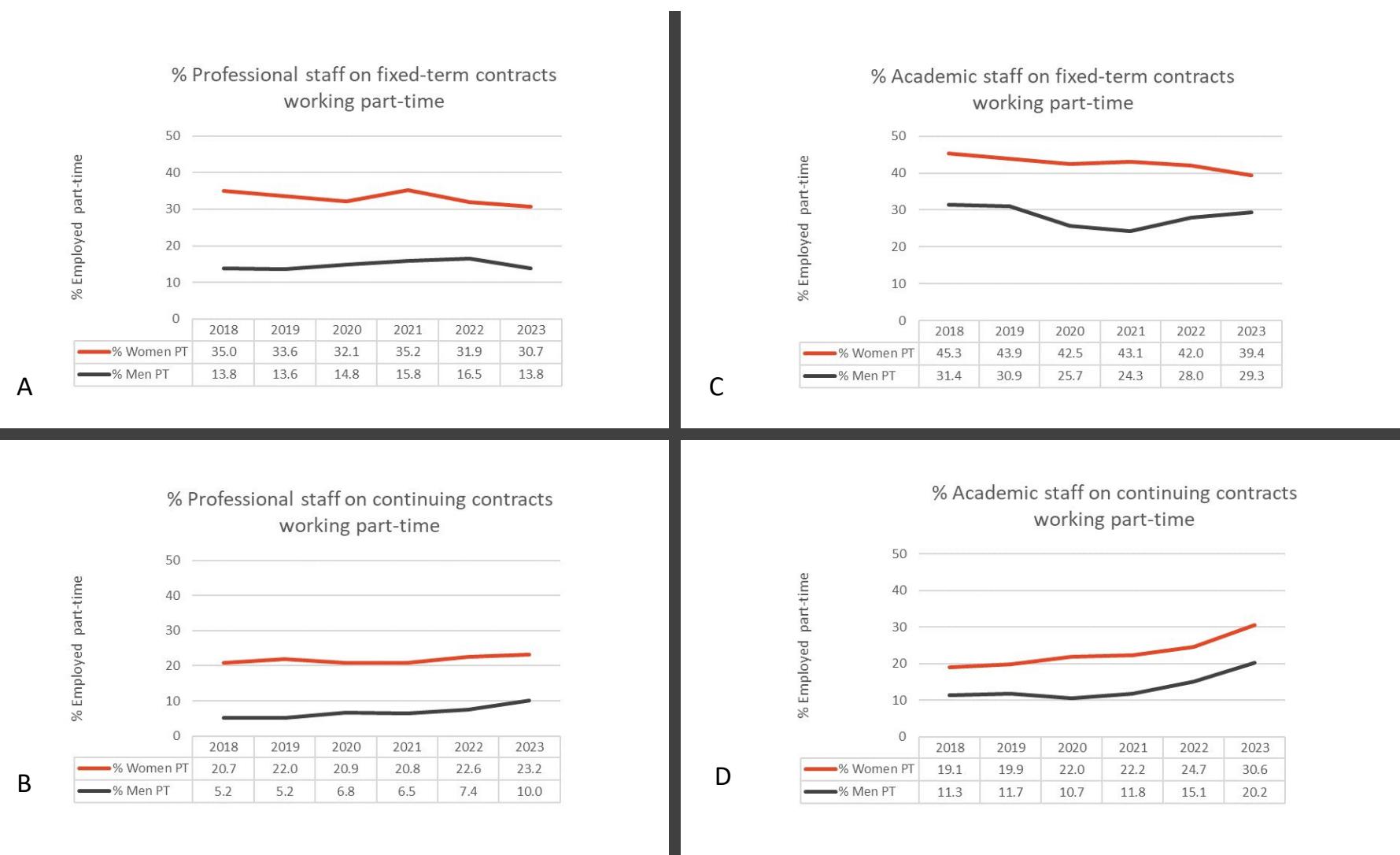


Figure 6 Percent (a) professional staff on fixed-term and (b) continuing contracts, and (c) academic staff on fixed-term and (d) continuing contracts employed part-time 2018-2023

PT = Part-time. Data extracted from HR Diversity Dashboard 23 June 2024 and correct at time of extraction

Table 11 Comparison of responses from staff employed part-time and full-time to 2023 Staff Engagement Survey questions relating to engagement, development, and flexible working

Orange shading = Gender employed part-time \leq 5pp compared to same gender employed full-time; Green text = women \geq 5pp men; Red text = women \leq 5pp men

	Employed Full-time			Employed Part-time		
	Overall (n=4.1K)	Women (n=2.4K)	Men (n=1.7K)	Overall (n=910)	Women (n=710)	Men (n=197)
I would recommend the University of Sydney as a great place to work	71	74	66	68	70	61
I see myself working at the University of Sydney in two years' time	70	72	67	65	65	63
I am appropriately involved in decision that affect my work	50	52	48	48	48	49
I receive appropriate recognition for good work at the University of Sydney	57	58	56	55	54	59
My supervisor (or someone in management) has shown a genuine interest in my career	62	63	59	65	66	62
My supervisor genuinely cares about my wellbeing	78	79	77	82	83	78
My supervisor keeps me informed about what is happening at the University	66	68	64	65	65	64
I feel I am part of a team	72	76	67	75	77	68
Workloads are divided fairly amongst people where I work	42	42	42	46	46	45
We are genuinely supported if we choose to make use of flexible working arrangements	67	67	68	69	70	65
I believe staff wellbeing is a priority at the University of Sydney	53	53	53	50	51	49
Generally I believe my workload is reasonable for my role	53	53	54	56	56	55

3. Engagement with Parents At Work program

Since the Parents at Work program was introduced at the University, 710 staff members have engaged with the program, increasing each year from 445 members in March 2020 to 660 in December 2023 (Figure 7). The majority of members are parents with a smaller proportion being managers, staff going on parental leave, and carers. Many more women than men subscribe to the program, noting the high proportion of members who chose not to disclose their gender for most timepoints measured.

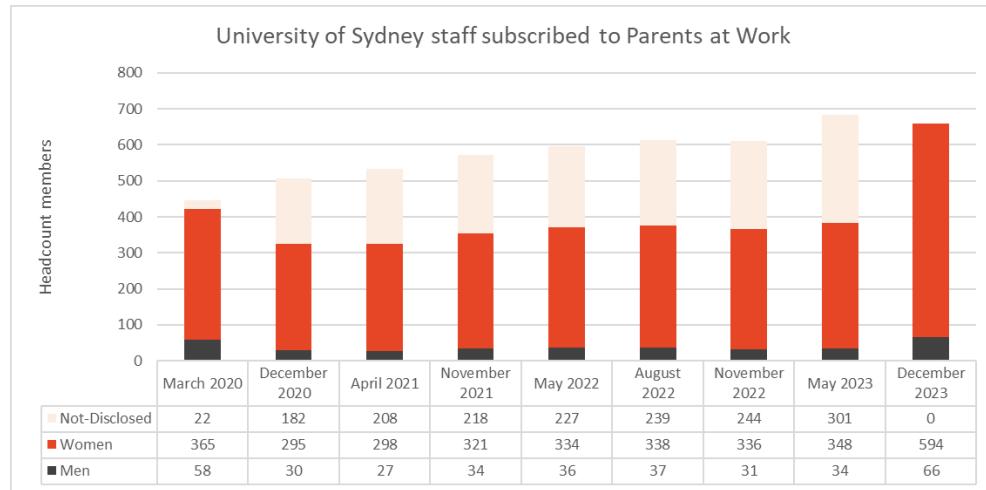


Figure 7 University of Sydney staff subscribed to Parents at Work program

Data provided by Parents at Work

Insights provided by the Parents at Work program showed that over half of the University Parents at Work members attend the webinars, with a high number attending multiple webinars, telling us that these are a valued by staff. Feedback from staff on the programs indicated their sense of safety and support in the open forum discussions with staff at a similar life stage. Although engagement with the program's survey is low (below 5% of members), most respondents said they would recommend the University as a family-friendly workplace and expressed satisfaction with both the University's parental leave policy and experience transitioning to parental leave. The top challenge reported by users has consistently been needing greater flexibility and understanding from their managers.

IMPACT

The impact of actions the University has taken to increase the equitable uptake and positive outcomes of leave and flexible work provisions for staff members with caring responsibilities was gauged through a series of 12 focus groups (University's Ethics Committee project 2023/274). Methodological details are shown in Table 12.

Table 12 Methodological details for focus group recruitment, structure and analysis

Participant recruitment	Recruitment was via internal communication streams (e.g. staff newsletters and the Yammer chat network) and external social media (Twitter/X) to connect with past staff members. Participants could have any role but must have used carer-related leave or flexible working arrangements.
Participant demographics	About 105 focus group invitations were issued, with 66 people attending. This met our sample size goal of between 60 and 120 participants, which we felt would provide sufficient voices to assess impact. The demographic profile of the 66 focus group participants differed from the overall University workforce profile in three key ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 88% of participants identified as women (59% in the general workforce); • 70% of participants were professional staff (59% in the general workforce); • 47% of participants were aged in their 30s (30% in the general workforce).
Privacy considerations	Each participant was asked to check and approve the edited version of their transcribed comments. The transcripts were then de-identified and analysed using the NVivo software system to discover common themes.
Structure	Focus groups were structured to give a mix of staff types and reduce potential conflicts of interest. They were held over Zoom and recorded. An experienced researcher, a University academic, facilitated the groups, using a topic guide but also following the conversation as it developed. A member of the SAGE Caring & Flexibility Working Group attended as an observer.
Post discussion	Participants have approved quotes used in this report.
A note on timing	The COVID-19 pandemic forced a rapid uptake of flexible work practices, including working from home, during the period under review for this Cygnet. Many participants (50%) said they discovered new and better ways to balance their work and caring commitments, which they wanted to retain. At the time of the focus groups (September-October 2023), University management had circulated an email suggesting they wanted to see staff on-campus more often, as part of a review of the flexible work policy. A quarter of participants were fearful that such demands would make it difficult for them to continue in their careers at the University.

Participant demographics indicate the staff most concerned about caring-related leave and flexible work provisions were women, professionals, and those in what might be considered the 'early parenting' years. However, a deeper dive found a broader and intersectional group of carers facing challenges. The focus groups revealed how much staff rely on carer-related leave and workplace flexibility to juggle their work and caring responsibilities. For instance, participants described how University policies and processes were central to major life decisions, including where to rent or buy a house. Moreover, four participants said the University's parental leave policy had a direct influence on the timing of their pregnancies. A quarter of participants said access to flexibility was a key factor in them remaining at the University.

Participants acknowledged improvements in leave and flexible working policies during the Bronze Action Plan period (since 2018). Almost 30% of participants said they felt 'lucky' or

'grateful' for working conditions at the University, especially around leave. They believed the University offered better carer leave provisions and flexibility than other workplaces.

There was, however, room for improvement: 15% of participants said they considered other institutions and private companies had better family and carer policies and arrangements. Most participants, even those who were satisfied with their experience at the University, identified ongoing barriers relating to caring responsibilities that could stymie career goals.

Overwhelmingly, participants said the 'make-or-break' factor was the attitude of individual managers, the work culture they generated, and how they applied policies within their team.

While almost half of the participants had enjoyed positive experiences with managers, more than a quarter recounted negative experiences. Participants called on University leadership to ensure practices at manager level consistently reflected institutional policies. Participants wanted to be trusted, respected, and valued, and suggested manager training was needed in inclusivity and empathy around how to apply flexible working principles within a team.

The focus groups also revealed that carer-related leave and workplace flexibility remain gendered. Women typically carried the load of caring responsibilities at home and faced specific challenges at work. Policies and practices around carer-related leave and workplace flexibility therefore had a greater impact on women than on men.

Themes and experiences shared by staff with caring responsibilities around parental leave and balancing work with caring responsibilities are summarised in Tables 13 and 14.

Table 13 Key themes raised by participants about parental and carer leave

Working well	Working less well	Suggestions for future action
<p>Gratitude for generous leave provisions. Almost 30% of participants said they felt 'lucky' or 'grateful' for University working conditions, especially around leave. The same number believed the University offered better carer leave and flexibility provisions than other workplaces.</p> <p><i>"I've always worked in corporate before ... and the leave provisions were very mean ... it was almost like you feared becoming unwell, or you feared anything interrupting your ability to work." [p12_01]</i></p> <p><i>"I really have seen the difference between working here and working at my partner's employer, because we share the load 50-50 ... my partner's manager is not supportive [and] he's been called in to meetings because he's taken too much leave." [08_06]</i></p>	<p>Inconsistent application of policy, largely dependent on attitude of team leader/manager. Difficulties accessing carers leave (14% of participants) included having to justify at length the reasons for a request.</p> <p><i>"I've had carers leave given to me, but I've also been pressured when I've asked for it, to say, you know, why it's really needed ... [or] I've been guilt-tripped [by the manager saying] you know I can't get cover for you unless you take leave without pay." [10_04]</i></p> <p>Workloads (23% of participants), such as being expected to complete work while on leave or returning to work that has piled up.</p> <p><i>"If I take a lot of sick leave or carers leave, which we have available, we're very lucky, the work just accumulates ... So it's not so straightforward that you get so many days of leave and you can actually take them. The workloads are so huge." [08_06]</i></p> <p><i>"I hate taking time off because I just spend crazy hours working up to it and crazy hours afterwards." [09_03]</i></p> <p>Participants say Information Technology (IT) systems such as Workday are not user-friendly and don't cope well with flexible work patterns and leave requests.</p>	<p>Manager education around policy to ensure consistency.</p> <p><i>"Educate managers so it's not so inconsistent ... [they all] manage things quite differently, and sometimes it can depend on whether they have children themselves and can empathise, and that's just not how it should be." [10_03]</i></p> <p>Action 1: Provide additional resources and monitor impact. For example, information about entitlements included in the mandatory training pack for staff moving into management roles, updating parental leave resources to include more information about inclusively supporting staff with parental/caring responsibilities, creating a checklist for Managers of staff taking Carer's Leave, and regularly monitoring the experiences of staff with caring responsibilities via our annual Staff Engagement Surveys.</p> <p>Clearly defining roles and workload expectations, setting boundaries around personal time (e.g. sick leave or carers leave).</p> <p><i>"I don't have proper sick days anymore. If I need to stay home, it's like, well, I can still jump onto a Zoom. I'm too sick to come and do a face-to-face, but sure I can jump on, sure I can keep an eye on Teams. And maybe that's about my own personal time management and boundaries, but I think Zoom has lowered that access bar." [06_01]</i></p> <p>Action 1: Provide additional resources and monitor impact. For example, information about entitlements included in the mandatory training pack for staff</p>

		<p>moving into management roles, updating parental leave resources to include more information about inclusively supporting staff with parental/caring responsibilities, creating a checklist for Managers of staff taking Carer's Leave, and regularly monitoring the experiences of staff with caring responsibilities via our annual Staff Engagement Surveys.</p> <p>Review Workday and other IT systems dealing with leave and flexible hours.</p> <p>Action 8: Draw on work underway via DIAP by the D&I team and WR team to review and update systems and forms dealing with leave and flexible hours to be more user-friendly.</p>
<p>Acknowledgement of improvements in Enterprise Agreement regarding parental leave, especially the removal of re-qualifying times to access leave and claw-back provisions.</p> <p><i>"When I had my first (child) and came back, I had to be back at work I had to be back at work for I think two years, maybe 18 months, before I could access the extended parental leave. [USyd] Inadvertently was my family planning because I had to get paid leave. I'm glad they have reduced that minimum return-to-work requirement" [05-09]</i></p>	<p>Inconsistent application of policy, largely dependent on attitude of team leader/manager. Problems returning from parental leave (20% of participants) included poor guidance about transition to full duties, a lack of part-time options, and not being kept informed about changes to the work environment. Keeping in touch days were valued but applied inconsistently.</p> <p><i>"I was really pressured to increase my days to five quicker than I was prepared to, and I [was suffering from] postnatal depression and anxiety [and] I felt very unsupported, to the point where I was having panic attacks at work. It just wasn't managed very well. It was sort of seen as a lack in my performance rather than a lack of accommodation for what I needed at the time." [01_04]</i></p> <p><i>"So while I was on parental leave, nobody told me this is what's happening at the university, and we've got new policies; you've got keep in</i></p>	<p>Further education of managers regarding parental leave provisions, especially return to work transitions and part-time work options, and how to use keeping in touch days.</p> <p><i>"My original director, who I had to put a case to, to go part-time, never had any carer responsibilities. Subsequent to that, she did have a young child, and her attitude changed." [02_04]</i></p> <p>Action 9: Provide additional resources and accountability structures.</p> <p>Increase awareness campaigns targeting staff re carer-related entitlements, especially the parental toolkit and networking opportunities.</p> <p><i>"It would be great to see more visible role models of women who have 'made it' through leave and reached senior roles for which they are recognised. When you look around your work environment and don't see those people as visible,</i></p>

	<p><i>touch days, why don't you come and meet the team; we've got a whole new way of doing things, let's transition you back to the workplace in a way that makes it easy for you. I had nothing at all." [05_01]</i></p> <p>Little awareness of parental leave toolkit and other resources.</p> <p>Stalled progression (23% of participants) due to career 'gaps' e.g. time spent on parental leave (this was particularly the case for academic staff). Feeling sidelined when on leave. <i>Note: "Relative to Opportunity" is now included in career -related policies such as Performance Planning and Development; Promotions; Academic Probation and Confirmation (i.e. achievements are accessed relative to opportunity which includes part-time work; significant parenting or other caring responsibilities.)</i></p> <p><i>"It is not clear to me how the extended period of time I took off work is going to be commensurately measured in the context of things like promotion and external grant applications ... because my AP&D supervisor has no scope for trying to account for that gap. That's where the anxieties around taking the time off [come in] ... how do I manage my output ... and not get behind on research projects, not get excluded from new ones." [01_07]</i></p> <p><i>"The maternity leave's great, that amount of pay and length of time. My main issue has been trying to get a promotion. That's been tricky. Even though we have this clause of relative to opportunity, how to operationalise that is up to</i></p>	<p><i>it makes it hard to see that it is possible to survive the journey of returning from maternity leave."</i> [08_08]</p> <p>Action 4: Better diversity in the images used in Staff News articles about parents and carers, and staff working flexibly.</p> <p>Develop a system that is more transparent around 'relative to opportunity' calculations for consideration during career advancement discussions.</p> <p>Action 10: Embed our new Full-time Equivalent Year (FTEY) calculator app into relevant systems and processes and communicate to staff.</p>
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	<p><i>everyone's imagination rather than actual concrete examples of how to make it happen."</i> [08_09]</p>	
<p>All of the men participants said that having access to carer-related leave and flexible working options allowed them to more equally share the caring burden at home. They appreciated the changes to parental leave provisions that gave them equal access as primary carers. Having role models had been important to them.</p> <p><i>"The policy changed after the birth of my second child. The policy I was under meant I wasn't eligible for anything more than one week of parental leave ... I was really jealous of men who came after, who were able to share some of that longer parental leave with their partners."</i> [10_07]</p> <p><i>"The flexibility meant that my wife was much more easily and comfortably able to return to work. That's both in the amount of paternity leave that I had, but also, even now, I do [childcare] pickups and drop-offs."</i> [01_07]</p>	<p>Women participants indicated they continue to carry the caring load, which can affect their career progression.</p> <p><i>"I do feel that my career has stalled because of having children and because I have to take the lion's share of the caring arrangements."</i> [05_01]</p> <p>Women participants reported examples of sexist attitudes around ambition, opportunities, and workload.</p> <p><i>"I did feel a bit of pressure telling my manager I was pregnant. He was an older gentleman who had some pretty traditional views and did things like make off-hand comments, like oh, well, you won't care about this because you won't be here next year anyway. That kind of stuff."</i> [05_04]</p>	<p>Showcase case studies of staff with caring responsibilities who identify as men, and role models and networking to share success stories.</p> <p><i>"Our head of school was a man who was also a parent of young kids. And I was very fortunate to have that role model, to give me some of the agency to do that flexible working and not feel like I needed to hide it."</i> [10_07]</p> <p>Action 4: Better diversity in the images used in Staff News articles about parents and carers, and staff working flexibly.</p> <p>Manager training around inclusivity, bias, and empathy.</p> <p>Action 11: Review existing Inclusion modules, refresh as required, then promote to managers and staff.</p>

Table 14 Key themes raised by participants about provisions and support for staff with caring responsibilities

Working well	Working less well	Suggestions for future action
	<p>A lack of part-time or job-share options, especially at senior levels in the professional ranks. Participants complained that flexible working options were not clearly advertised.</p> <p><i>"After 18 months working full-time, and it had been quite intense with three small children, I applied for another role. Again, it was a full-time role but they were open to the possibility of four days a week ... I still see a complete absence of appropriate part-time roles [at] high levels [so] you are kind of just stuck where you are." [02_01]</i></p> <p>Staff working part-time are expected to complete full-time loads.</p> <p><i>"I found that working four days a week, you were pretty much expected to do the full-time load in the four days, and it wasn't ... sustainable." [02_04]</i></p>	<p>Advertising flexible, part-time and job-share options as standard practice. Putting flexibility at the top of job ads.</p> <p><i>"It's quite rare for you to see a part-time role advertised [for a professional staff member]. There's not that thinking by upper management, that this role does not require the one brain to do the job five days a week ... The university seems to think it's too hard ... let's just advertise it as full-time. I think they are probably losing a lot of talent because they don't have that flexibility." [02_02]</i></p> <p>Action 12: Work with the recruitment team to raise visibility of flexible work options available, such as hybrid working arrangements, part-time, flexible working hours, and job-sharing to hiring managers for inclusion in job advertisements.</p> <p>Connecting to mentors and role models; promoting networking opportunities to share success stories and ideas.</p> <p>Action 4: Better diversity in the images used in Staff News articles about parents and carers, and staff working flexibly.</p>
<p>The University's flexible work policy was updated in August 2020, in response to the pandemic. Participants (68%) spoke about the positive outcomes for their work-life balance.</p> <p><i>"[Flexible working] is the one positive thing that came out of what I consider a really dark time. I'm not one of</i></p>	<p>Inconsistent application of policy, largely dependent on attitude of team leader/manager.</p> <p><i>"When I started at [USyd], my kids were very small and my manager was amazing. She was like, just do whatever you need to do. But then I moved into a new role and the professor ... just doesn't want any kind of flexible work hours. It's just been really, really difficult with her." [11_07]</i></p> <p><i>"I've moved into a different area now, and I've got a very different sort of [manager], and you know so</i></p>	<p>Flexibility to be embedded in workplace culture across the board. Judging performance on KPIs/outcomes, not where or when the work is done.</p> <p><i>"I've been in situations in the past where, even though things are in policy or guidelines, you still had to kind of fight for them. I feel that [flexibility] has to be a given unless we have really good business reasons for it not to be." [08_02]</i></p> <p><i>"I think all the conditions are amazing on paper ... we need to find a way to implement them." [10_04]</i></p>

<p><i>those people who cherished the time at home at all. But I will always look back on it as accelerating flexible work so much. I would never want to go back to the previous arrangements." [01_09]</i></p> <p><i>"Pre-COVID the whole idea that there could be a flexible working arrangement for something like elder caring ... was not even conceived as a possibility ... It was treated like a liability. There was no discussion." [01_02]</i></p> <p>Professional staff said they appreciated access to flexible work options, which were unavailable to them previously.</p> <p><i>"I know there was resentment from professional staff that academics were allowed to work from home one day a week pre-COVID and professional staff weren't. And so then, when COVID happened along, we had the same equality, if you like." [02_02]</i></p>	<p><i>much more flexibility and genuine support to do what I need to do, without feeling my stomach in knots."</i> [11_03]</p> <p>A quarter of participants said that recent discussion exploring a bigger return to campus had been causing stress. They feared they would not be able to stay in their jobs/ keep working to the same capacity if they lost flexibility and had to return to campus for more days.</p> <p><i>"It would be awful if I had to be in at the office [more often]. I couldn't make it work. I couldn't make my life work ... I wouldn't be productive. And I would have to seriously think about whether I could keep working full time."</i> [08_03]</p> <p><i>"If someone said, right, tomorrow you've got to work five days a week in the office, and then another uni said to me you can work with us, and you only have to come in one day a week ... you know what? I think I'm going to move to a different uni."</i> [02_02]</p> <p>Staff on short-term or fixed contracts said their lack of job security made access to flexibility and leave even harder.</p> <p><i>"I think my lack of continuity and security at the uni means that I am the primary carer to my children. We've had to prioritise my husband's career because I've never known if I'm going to have a job. And that's a vicious cycle."</i> [11_06]</p>	<p>Action 1: Provide additional resources and accountability structures. For example, information about entitlements included in the mandatory training pack for staff moving into management roles, updating parental leave resources to include more information about inclusively supporting staff with parental/caring responsibilities, creating a checklist for Managers of staff taking Carer's Leave, and regularly monitoring the experiences of staff with caring responsibilities via our annual Staff Engagement Surveys.</p> <p>Manager training around inclusivity, bias and empathy. Participants (29%) said they wanted managers to trust and respect their staff and show them they were valued through their response to requests for flexibility and carer-related leave.</p> <p><i>"I think it's about having leaders [who] value you in the work that you do, and trust that you'll do the work wherever you are. Where I see it not working at the University of Sydney, it's a lack of trust in people as professionals. You know, sometimes I think we infantilize our staff, like we don't give them the respect they deserve as professionals who are employed to do their jobs ... it's a failure of leadership trusting their staff."</i> [08_03]</p> <p><i>"I wish there was a way for senior managers to see this isn't permanent ... To retain these good staff, we have to be flexible [but] it's at a point in time. I'm requiring a lot more flexibility now, while my kids are young, but ... as your kids get older you work up to coming back in a full-time capacity."</i> [11_01]</p> <p>Action 11: Review existing Inclusion modules, refresh as required, then promote to managers and staff.</p>
<p>Participants said flexible work arrangements had allowed them to:</p>	<p>Childcare is a major expense, but participants did not generally consider this a problem for the workplace to solve.</p>	<p>Flexible work options were a higher priority than on-campus childcare for most participants.</p>

<p>live in cheaper locations or closer to family;</p> <p><i>"We bought [in outer suburbs of Sydney], otherwise we would have probably just ended up having to stay in apartments in the inner city, because of affordability. COVID and that change in working has enabled us to have more space and live in a really beautiful leafy area, without having to commute to the office every day, which would have been a deal breaker with the three kids to have us both commute for work every day." [02_01]</i></p> <p>save hours in commuting time;</p> <p><i>"Now that I can work from home, it means not having to travel three and a half hours a day. It means it's possible to share that time a little bit more equitably across the family." [01_02]</i></p> <p>save on paid childcare. For example, parents can work a compressed week and save on a day's childcare fees; parents can work from home to be close for school drop-offs/pickups or any emergencies.</p>	<p><i>"We realised that if we were to put the girls in childcare for five days it would cost a salary, but I said I would never trade that off. I know some people love being stay-at-home parents [but] I know I couldn't. My work is too important to me, it's a big part of who I am. And even if I was working at a loss, I would rather be working and putting the girls in childcare, because it's who I am." [12_02]</i></p> <p><i>"I had two children in daycare at the same time for six months, but they weren't in the same daycares. They were both in two separate day cares. So I had four different daycares that I was paying fees for. It was absolutely crazy ... with pick-up and drop-off as well. When they both started school this year, I thought all my Christmases had come at once because I had a single pick-up and drop-off." [05_01]</i></p>	
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<p><i>"My kids have always gone to childcare near home. I work two days in the office, two days from home, and the days that I'm working in the office my husband works from home. We've planned our week that way so that someone is always nearby in case there's a school pick-up."</i> [09_01]</p>		
<p>Informal flexible work arrangements appear to be easier for staff if managers are on board. 64 of the 66 participants were working flexibly and most of these (78% of participants) were informal agreements that involved adjusting hours around caring responsibilities (e.g. school times or medical appointments), and/or working from home some days. The flexible arrangements often negated the need for formal carers leave.</p> <p><i>"[My manager] has been great ... they see me as wanting to do my job and they want to facilitate that, so we work together. There's mutual understanding and respect, and I think you need to start from there. I've encountered other managers that are adversarial and</i></p>	<p>Lack of respect for flexible hours.</p> <p><i>"I found that in my first maybe six months to a year of having a condensed working week I did come across a few people who would jokingly, but there's always something behind a joke, say things like, 'Oh, she's never available on Friday', and you know things like that. And professionally, that really affects you. It impacts what you see as how you come across to other people."</i> [12_01]</p> <p>Blurring of lines between work/ home, the sense of being always available.</p> <p><i>"A downside for teaching is ... if you are sick, you're expected to somehow still provide the lecture, because you can do it from home, and I find that has become more stressful. And it's not just if you're sick on the day, like if your child has been sick for a week, you're still expected to deliver everything by the deadline."</i> [10_06]</p> <p>Even though the concept of core hours is embedded in the EA along with a workload agreement, interpretation is up to individual team leaders/managers who may not</p>	<p>Adding a note about flexible hours to email signatures.</p> <p><i>"My new boss is incredible and has in her signature block a very lovely message, which I've copied, about being a proud working parent and stating that her response times may be impacted and at times will be outside of core business hours."</i> [11_05]</p> <p>Clearly defining roles and workload expectations, setting boundaries around personal time (e.g. sick leave or carers leave).</p> <p>Education campaign for managers around respecting needs of carers and how to manage flexibility in their teams.</p> <p><i>"I think it's one thing to have the formal arrangements in place, but it's also another thing to have an understanding team who can cope with the ... unplanned things, like if your kids are sick and you can't send them to daycare, or if all of a sudden you have to go home to pick them up."</i> [12_02]</p> <p><i>"If you have problems of productivity with some people working from home, don't generalise but just address those issues with those people. So not everybody needs to pay the consequences for those who are evidently less productive."</i> [08_06]</p>

<p><i>reactive, and those relationships and jobs haven't worked out as well." [10_01]</i></p> <p><i>"I have been lucky enough to be able to choose whether I want to do 3 or 4 days and the [team] will work around that. I don't typically take a lot of carers leave ... I can just take time off and make it up at other times. As long as I'm hitting my KPIs, it's working." [02_04]</i></p> <p><i>"If I'm working at home, you know, I'll leave a couple of things to the end of the day, and then I have to go get the kids, and then I'll finish at 6 or 6 30. So it does bleed [into personal time]. But I feel like it's my choice and I have that autonomy. It's left to me to decide when I'm going to do things." [01_01]</i></p>	<p>understand or respect the needs of staff with caring commitments.</p> <p><i>"The degrees that I'm teaching into we quite often have evening classes, which are just totally unsuitable for me. I would hate to be doing them, even if I didn't have a 4-year-old to put to bed. But I hate doing them even more so. And then conferences as well. There's just that tacit expectation that you should be zooming off across the world constantly. And I've really pushed back on that ... I just don't want to go, I don't want to be away from my family." [09_03]</i></p> <p>Feeling excluded from group activities, either directly or because they were organised at times that were tricky for families.</p> <p><i>"I have a feeling I'm being left out of conversations, because, you know, people think you're not available, or they assume that you can't do something because you're working from home that day." [07_01]</i></p> <p><i>"Things like little retreats and that kind of stuff. It's blatantly obvious the only people who go to them are the younger groups without kids, or men with kids." [09_03]</i></p> <p><i>"There's still a big dichotomy between people with children and people without children. It's just like a different universe. So I struggle sometimes with my colleagues that don't have children that can organise drinks on a Friday, which is impossible for me." [08_06]</i></p>	<p>Educate managers and teams about best practice when it comes to flexible working, e.g. ensuring there's a clear purpose for attending campus in person, how best to stimulate connections and interactions especially for new staff members and with students.</p> <p><i>"I'm quite sociable, and I do like going into the office ... But I find I'm actually less productive on that day, because we all have those, you know little catch-ups and chitchats, which is fine, it makes for great teamwork. But I think it's a myth that people are more productive in the office." [02_02]</i></p> <p>Action 1: Provide additional resources and accountability structures. For example, information about entitlements included in the mandatory training pack for staff moving into management roles, updating parental leave resources to include more information about inclusively supporting staff with parental/caring responsibilities, creating a checklist for Managers of staff taking Carer's Leave, and regularly monitoring the experiences of staff with caring responsibilities via our annual Staff Engagement Surveys.</p>
<p>New buildings with parent-friendly facilities, capacity for video meetings.</p>	<p>Lack of parent rooms and workspaces for part-timers and other flex workers who drop in to campus from time to time. Complaints that where hot-desking has been introduced, some staff 'take over' a desk as their own.</p>	<p>More hybrid meeting rooms are needed to accommodate the growing demand for video conferencing to support flexibility.</p>

<p><i>"When I came back [from parental leave] it was in a new building that was set up to have a parents room where I was able to pump [breast milk] ... then I moved to an old building that had no space for pumping, which cut my breastfeeding journey quite quickly, before I or the baby were ready." [01_06]</i></p>	<p><i>"The whole idea of [activity-based working] was no one would have their own desk or office. You just pick somewhere. Pretty quickly people were saying 'I'm just going to camp here and leave my stuff here tonight, and then I'll leave this here for this week' ... As someone who is in there [part-time] it's very frustrating to come in and find I can't sit there because someone's 'bagged' the desk." [02_03]</i></p> <p>Parking on campus – parents say it's almost impossible for those doing school drop-offs to find a car space by the time they arrive.</p> <p><i>"The daycare my kids go to opens at 7.30am, so I drop them off and the earliest I can get to campus, after like an hour and a half in traffic, is a quarter past 9, half past 9. So then you can't park. There is so much time I have wasted commuting and finding parking spaces over the course of this semester." [12_02]</i></p> <p>Technology systems such as Workday and teaching timetables are not user-friendly or suited to flexible working arrangements.</p> <p><i>"Timetables used to be sorted out at local level, where it was very easy for people to be flexible. I was arranging the timetable for my section and I had 2 colleagues who had 2 small children, and they didn't want to be teaching at the same time in case there was some emergency ... and that was easy to accommodate. That sort of arrangement wouldn't be remotely possible now with the new systems." [06_03]</i></p>	<p>Set aside dedicated parking spaces for parents until a certain time, e.g. the spaces are held for parents doing school drop-offs (proof via a windscreens sticker or similar) and become generally available after, say, 10am.</p> <p>Note: The parking issues are well understood by the University and there are ongoing discussions around this already.</p> <p>Review centralised timetabling systems in relation to dealing with flexible hours.</p> <p>Action 8: Draw on work underway via DIAP by the D&I team and WR team to review and update systems and forms dealing with leave and flexible hours to be more user-friendly.</p>
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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
1	<p>(1) An unintended negative outcome of increased flexible work options such as working from home was noted as being a blurring of boundaries and a greater expectation for staff to work from home even if they are unwell or caring for someone. Further, the experience of staff with caring responsibilities or working flexibly continues to be manager/supervisor-dependent. In 2024 the University developed a new Flexible Working Toolkit for Staff and Managers. The impact of this should be monitored.</p> <p><i>See pages 13, 36, 41, 44</i></p>	<p>Provide additional resources and monitor impact.</p> <p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide information about entitlements and supporting staff in the mandatory training modules staff take when moving into management roles. Update parental leave resources to include more information about inclusively supporting staff with parental/caring responsibilities. Create a Carers Leave checklist for Managers. Regularly monitor the experiences of staff with caring responsibilities by School via our annual Staff Engagement Surveys. 	Jan-Dec 2025	HR Workplace Relations team, Organisational Development Team, and SAGE Caring & Flexibility WG	CHRO	<p>(1) Managers and Staff have increased understanding and consistent implementation of flexible work expectations. News articles, Staff profiles, staff forums, Parents At Work resources, new starters welcome, included in new manager training, performance and development plans.</p> <p>(2) Managers are aware of the expectations on them to inclusively support staff working flexibly.</p>

2	<p>In the 2023-26 EA the University removed the 6-month return to work requirement but we do not yet know the impact of this, particularly for staff on fixed-term contracts who were disproportionately impacted by the claw-back.</p> <p><i>See page 14</i></p>	<p>Monitor whether there is an increase in the number of fixed-term staff taking primary care leave.</p>	<p>March 31, annually</p>	<p>SAGE Caring & Flexibility WG</p>	<p>SAGE Team</p>	<p>To understand whether removal of the 6-month return to work requirement increases equitable access to parental leave for staff on fixed-term contracts.</p>
3	<p>There was a very low uptake of the University's provision for staff to utilise part of their parental leave provisions as a return-to-work allowance, but we do not know whether this is because staff are not aware of this option, or it is not appealing to them.</p> <p><i>See page 15</i></p>	<p>Work with the HR Workplace Relations team to understand prior communication and awareness around the return-to-work allowance and better communicate if necessary, including integration into relevant toolkits.</p>	<p>Jan-Dec 2025</p>	<p>SAGE Caring & Flexibility WG, D&I team, and HR Workplace Relations team</p>	<p>CHRO</p>	<p>Ensure the Return-to-Work allowance is better communicated to staff if necessary.</p>
4	<p>There remains a lack of gender diversity in communications to staff about parental/carer's leave and flexible work.</p> <p><i>See pages 15, 38, 39, 40</i></p>	<p>Better diversity in the images used in Staff News articles about parents and carers, and staff working flexibly.</p> <p>Celebrate staff with diverse caring responsibilities on the Staff Spotlight, and use as a platform to promote further information around entitlements and toolkits. Re-engage with MarComms to develop a stock of easy to access images for use in</p>	<p>Jan-June 2025</p>	<p>MarComms and SAGE Communications and Engagement WG</p>	<p>Director, MarComms</p>	<p>Images accompanying communications about parental/carer's leave and flexible working are gender balanced and include other forms of visible diversity as well as different types of caring, including care for elders.</p>

		communications to staff, and cascade to Faculties.				
5	<p>Men have more equitable access to parent and carer leave but are not yet accessing at rates similar to women.</p> <p><i>See page 20</i></p>	<p>(1) Survey men in academic and professional roles to understand barriers to taking up provisions</p> <p>(2) Feature men who have taken parental/carers leave in staff news profiles or similar</p>	Jan-Dec 2025	SAGE Caring & Flexibility WG, D&I team, and HR Workplace Relations team	CHRO	<p>(1) To better understand potential barriers to men taking up parent and carer leave provisions and develop targeted actions to mitigate those.</p> <p>(2) Men see more role models of other men as parents and carers at the University.</p>
6	<p>Although women are still more likely to take Primary Carer Leave than men, since 2021 men have, on average, accessed a greater number of total hours Primary Carer Leave. Undertaking a deep dive into the drivers behind this will allow us to understand whether there are underlying issues that may need to be addressed.</p> <p><i>See page 23</i></p>	Undertake a deep dive into Primary Carer Leave data segmented by role, age, and employment contract, to better understand the drop in average hours accessed by women compared to men post-pandemic and take further action if necessary.	Jan-Dec 2025	SAGE Caring & Flexibility WG, Human Resources	SAGE	To ascertain whether there are underlying issues with respect to workload and expectations that may be driving a decline in the number of Primary Carer Leave hours women have taken post-pandemic.
7	<p>Staff with caring responsibilities continue to feel less involved in decisions impacting their work, and less resourced compared to staff without caring responsibilities.</p> <p><i>See page 26</i></p>	Undertake a deep dive into staff engagement survey results by School, including free text comments, to better understand the barriers to accessing resources for teaching and research women,	Jan-Dec 2025	SAGE Caring & Flexibility WG	SAGE	To better understand and develop mitigating actions to address the barriers faced by staff with caring responsibilities.

		particularly for women at Level D.				
8	Navigating information and processes on IT systems such as Workday is not always user-friendly and accessible, and do not always cope well with flexible work patterns, core hours, and leave requests. <i>See pages 37, 45</i>	Draw on work underway via DIAP by the D&I team and WR team to review and update systems and forms dealing with leave and flexible hours to be more user-friendly.	Jan-Dec 2025	HR Workplace Relations team, D&I Team	CHRO	Systems and forms are optimised within technological constraints to support staff working flexibly.
9	Parental Leave Toolkit page views indicate that there is good awareness amongst staff with respect to resources supporting staff taking Parental Leave, however focus group feedback suggest that potentially managers' awareness of best practice support may be lagging. We do not have clear mechanisms to determine whether the resources developed for managers supporting staff taking parental/carer's leave are meeting their needs to better and more consistently support staff. Further, Managers currently have no accountability structures to ensure they support staff taking extended parental leave.	(1) Provide Managers (all those who are responsible for oversight of two or more members of a team) with a mechanism to share whether parental/caring leave and flexible working resources meet their needs. (2) Work with stakeholders to develop simple accountability structures for managers supporting staff taking parental/carers leave.	Jan-Dec 2025	MarComms, SAGE Communications & Engagement WG, and HR Workplace Relations Team	SAGE	Opportunities to promote toolkit and resources are leveraged, such as Staff News articles, Staff profiles, staff forums, Parents At Work resources, new starters welcome, included in new manager training, performance and development training. (1) Managers are able to provide point of use feedback (e.g. an open survey/feedback form link for staff and managers on the parental leave resources page) to improve the guidance we give them to support staff taking parental/carers leave

	<i>See page 37</i>					and provide a better experience for their staff. (2) Managers are aware of the expectations on them to inclusively support staff taking parental/carers leave.
10	Staff who have taken parental/carers leave feel that they may not be able to easily communicate the impact of this on their output for grants and promotions. <i>See page 38</i>	Embed our new Full-time Equivalent Year (FTEY) calculator app into relevant systems and processes, sitting alongside the existing Relative to Opportunity, and communicate to staff.	Jan-Dec 2025	SAGE, ICT, Academic Promotions Unit, Research Office, Recruitment, and other stakeholders as relevant	SAGE	Staff can quantify the impact of parental and carers leave on their output.
11	In our focus groups, the issue of a lack of empathy and inclusion from some managers was a prominent theme. <i>See pages 39, 41</i>	Update existing Inclusion in Action module/investigate alternative options to promote to managers and staff.	Jan-Dec 2025	SAGE Self-Assessment Team, Diversity & Inclusion	SAGE, Senior Manager Diversity & Inclusion	Inclusion training is refreshed/updated
12	A lack of part-time or job-share options, especially at senior levels in the professional ranks. Participants complained that flexible working options were not clearly advertised. <i>See page 40</i>	Work with stakeholders to identify pathways to raise awareness and manager/leadership capability around flexible working options when creating roles and job advertisements, especially at senior levels in professional roles.	Jan-Dec 2025	SAGE Recruitment WG, HR Recruitment, HR Workplace Relations, OD team	CHRO	Flexible working and job-share options are understood by hiring managers and included where appropriate in job advertisements.