SAGE Cygnet Award Application

Supporting under-represented groups in STEM achieve academic promotion

SCIENCE IN AUSTRALIA
GENDER EQUITY

SAGE Cygnet Award Application

Name of Institution	University of Technology Sydney
Date of Application	October 2025
Contact for Application	Dr Kumudika de Silva
Email	Kumudika.deSilva@uts.edu.au

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY: SAGE CYGNET #4

	✓ Current Cygnet	Barrier
Institution-wide barrier	✓	Supporting under-represented groups in STEM achieve academic promotion
[Mandatory] Sub-group barrier	#1	Supporting career pathways to academia for women in Engineering and IT
Sub-group barrier	#2	Attracting girls and women to Engineering and IT studies
[Mandatory] Institution-wide	#3 (submitted)	Supporting gender representation in STEM through improving recruitment practices

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

UTS acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the Boorooberongal people of the Dharug Nation, the Bidiagal people and the Gamaygal people upon whose ancestral lands our university stands. We would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for these lands.

UTS extends our sincere appreciation to our Athena Swan leaders Chairs Prof. Anne Gardner and Prof. Peta Wyeth and Pro Vice Chancellors (SJI) Verity Firth and Amy Persson for their outstanding leadership and guidance.

We also gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the dedicated team who supported our Cygnet Programs. Their collaboration, expertise, and tireless efforts were fundamental to this report which is a testament to the collective commitment to excellence and shared purpose.

The Promotion Cygnet Working Group included:

- Liz Jenkins, Prof. Paul Kennedy, Dr. Cecilia Gravina da Rocha, Assoc. Prof Eva Cheng, Prof. Joanne Tipper, - Faculty of Engineering and IT
- Prof. Ian Menz, Assoc. Prof. Lana McClements, Dr. Georgina Meakin, Prof. Steven Langford, Dr. Sujeewa de Silva – Faculty of Science
- Prof. Sally Inglis, Dr Suyin Hor, Dr. Poppy Watson – Faculty of Health
- Dr. Berice Anning - Office of PVC (Indigenous Leadership & Engagement)
- Abdul Macauley, Grace Johnson - People and Culture Unit
- Mark So - Data Analytics and Insights Unit
- Dr. Kumudika de Silva, Rachel Gray, Ekaterina Frolov, Jo Tilly – Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion

Evaluation framework development and data analysis support was provided by John Tran, Dr. Ben Manning, Dr. Gautam Pingali from the Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion

TABLE OF CONTENTS

NOTES

Dimensions of diversity

Gender data is presented as sex (female/male) or gender identity (women/men). While reporting as sex is not our preference, we are constrained by the way data is collected and are currently working to improve our systems. Information on other genders is collected at appointment but has not been included in the following analyses as numbers are low and to ensure consistency between datasets. The impending implementation of a new enterprise resource planning (ERP) system will enable us to gain a better understanding of our staff diversity. Other data gathering processes, e.g., surveys, allow us to collect more nuanced information on gender and cultural diversity.

We use the term Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CARM)[1] to understand the impact of gendered racism. This term which encompasses non-white cultures/ethnicities (specifically Indigenous Australian, African, Asian, Pasifika and Middle Eastern groups) is useful for identifying those who experience impacts of intersectionality the most. Since CARM is a relatively new term, we assessed its recognition by staff. When comparing self-identified global regional groups with self-identified CARM status, we find that 89% of those from Anglo-Celtic, European, American countries identified as non-CARM while only 53% of those from Indigenous Australian, African, Asian, Pasifika or Middle Eastern cultural/ethnic background self-identified as CARM. Therefore, in our analyses we chose to use presumed CARM identity based on self-identified global regional group.

[1]Diversity Council Australia (V. Mapedzahama, F. Laffernis, A. Barhoum, and J. O'Leary). *Culturally and Racially Marginalised Women in Leadership: A framework for (intersectional) organisational action*, Diversity Council Australia, 2023.

Factors impacting desired outcomes

Within the context of COVID, the Bronze Action Plan was reviewed and focus shifted to consolidating retention and promotion to improve representation of STEM female/women academics and other under-represented groups. This meant a shift away from targets for academic women at Level D and E toward alignment with UTS 2027 strategic goals. The primary focus was to build the pipeline of Early Career Researchers and to develop a framework that supports the full research career lifecycle and fosters support for researchers from across UTS.

Surveys

We conducted several surveys to evaluate applicant experiences. While these are noted by year and rationale in the text, we summarise them here to improve clarity.

- One survey following review of the Academic Promotion Policy (Post-policy Review Survey) of applicants and interviews with reviewers in 2020 (Section 3.1A and 5.1).
- Multiple Academic promotion Applicant Surveys to capture demographic information and applicant experience of the promotion process. These are sent during each application period to all applicants. Since 2022, the Equity Observer (EO) has reached out to applicants through this separate survey for information on gender identity, ethnic/cultural background, LGBTQ identity and disabilities. In 2022–2024, 81% of applicants shared this information. Despite the perception of reluctance staff may have to share this sensitive information, the majority volunteered their LGBTQ (69%) and ethnic/cultural (94%) background (Section 3.1C).
- Two STEM Academic Staff Surveys, one in 2022 (Section 3.2C) and the other in 2025 (Section 5.2), to compare experiences in relation to support for career progression.
- Post-program Evaluation Surveys generally had low response rates (Section 3.2A). To mitigate this, we included questions about specific career progression programs in the Applicant Surveys noted above.

Glossary

Term	Description
AWiS	Academic Women in Science (a Science faculty funded program)
BAU	Business as usual
CARM	Culturally and Racially Marginalised (see Notes for further information)
CRO	Contribution Relative to Opportunity
CSJI	Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion
ECR	Early Career Researchers
EO	Equity Observer
ERP	Enterprise Resource Planning
F	Female/Woman
FEIT	Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology
HoS	Head of School
Level A, B, C, D and E	Academic employment levels Assistant Lecturer, Lecturer, Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor and Professor respectively.
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer/Questioning
M	Male/Man
Q	Quarter, when referring to calendar year periods
Science	Faculty of Science
STEM	In the context of UTS faculties, this includes FEIT, Health and Science
SSG	Senior Staff Group

UTS Athena Swan Cygnet 4 logic framework: Academic Promotion

The opportunity was...

Fewer women apply for promotion to Level D or E and fewer women are successful at Level C. Sub-barriers contributing to this include:

1. Academic promotion policies and practices hinder participation

- 47.4% of academic staff were female/women in 2017, there were fewer STEM academic women (36.9%). Only 28.3% were in senior roles (Level D, E or SSG) and there were discipline-specific gender differences within STEM faculties.
- In 2020 STEM focus group participants indicated they valued additional mentoring for progression and career planning and were concerned that the promotion process was complicated.

2. Lack of support for participating in the promotion process

A 2022 STEM academic survey highlighted:

- 59% of staff living with a disability agreed there was support for career progression/promotion compared to those not living with a disability (67%).
- Fewer women (30%) and staff living with disability (26%) were confident to apply for promotion compared to men (47%).
- Women (46%) and Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CARM) (43%) staff were less likely to say they understood the promotion process compared to men (66%) or non-CARM staff (56%).
- Fewer LGBTQ staff (17%) had applied for promotion recently compared to their peers (32%).

Expanded focus

- Shift from senior women focus to strengthening pipeline of academic women
- Consideration of support for careers impacted by life circumstances
- Included strategy to capture cultural diversity of applicants

We pursued these actions...

Academic policies and practices 3.1

3.1A: Reviewed promotion policy

3.1B: Contribution Relative to Opportunity (CRO) included in application for more equitable review and CRO concept adapted to other areas.

3.1C: Improved capturing applicant demographic information

Support for participating in the promotion process 3.2

3.2A: Delivered promotion support programs to reduce application gap between men and women

3.2B: Provided research funding support for staff with career interruptions

3.2C: Supervisor capacity to support impact of life circumstances

Which had the following outcomes/impacts

Academic policies and practices 4.1

4.1A: Shortened and digitally formatted applications; broader recognition of non-traditional research outputs

4.1B: CRO concept extended from promotions to annual work plans

4.1C: Enhanced demographic data collection, including cultural background proxy; identified outcomes for CARM academics

Support for participating in the promotion process 4.2

4.2A: Improved applicant experience; narrowed gender gap in applications

4.2B: Three funding schemes supporting research continuity post-career interruptions:

- REI/REACH, Jenny Edwards Fellowship, FEIT Parental Leave Scheme

4.2C: Inclusive Career Conversations program co-designed to help supervisors consider life circumstances impacts in career planning

4.2D: Strengthened career support for staff with disabilities

Which inform these future directions...

1A: Review Academic Promotions policy

1B: Maintain awareness of CRO in promotion

1.C*: Enable reporting of dimensions of diversity of promotion applicants through ERP systems

1.D: Consultation with UTS Multicultural Women's Network (MWN) during policy review

2A: Improve use of REACH grants by STEM academics

2B: Ensure tracking of DEI training through ERP systems

2C: Provide application support for non-STEM faculties

2D: Support programs for promotion to Level D for women and gender diverse academics

2E: Develop relevant support strategies for senior STEM women and gender diverse academics

2F: Targeted support for CARM staff to prepare promotion applications

2G: Incorporate concepts from Inclusive Career Conversations into DEI training for leaders

2H: Create opportunities for supervisors to reflect collectively on Inclusive Career Conversations

*Aligns with Future Action 1.E1 in UTS Cygnet 3: Academic recruitment in FEIT and Science and UTS Cultural Diversity and Anti-Racism (CDAR) Action Plan.

1. KEY BARRIER

Fewer STEM women apply for promotion compared to representation in the workforce contrasted to STEM men. Specifically, applications for promotion to Level D or E are lower and fewer are successful at Level C compared to STEM men.

Sub-barrier 1: Academic promotion policies and practices that hinder participation

- 1.1 Complicated application process
- 1.2 Inequitable evaluation of applications through lack of consideration relative to opportunity
- 1.3 Lack of applicant demographic data beyond gender

Sub-barrier 2: Lack of support for promotion

- 2.1 Impact of career interruptions
- 2.2 Academics' unfamiliarity with the process
- 2.3 Supervisor lack of awareness of life circumstances' impact on career

2. EVIDENCE OF BARRIER

2.1 STEM application data

In the Bronze application we noted that in 2014-2016 there were 1.7 times more STEM academic men compared to STEM women (36.9%). Based on the proportion of staff applying for academic promotion female STEM applicants (n=26) had a lower success rate (85%) when compared to their male STEM counterparts (n=50, 90%) (Table 1). When comparing female and male applicants there was a clear 'application gap' where men applied at almost double the rate of women (Table 1).

Table 1: STEM Promotion applicants for Levels C, D and E in 2014–2016

	Applicants	Success rate	Application gap
STEM Female	26	85%	1.92
STEM Male	50	90%	

In STEM faculties, only 28.3% of academic women were in senior roles (Level D, E or Senior Staff Gorup (SSG) and there were discipline-specific gender differences within STEM faculties (Table 2). During this period, no STEM women applied for promotion to Level E and, when applying to Level C, women were less successful compared to STEM men.

Table 2: *STEM applicants and rate of promotion in 2014–2016 by gender and academic level*

			Number	% Promoted	Application gap
Level C	Male	Applicants	20	90%	Applications by males were 1.92-times greater
		Promoted	18		
	Female	Applicants	17	76%	
		Promoted	13		
Level D	Male	Applicants	20	100%	Applications by males were 2.22-times greater
		Promoted	20		
	Female	Applicants	9	100%	
		Promoted	9		
Level E	Male	Applicants	10	70%	There were no applications by women
		Promoted	7		
	Female	Applicants	0	None	
		Promoted	0		

2.2 STEM academics' experiences

A 2022 STEM survey of academics (40% response rate, n=266) highlighted the need to include promotion support for other under-represented cohorts (Table 3). For example, staff living with disability were less likely to agree they were supported for career progression/promotion. There were some gendered differences for staff from Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CARM) backgrounds compared to non-CARM men and women. Women and staff living with disability were less likely than men to say they were confident about applying for promotion. Women and CARM staff were less likely to say they understood the promotion process compared to men or non-CARM staff. Fewer LGBTQ staff had applied for promotion recently compared to their peers.

Table 3: Key findings from 2022 STEM academic staff survey

Key finding	Comparison	Additional information
Staff with disability were less likely to say that they knew where to find information about the promotion process	59% agreement compared to staff without disability (67%)	The proportion of staff respondents living with disability (38%) who had applied for promotion in the past 3 years was similar to their peers without disability (31%)
Staff with disability were less likely to say they had HoS support to apply for promotion	40% agreement compared to their peers (70%)	
Overall confidence to apply for promotion was lower for staff with disability and women	30% agreement for women and 26% agreement for staff with disability compared to 47% for men	
Gendered differences in relation to know who to ask for information about promotion	54% agreement for women compared to 74% for men	For FEIT women, agreement was higher compared to overall STEM women (61%)
LGBTQ staff were less likely to have applied for promotion in the previous 3 years	17% compared to the rest of the cohort (32%)	9% of respondents identified as LGBTQ
Women and staff from CARM backgrounds were less likely to say they understand the promotion process	46% and 43% agreement respectively compared to men (66%) or staff from non-CARM backgrounds (56%)	In Science fewer women (50%) agreed compared to men (75%)

These findings underscore the importance of targeted support and informed the design of subsequent actions.

3. PROGRESS (ACTIONS AND OUTPUTS)

UTS aims to recognise and reward high academic achievement and workplace behavior which reflects our values through the Academic Promotions Policy. Applications are considered for senior lecturer, associate professor, or professor roles (levels C–E). We reviewed our academic promotion policy and practices and implemented several actions in 2019 to increase applications by women academics and support their success (Table 4).

Table 4: *Key activities and desired outcomes related to policies and practices*

Key Activity Area	Planned at Bronze or post-Bronze	Desired Outcome/Impact[#]	Further Action*
Review of policy (Section 3.1A)	Bronze	Increase applications by women and other under-represented groups	Further review of Academic Promotions policy (Action 1A) Provide application support for non-STEM faculties (Action 4A)
Implement Contribution Relative to Opportunity Guide (Section 3.1B)	Bronze	Equitable evaluation of applications mitigating impact of career interruptions	Maintain awareness of CRO in promotion amongst applicants, supervisors and reviewers (Action 1B)
Capture applicant demographic information beyond gender (Section 3.1C)	Post-Bronze	Better understanding of diversity and success of promotion applicants Allow for better targeting of promotions support initiatives	Enable reporting of dimensions of diversity of promotion applicants through ERP systems (Action 1 C)
Promotion support programs (Section 3.2A)	Bronze	Demystify the promotion process Provide support for developing a successful case for promotion	Support programs for promotion to Level D for women in FEIT (Action 4B) Targeted support programs for CARM academics (Action 4D)
Research funding support to address career interruption (Section 3.2B)	Bronze	Mitigate the impact of a broad range of equity related career interruptions	Improve use of REACH grants by STEM academics (Action 2B)
Enhance supervisor capacity to support academics with a range of life circumstances (Section 3.2C)	Post-bronze	Supervisors understand and are equipped to support academic promotion aspirations of staff whose career is impacted by life circumstances	Incorporate concepts from Inclusive Career Conversations into DEI training for leaders (Action 5A) Integrate Inclusive Career Conversations reflection sessions for supervisors into annual work planning cycles (Action 5B)

[#]The overarching strategy underpinning outcomes/impact of this Cygnet relates to achieving 40% academic women in STEM by 2022 through sustainable career pathways for women in STEM;
*See Section 6 for further details

3.1 Academic promotion policies and practices

3.1 A Reviewed promotion policy

Following a review of the promotion process in 2019, a range of actions were implemented including: digitally streamlining applications; increasing awareness of the revised application process and; increasing the number of Level C rounds (Table 5). Applicants at all levels in 2020 were surveyed to seek feedback on their experience of the process, as were Deans and Heads of School/Discipline (who provide reports in support of the applicant).
Feedback was also sought from Promotion panel Chair and panelists. All respondents (n=44) noted a marked improvement in their experience.

Table 5: Actions and output from review of promotion policy and process in 2020

Action	Output
Changed application format	Converted from hard copy to digital format. Reduced length of application. Expanded to include Non-traditional Research Outputs as evidence for research impact and contribution (e.g., creative works, digital media, consultancy reports).
Increased awareness of the new format	UTS-wide and faculty-based promotion workshops to guide application preparation.
Gave more opportunities for early career academics to apply	Increased Senior Lecturer promotion rounds from one to two per year

All but one of these actions remain as BAU processes. Another policy review was initiated in 2024 with the additional Senior Lecturer round withdrawn to improve operational efficiencies.

ACTION 1A Review Academic Promotions policy.

3.1 B Implemented Contribution Relative to Opportunity

Guidelines on documenting Contribution Relative to Opportunity (CRO) for promotion were developed in 2019 to support academics and promotions panels to recognise the impact of career interruptions. CRO matters include circumstances such as parental leave, caregiving, and periods of illness or disability.

Information about how to document CRO is provided at biannual information sessions and through the Academic Promotion SharePoint on the intranet or by contacting an Equity Observer (EO). As a member of the review panel, the EO's role is to support and advise panels on equitable assessment of applications. Applicants can also provide information confidentially to the EO.

During 2022–2024, 64% of women and 43% of men used CRO in Level C applications. For Level D/E in 2023, 64% of women and 38% of men used CRO.

ACTION 1B Maintain awareness of CRO in promotion.

Expanded use of CRO concept

Science and FEIT began documenting the impact of life circumstances through annual work planning in 2022–23. In consultation with their supervisors, all staff prepare an annual work plan which documents activities, expectations, and development and these plans are often linked to perceptions of promotion readiness.

Since 2024, this has become BAU across UTS. A new academic work planning tool now includes a section for other considerations that may impact performance. The work planning framework is intended to be a starting point for discussions between staff and supervisors, without staff feeling concerned about initiating these discussions.

3.1 C Improved capturing applicant demographic information

Currently, gender is the only demographic information collected during promotion. Other applicant demographics are not collected or able to be linked to other staff diversity data sources. To ensure collecting this information did not increase perceptions of bias, we trialed a process of decoupling demographic data from application outcomes. A request for demographic data is sent by the review panel EO who is also the confidential advisor for matters relating to CRO. This data is held by the EO and is not shared with any other business units.

In the absence of more robust data, in 2024 we evaluated whether presumed cultural background (i.e. based on an individual's name and/or information from their staff profile) is a realistic proxy for self-identified cultural background. While not ideal, a similar method is used for reporting on cultural diversity in the Board Diversity Index (Watermark Search International). We used a CARM, rather than Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) definition, to specifically identify any compounding effects of gendered racism.

This evaluation found presumed CARM identity is a reliable proxy for self-identified cultural background (Table 6).

Table 6: *Alignment of self-identified and presumed cultural background in 2024 promotion applicants**

CARM identity		Self-identified	Presumed
Women	Level C	19%	32%
	Level D	25%	24%
	Level E	33%	27%
Men	Level C	64%	62%
	Level D	39%	41%
	Level E	31%	36%

*There were 16 women and 26 men who shared CARM identity voluntarily (self-identified) and 22 women and 37 men amongst total applicants (presumed).

During the period of data collection, no applicant indicated that they were Indigenous which may reflect the low number of Indigenous staff at UTS (2.1% in 2024) and/or the lack of cultural safety to share this voluntary information.

ACTION 1C Enable reporting of dimensions of diversity of promotion applicants through ERP systems. This action is aligned with the following actions in other key strategies:

- Indigenous Education and Research Strategy 2025–2030 (Developing a Cultural Safety Plan)
- Cultural Diversity and Anti-Racism action Plan (CDAR-AP) (Supporting cultural safety and racial dignity).

3.2 Support for participating in the promotion process

3.2 A Delivered promotion support programs

An evaluation of STEM mentoring programs was carried out in 2020 as part of our Bronze Action Plan. Focus group participants indicated they valued mentoring for progression and career planning and were concerned that the promotion process was complicated.

From 2019–2024, all academic promotion information sessions were run by the Provost with recordings made available to all staff. Collectively, the STEM faculties also made considerable effort to support their women academics to achieve promotion; some sessions were open to all interested staff regardless of gender (Table 7).

Table 7: Faculty-based promotion support programs in 2019–2024

Faculty	Program	Engagement
FEIT	Mentoring program for FEIT early career academic women and develop a network group (2019-2020)	Feedback on barriers to career progression were shared with faculty executive to address identified issues *In 2022–2024*, six participant women had applied for promotion*
FEIT	Academic Promotion Workshops for women: Building confidence to understand strengths, articulate impact and value to support application (2023)	25 women academics attended
Science	Academic Promotion for Women in STEM (2021)	Online session with 35 attending Three Level D and E academic women shared their approach to writing promotion applications. They also offered to share promotion applications with participants on request.

Science	AWiS Career Breaks Workshop 2022	This workshop was to help support and prepare academic staff for potential career interruptions (parental and carer's leave and Professional Experience Programs). People Unit representatives advised on systems and academics who had navigated these processes spoke about their experiences. *In 2022–2024*, three women participants applied for promotion*
STEM	Franklin Women Mentoring Program (2019–ongoing)	This program is specific to health-related disciplines and catered to a small number of participants (one mentor-mentee pair per faculty per year). The capacity for broad reach is limited and does not include disciplines where women are under-represented. *In 2022–2024*, three women participants applied for promotion*
STEM	Career progression coaching program for Level C women in 2019–2020	Developed though the Bronze Action Plan by People Unit and CSJI. Cross-faculty program to develop relationships across STEM fields. 22 participants
FEIT	Promotion workshop with a focus on Teaching and Learning (2022–2024)	42 staff of all genders attended
FEIT, School of Computer Science	Workshop focused on application preparation, developing a narrative of academic output, assembling evidence and explaining impact in a supportive environment. All Heads of Discipline were invited to this event which was intended to complement the pan-UTS promotion workshop (2023).	26 staff of all genders attended
Science	AWiS information session in 2023 focused on writing CRO, advice from Dean as a member of the review panel and insights from recent successful woman applicant.	Hybrid event attended by 17 staff of all genders

Health	Workshop as part of the School of Public Health Research Lunch Series *Applying for promotion to Levels C or D: useful advice (that isn't already in the resources provided by UTS)* (2023)	Hybrid event with 10 attendees Following this event a *Promotions Tips* document was shared across the School
Health	Promotion Bootcamp in one school in 2024 – a successful model adapted from the Business School. An 8-week program with peer senior academic support led by a recent successful applicant to support writing the promotion application	Ten participants but only one was considering applying for promotion that year.

In addition to promotion-focused support in 2023–2024, Science (through Academic Women in Science – AWiS) provided funding to ten awardees for professional development. The majority (4/5) used the funding to participate in leadership programs.

Starting in 2024 a new ECR Capability Development Program was delivered across UTS. Amongst Level C applicants in 2025, most women (91%) and two-thirds (63%) of men had participated in this program.

In response to the lack of awareness of where to find information about the promotion process, in 2024 a SharePoint site (Figure 1) was created. This site describes the process from the viewpoint of applicants, supervisors, panel members and senior leaders and provides useful resources and templates. Site details were shared widely through a variety of internal channels.

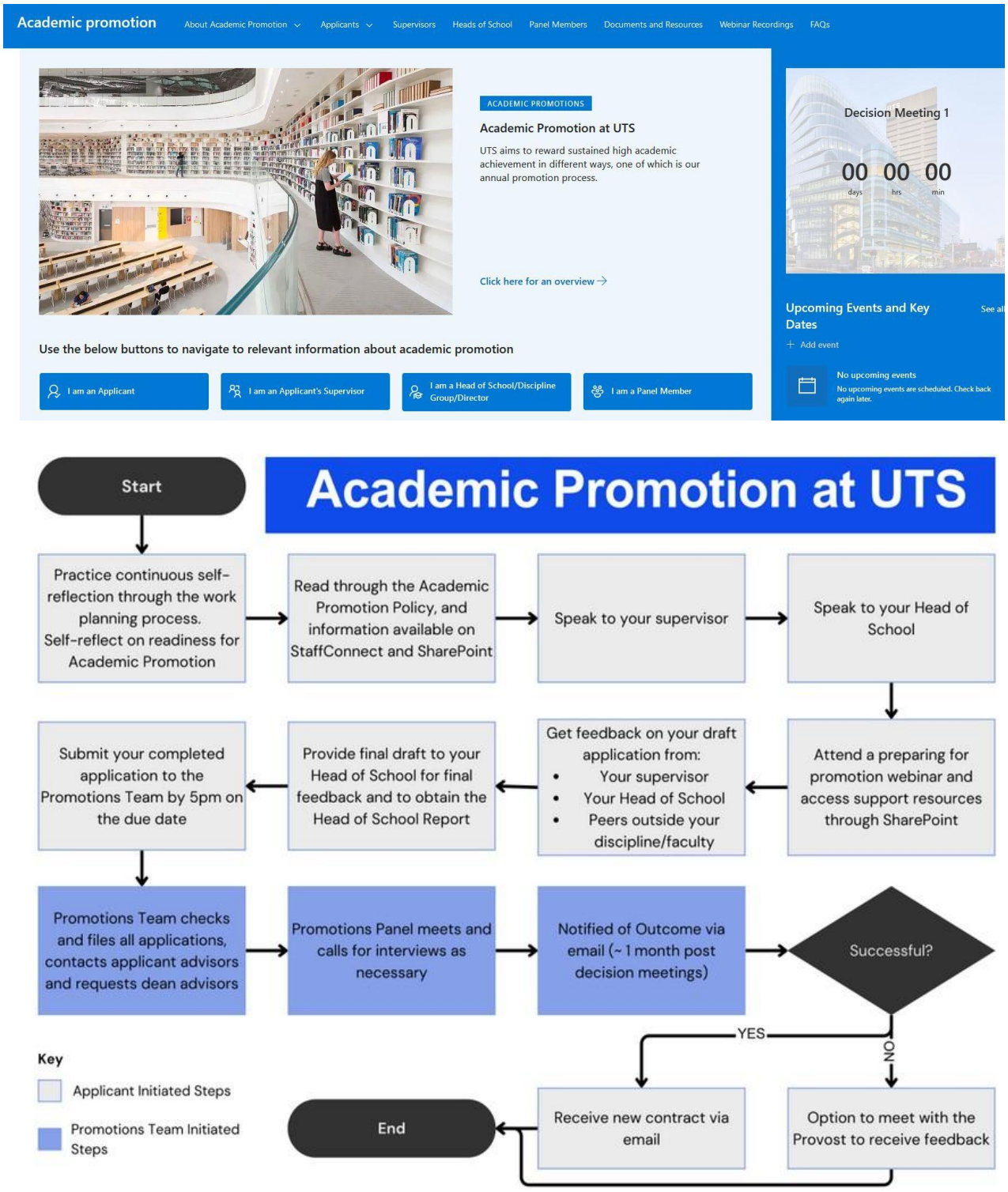

Figure 1: Example of information on the Academic Promotion pages on the intranet

3.2 B Provided research funding support for staff with career interruptions

REI/REACH grants

In 2019–2020, the Research Equity Initiative (REI) provided support to re-establish research portfolios after carer-related career interruptions. It was amended in 2021–2022 to reflect COVID-related impacts such as travel restrictions. Eligibility was expanded further in 2023, and the program was relaunched as the Research Equity and Access Career Help (REACH) Grants Scheme. Considerations can include periods of parental leave, impacts of disability or long-term health conditions, and primary carer responsibilities. It has expanded to include late-stage Higher Degree Research students too. Researchers can access up to $2,500 annually to support their professional development and up to $10,000 for project funding. Applications can be submitted at any time during the year to support ease of access.

From 2021–2024 a total of 18 REI/REACH grants were awarded; most (17/18) were women, and the majority were from non-STEM faculties (Table 8).

Table 8: Research support grant awards 2021–2024

	2021	2022	2023	2024
STEM	2	1	1	2
Non-STEM	4	3	4	1

ACTION 2A Improve use of REACH grants by STEM academics.

Jenny Edwards Fellowship

The Jenny Edwards Research Fellowship (up to $50,000) assists academic researchers (of any gender) with a strong research track record, whose careers have been significantly interrupted or delayed by carer responsibilities, to focus intensively on their research. From 2022–2025, 5 women have received this award with the majority (4/5) being from STEM faculties.

FEIT Parental leave support scheme

This scheme, targeted to minimise parental leave-associated career disruption for women academics in FEIT, was introduced in 2019. To encourage and support staff of any gender, guidelines were revised in 2024. This funding allows cover to continue research and engagement activities during parental leave. There have been 7 applicants (all women) to 2024.

3.2 C Supervisor capacity to support impact of life circumstances

Key findings from our STEM Academic Staff Survey in 2022 (Table 3) highlighted the need to equip supervisors to support academic promotion aspirations of staff whose careers are impacted by life circumstances (e.g., parental leave, caring responsibilities, ill health).

All promotion panel members are required by policy to have completed Unconscious Bias and Cultural Awareness training. These sessions are run in-person by an experienced trainer from our Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion (CSJI). In 2023–24, STEM faculties proactively encouraged all senior leaders to undertake Indigenous cultural awareness, LGBTQ (Breaking the Binary), anti-racism/cultural humility, ability awareness and mental health awareness training. While CSJI runs sessions (excluding Indigenous cultural awareness) throughout the year, CSJI trainers delivered bespoke sessions for faculties to increase attendance. Accurately tracking training completions was challenging due to a reliance on manual attendance checks.

ACTION 2B Ensure tracking of DEI training through ERP systems.

The 2022 Academic Staff Survey results prompted development of a program to support supervisor capacity for career conversations. The Inclusive Career Conversations program was co-designed in 2023 with senior leaders in Science and FEIT and an external facilitator who ran the program. The aim was to foster a supportive mindset that recognised staff members' intersecting identities and the barriers they may face. Rather than replicate other leadership training, this program (Figure 2) had a dialogue-based framework and was designed specifically for supervisors responsible for work planning discussions – Heads of Schools/Disciplines. The program was backed by Deans, the Provost and the Vice-Chancellor. It was piloted across Science and in two FEIT schools in 2024. All 24 invited staff participated, attending all three workshops. In 2025, FEIT ran the program across all schools.

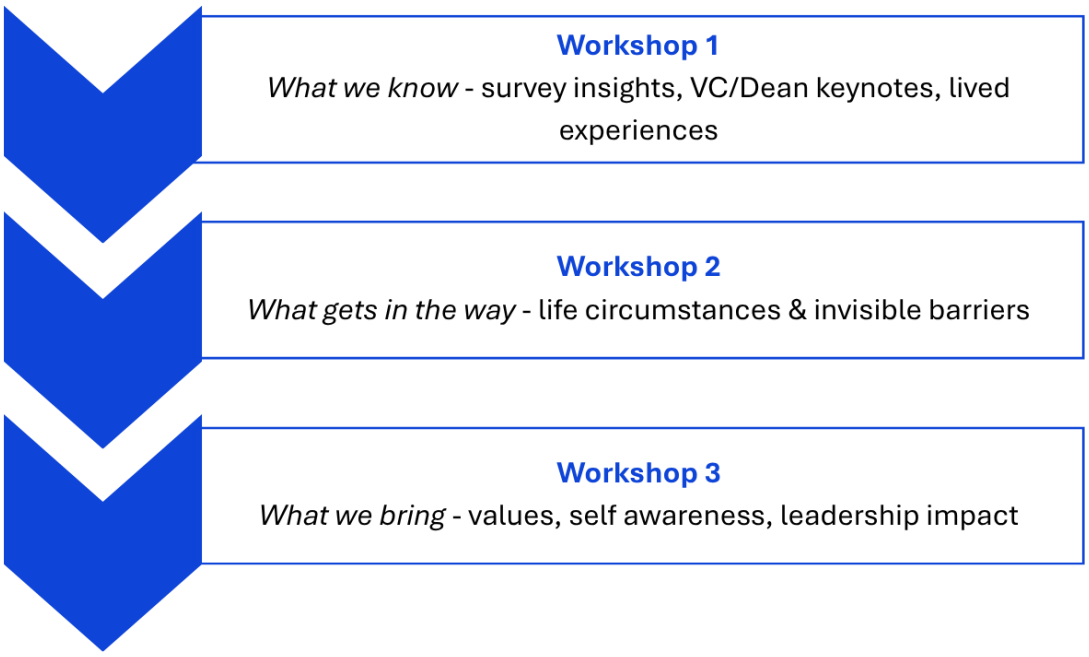

Figure 2: Structure of career conversations pilot program for senior leaders in STEM

4. OUTCOMES

4.1 Reduced application gap between men and women

Since application numbers varied each year, we aggregated data into 3-year periods. We sought to evaluate if Cygnet actions had reduced barriers to STEM academic women applying, including the 'application gap'. While applications by men in STEM continue to be greater in number in 2022–2024, the application gap between men and women reduced from 1.92 in 2014–2016 (Tables 1 and 9) to 1.77 in 2022–2024 (Table 9). This suggests that actions we implemented post-Bronze involving structural changes (Section 3.1) and support for staff and their supervisors (Section 3.2) had some influence in reducing the application gap. However, this outcome must be assessed against changes to overall workforce profile where representation of academic women in STEM at UTS has improved. In 2024, STEM academic women had increased to 43% (from 36.9% pre-Bronze Award) and the gender gap in STEM had reduced to 1.32 (from 1.7 pre-Bronze Award) favouring men.

We interrogated STEM outcomes further by academic level with non-STEM faculties as the comparator (Table 10) and evaluated the impact of changes to workforce headcount (Figure 3).

Table 9: *Change in STEM Level C to E applicants between Period 1 (2019–2021) and Period 2 (2022–2024)*

	Bronze award period 2014–2016	Application gap	Period 1 2019–2021	Application gap	Period 2 2022–2024	Application gap
Female/ Woman	26	Applications by men were 1.92-fold greater	62	Applications by men were 2-fold greater	95	Applications by men were 1.77-fold greater
Male/Man	50		124		168	

Actions in this Cygnet can also be attributed to reducing the impact of a key barrier identified in our Bronze self- assessment: *the success gap for STEM Level C women*. Promotion success for this cohort increased from 76% (90% men) in 2014–2016 (Table 1) to 89% (94% men) in 2022–2024 (Table 10).

In 2022–2024, there were no gendered differences (<10%) in outcomes between women and men overall at UTS (Table 11). However, there were differences (≥10%) between non-STEM and STEM academics. Success rates were higher for STEM men at Level C and STEM women at Level D and E compared to non-STEM peers.

ACTION 2C Provide application support for non-STEM faculties.

Table 10: Number of applications and success by gender, academic level and STEM vs non-STEM

			2019–2021			2022–2024			2022–2024	
			Non-STEM	STEM	Application gap - STEM	Non-STEM	STEM	Application gap - STEM	UTS	Application gap - UTS
Level C	Male	Applicants	32	57	Applications by men were 1.84-times greater than by women	17	52	Applications by men were 1.16-fold greater than by women	69	Applications by men were 0.87-times greater than by women
		Promoted	27	45		14	49		63	
		% promoted	84%	79%		82%	94%		91%	
	Female	Applicants	39	31		34	45		79	
		Promoted	33	30		31	40		71	
		% promoted	85%	97%		91%	89%		90%	
Level D	Male	Applicants	16	40	Applications by men were 2.22-times greater than by women	39	77	Applications by men were 2.57-times greater than by women	116	Applications by men were 1.61-times greater than by women
		Promoted	8	27		26	55		81	
		% promoted	50%	68%		67%	71%		70%	
	Female	Applicants	30	18		42	30		72	
		Promoted	20	14		24	24		48	
		% promoted	67%	78%		57%	80%		67%	
Level E	Male	Applicants	11	27	Applications by men were 2.08-times greater than by women	20	39	Applications by men were 1.95-times greater than by women	59	Applications by men were 1.37-times greater than by women
		Promoted	7	21		12	25		37	
		% promoted	64%	78%		60%	64%		63%	
	Female	Applicants	12	13		23	20		43	
		Promoted	9	10		15	15		30	
		% promoted	75%	77%		65%	75%		70%	

Based on the number of 'eligible' staff (e.g., at Level B for Level C applications), the proportion of women in STEM applying for promotion is lower compared to men. While the number and proportion of academic women in STEM continues to increase, the proportion of women in STEM is proportionately lower than for men (Figure 3). Note: 'Eligible' does not reflect promotion readiness/confidence.

At Level C, the number of STEM women applicants increased between the two periods and are now within a similar range to men (Table 10).

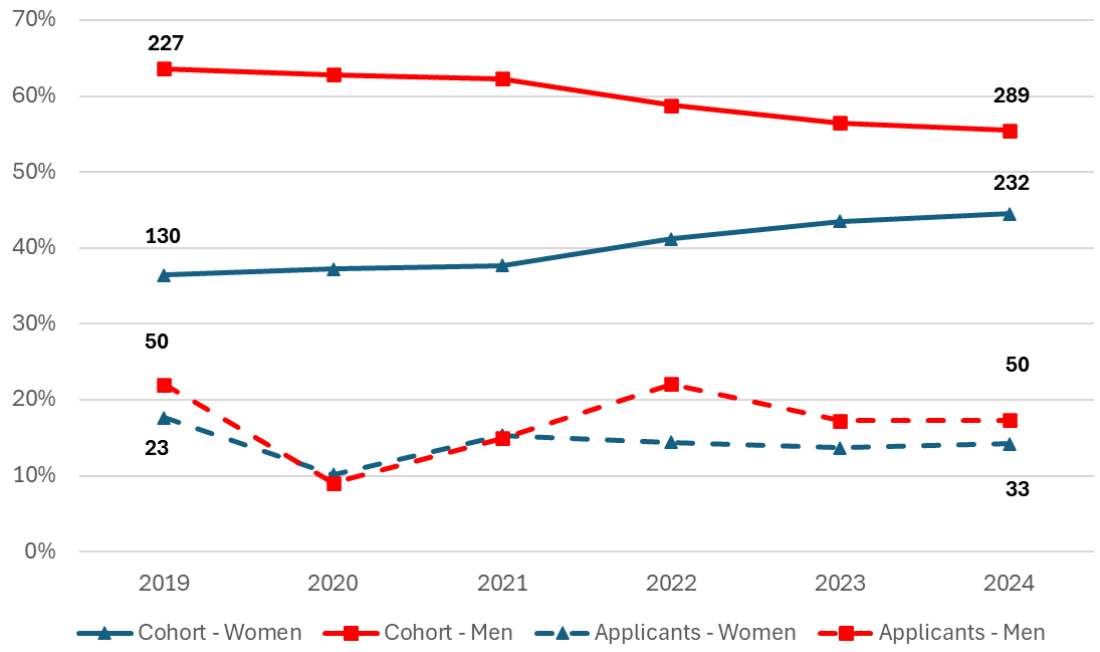

Figure 3: *Proportion of STEM Level C to E staff (solid lines) and proportion of applicants within gender cohort (dashed lines) in 2019–2024*
Headcounts for 2019 and 2024 are noted within the graph

To further understand STEM level D data, we disaggregated by faculty focusing on one year within the 2022–2024 period (Figure 4). For each faculty we compared proportion of women and men applying based on the number of women and men at the previous academic level (i.e. eligible). The proportion of Level C and E applications from women was highest in FEIT. The higher application rate could be attributed to FEIT's efforts in supporting early career women (Table 7) as part of the ethos of 'growing our own pipeline'. At Level D however, the proportion of FEIT women applicants was lowest and there was a striking increase in applications by men (Figure 4) suggesting that targeted support is needed for Level D women in FEIT. It would be valuable to better understand the needs of senior women in Science and Health and provide relevant support for their career aspirations.

ACTION 2D Support programs for promotion to Level D for women.

ACTION 2E Develop relevant support strategies for senior STEM women and gender diverse academics.

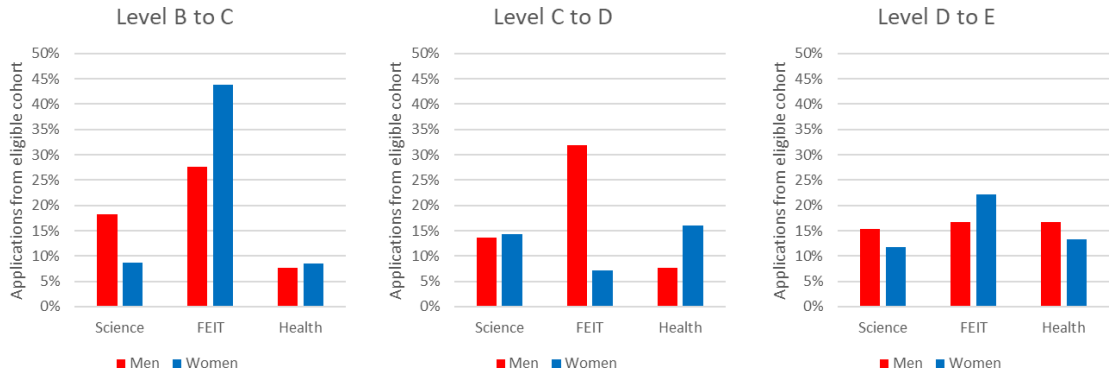

Figure 4: Proportion of applications by staff eligible to apply for promotion in 2022 in STEMM faculties by gender and academic Level

4.2 Identified outcomes for CARM academics

Having developed a method for capturing cultural diversity of applicants (Section 3.1C), we were able to evaluate outcomes for CARM and non-CARM staff. Since numbers of CARM staff were low from some faculties, the analysis considered applicants from across UTS. On average, in 2022–2024, CARM women and men applying for promotion to Level D or E had lower success rates (≥10%) compared to their non-CARM peers (Table 11).

Table 11: Comparison of success rates for CARM and non-CARM academics

Gender	Promotion to	CARM			Non-CARM		
		Applicants	Promoted	% success	Applicants	Promoted	% success
Women	Level C	31	28	90%	40	35	88%
	Level D	18	10	56%	54	38	70%
	Level E	10	5	50%	33	25	76%
Men	Level C	37	33	89%	25	23	92%
	Level D	51	32	63%	62	49	79%
	Level E	28	15	54%	31	22	71%

ACTION 1C Enable reporting of dimensions of diversity of promotion applicants through ERP systems. This aligns with Action 1.E1 in our Recruitment Cygnet and with our Cultural Diversity and Anti-Racism Action Plan.

ACTION 1A Review of Academic Promotion policy and procedures including panel member briefing sessions to include recent trends in promotion outcomes, the impact of challenges faced by some cohorts and the use of Contribution Relative to Opportunity.

ACTION 2F Targeted support for CARM staff to prepare promotion applications.

ACTION 1D Consultation with UTS Multicultural Women's Network during policy review.

5. IMPACT

5.1 Improved applicant experience

Following actions implemented based on policy review in 2019 (Table 6), feedback was sought from applicants through a survey (n=32) and through interviews with review panelists (n=12) in 2020. Further details of methods are no longer available. Applicants said the new process improved their experience. Reviewers noted an increase in the quality of applications, relating to the requirement for succinctness in case construction. They also found it easier to review applications from disciplines they were less familiar with because of the updated nature of applications.

Improved clarity

"One of the key benefits in the new process was much tighter applications and removal of a lot of unnecessary material. There was sufficient material to make a judgment but not excessive" (Dean/Director)

"It helped me develop my professional narrative and forced me to articulate it in a clear way, connecting my research, teaching and service coherently". (Senior Lecturer applicant)

Expanded recognition of impact

The new application format gave me the flexibility to tell my non-traditional academic story. (Associate Professor/Professor applicant)

The guidelines for writing an RTO [relative to opportunity] *case for promotion were particularly helpful. At the Academic Promotions workshop, I felt particularly encouraged to hear the Provost highlight the importance and significance of research impact - and not merely research outputs - in putting forward a case for promotion. (Associate Professor/Professor applicant)*

Improved support

More explicit communication around the reality of the application process provided through the various promotion workshops and improved staff intranet pages was cited as valuable for applicants.

It was daunting to gather all the necessary data, but the guidelines were useful to help structure the application. (Senior Lecturer applicant)

I mainly used the Staff Connect page and the links coming out of that, along with the School's academic benchmarks document. (Senior Lecturer applicant)

With the new procedures for promotion applications, it was great to have up to date intranet pages to consult regarding the specifics of the process. The policy also helped to guide the drafting of my application. (Associate Professor/Professor applicant)

The extra round for Senior Lecturer applicants was viewed as beneficial both to applicants and senior leaders.

The additional 2nd round gave me sense of security in that it meant that if I didn't manage to finish my application in time for the 1st round I would be able to submit it in the 2nd and would not have to wait a whole year to apply again. *(Senior Lecturer applicant)*

The two rounds allowed for better application feedback within the School without last minute rushing. *(Head of School)*

While there were a host of support programs (Table 8), it was difficult to fully capture their impact on participants. Response to surveys was low and some attendees were not considering applying for promotion immediately. The Career Progression Coaching Program for Level C women (2019–2020) proved highly impactful: of the participants who responded to the evaluation (77% response rate), half rated it as extremely or very effective. Importantly, between 2020 and 2023, 43% of participants applied for promotion—with an impressive 90% success rate.

Of the ten women academic women in Science who had received funding for professional development of their choice (Section 3.2A), five responded to our evaluation survey. They all said that the funding had a positive impact on their careers. In the 1–2 years since receiving this funding, two had applied for promotion and the other three were considering applying for promotion.

5.2 Improved supervisor awareness of impact of life circumstances on career

The Inclusive Conversations program (Section 3.2C) participants were Heads of School/Disciplines in FEIT or Science who are responsible for preparing annual workplans together with their direct reports. Prior to the program, most participants had some knowledge of their direct reports' parental or caring responsibilities and cultural background but not of any disabilities, Indigenous identity or LGBTQ identity. This may result in unacknowledged impacts on career opportunities. The program provided tools for senior leaders (e.g., active listening, intentionally creating space for different voices) to frame inclusive career planning conversations as well as to seed the formation of a community of peer leaders in their faculty.

Post-program survey responses were low, with most feedback provided verbally to the program co-designers. However, the impact of the program on participants is highlighted in several of their comments:

The program was thought-provoking, and it was good to be able to get together with peers to discuss these issues as we don't often get a chance to do so. *(Man,* [redacted]

I thought it was going to be a waste of my precious time but it wasn't. *(Man,* [redacted]

In response to the question as to what they would do differently in the post-program survey, participants noted:

I'll make a real effort to bring inclusive practices into how I make decisions, how I mentor others and how I support my team's growth. *(Woman,* [redacted]

Use more tools to facilitate inclusion, inclusive culture and inclusive practices - rather than relying on instinct. *(Woman,* [redacted]

In particular our junior teaching staff, who are eager to take things on board, might not assume they have a voice. I have already started to include these academics in faculty forums, so they can provide direct feedback to our processes. *(Man,* [redacted]

This type of program is costly, both in terms of investment of funding and participant time and, while impactful, may not be feasibly integrated into regular BAU.

ACTION 2G Incorporate concepts from Inclusive Career Conversations into DEI training for leaders.

The 2025 Promotion Applicant Survey, which collected demographic information and experiences of the promotion process (73% survey response rate), revealed most Senior Lecturer applicants (86% of women and 100% of men) said they had been encouraged to apply. This was mainly through strategic career planning or annual reviews (40%) or encouragement by peers/supervisors (38%). Some examples included:

Promotion was discussed 2 years ago at our annual retreat, of which I followed up with my peers and supervisor. This was discussed and loopholes for application identified. Plans were put in place in my last year work of plan to address these gaps. I was then encouraged by my supervisor to apply this year after the annual work review. *(CARM academic woman in STEM faculty)*

My line manager and I discussed how to articulate my achievements through my workplan to demonstrate these effectively for promotion. *(Non-CARM academic man in non-STEM faculty)*

I have discussed this promotion with my supervisor and HoS for the past 2–3 years and developed a plan to work towards this. *(non-CARM academic woman in STEM faculty)*

ACTION 2H Create opportunities for supervisors to reflect collectively on Inclusive Career Conversations concepts prior to the annual period for work planning meetings.

5.3 Improved career progression support for staff with disability

Academic staff in FEIT, Science and Health were surveyed in 2022 and 2025 to evaluate the impact of actions implemented to support academic career development. The 2025 survey was released during a time staff were anticipating the release of a major organisational change proposal and as such we expected an impact on survey responses within this context (Table 12).

Table 12: Comparison of respondents to STEM academic survey in 2022 and 2025

	Response rate in 2022	Response rate in 2025
Overall survey	40%	23%
Women	43%	49%
Men	54%	40%
Gender diverse	2%	1%
Prefer not to share gender	2%	10%
Living with a disability	16%	14%
CARM	33%	36%
Non-CARM	72%	55%
LGBTQ	9%	9%

For evaluation, we applied factor analysis to group related survey questions and created index scores for each factor. Index scores were then used as dependent variables in linear regression models with demographic variables as predictors. We identified significant predictors based on both statistical significance and the practical magnitude of their effect on the outcome. For significant effects, we traced this back to the individual survey item to interpret the underlying questions as the drivers of these differences. These form part of the sense making and narrative points in our final analysis.

Career Support by Supervisors

The Supervisor Career Support Index (see Table 14 for individual components) in 2025 (Figure 6) was high (>70%) overall). Importantly, there was a marked improvement in the score for staff with disability. In 2022 there was a significant difference between staff with and without disability (Wilcox test W = 5766, p-value = 0.0105) but not in 2025 (Figure 7). A closer look at the individual items reveals a complete reversal of the scores for the three statements that were included in both 2025 and 2022 surveys (Table 13).

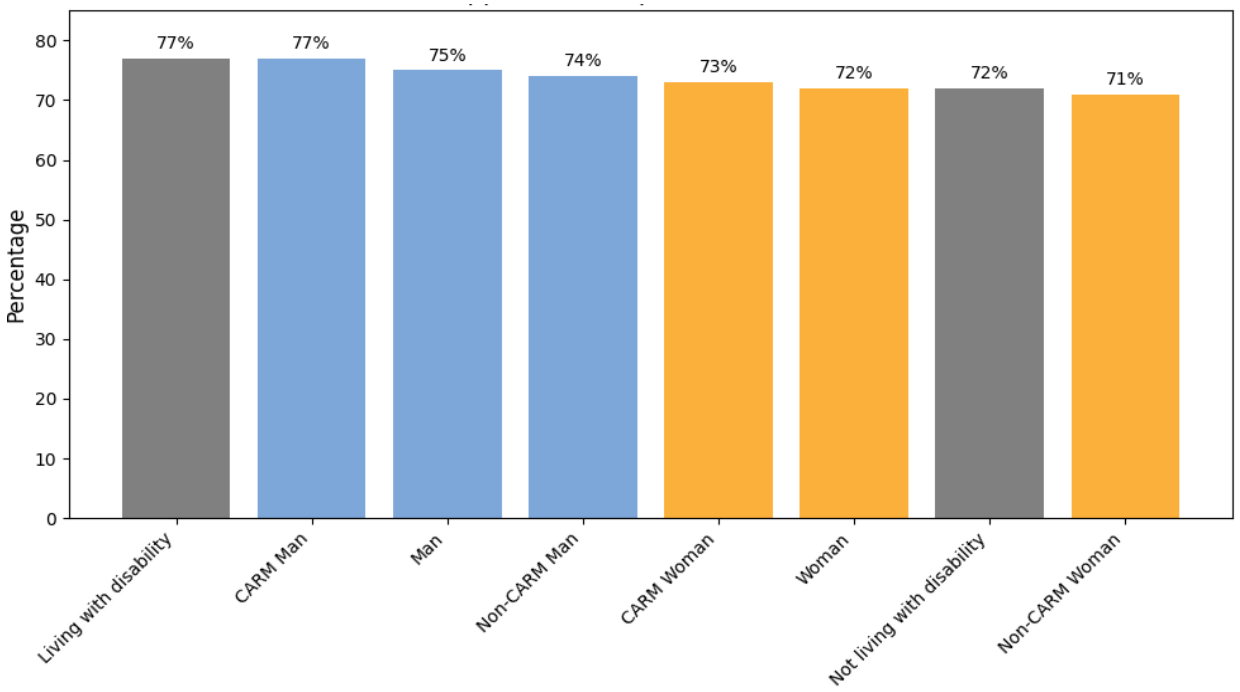

Figure 6: Supervisor Career Support Index for different staff demographic groups

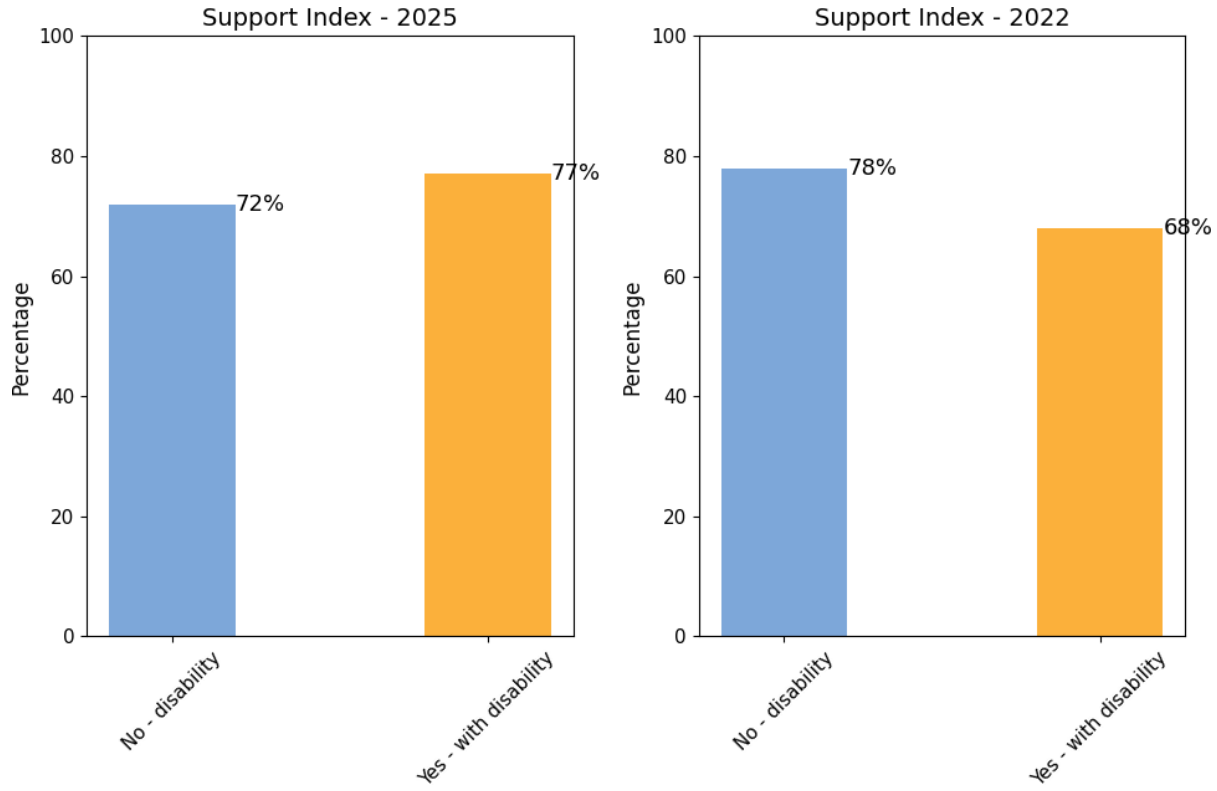

Figure 7: Supervisor Career Support Index for staff with and without disability in 2025 and 2022

Table 13: Comparison of agreement scores to survey questions in 2022 and 2025 for staff living with disability

Index	Statement	2022	2025
Supervisor Career Support	My supervisor supports me to make strategic decisions about workload to advance my career goals	50%#	66%
	My supervisor encourages me to apply for promotion	NA*	70%
	I feel supported by my supervisor to progress my career	55%	88%##
	I feel confident discussing my career goals with my supervisor	55%	75%
Promotion Preparedness	I know where to find information about promotion	59%	56%#
	I know who to ask for information about the promotion process	59%	65%
	I am familiar with the university's criteria for promotion	59%	35%
	I feel confident that I can write a strong promotion application	48%	30%

*This question was not in the 2022 survey; #significantly lower compared to staff without disability; ##significantly higher compared to staff without disability

Comparing staff with and without disability, we see a marked improvement for the statement *My supervisor supports me to make strategic decisions about workload to advance my career goals*. The significant difference in responses from staff with and without disability to this statement in 2022 (p-value <0.05) was reversed in 2025 (p-value >0.05).

Promotion Preparedness

The Promotion Preparedness Index highlighted differences across demographic groups. Although there was no significant difference between staff with and without disability, staff with disability had the lowest score (66%). In addition, the gap between these groups had widened since 2025. Staff with disability scored lower in all statements with a significant difference between groups for the statement *I know where to find information about promotion* (disability 56%, no disability 75%; p=0.0449).

Actions 2G and 2H will be important to improve career progression support for staff with disability.

6. FURTHER ACTION

Self-assessment for the Bronze Award identified a lack of senior STEM academic women applying for promotion and a lower rate of success compared to their peers. Strategies to support career progression for women in STEM included both structural changes (changes to the application process, recognition of non-traditional output, inclusion of contribution relative to opportunity, ability to evaluate outcomes for CARM academics) as well as strategies to support career progression for women in STEM (coaching programs for STEM women for career development, upskilling supervisors ability to have inclusive work planning conversations, application preparation). To evaluate impact of our actions we compared STEM staff experiences of support for career progression through surveys in 2022 and 2025. The experiences of under-represented cohorts were evaluated using an intersectional lens where possible (e.g., CARM men and women).

Through our actions, we have increased applications (both rate and number) by Level D/E STEM women and improved successful outcomes for Level C STEM women. However, the gendered application gap persists for Level D academics. Staff feedback shows that we have improved career progression experience for staff with disability. Despite this, further action is needed to normalise and standardise inclusive career work planning conversations and support for promotion.

Further actions using insights from this Cygnet program are designed to support diverse cohorts of academics to achieve career progression and are described in the table below.

Two UTS strategies align with the underlying principles of this Cygnet. The Wingara Indigenous Employment Strategy 2019–2026 commits UTS to the retention and career progression of UTS Indigenous employees and expansion of Indigenous leadership at Level D/E. Strategic actions are led by the PVC (Indigenous Leadership and Engagement).

The CDAR-AP (Cultural Diversity and Anti-Racism Action Plan), released in December 2025 focuses on experiences of non-Indigenous culturally and racially marginalised students and staff and is co-led by the PVC (Indigenous Leadership and Engagement) and the PVC (Social Justice and Inclusion).

Reference	Rationale/ Evidence	Actions & Outputs	Timeframe (start & end)	Person/Gro up responsible for implementing action	Senior Leader accountable for action delivery	Desired Outcomes/ Targets/ Success Indicators
1A	Gendered application gap persists	Review Academic Promotions policy	Q1 2026 to Q4 2026	People Unit CSJI	DVC Research	Lower gendered application gap by Q4 2027
1B	Most academics are not aware of the ability to include statement of CRO in promotion	Maintain awareness of CRO in promotion	Q1 2026 to on-going	Gender Equity Programs Manager, CSJI	Director EDI	Most academic staff are aware of CRO
1C*	Lack of data on dimensions of diversity of promotion applicants	Enable reporting of dimensions of diversity of promotion applicants through ERP systems	2027	Head of Learning and Organisational Development	Executive Director, People and Culture	Reporting of applicant pool by gender identity and ethnic/racial identity
1D	Success rates for promotion to Level D and E are lower for CARM academics	Consultation with MWN during policy review	Q2 2026 to Q4 2026	Director EDI, CSJI Executive Director People & Culture	PVC SJI DVC Research	Promotion success rates are similar for CARM and non-CARM academics by 2027
2A	REACH grant uptake by STEM academics is low	Improve use of REACH grants by STEM academics	Q1 2026 to ongoing	Gender Equity Programs Manager, CSJI Research Grants Team, Research Office	DVC Research	Increased awareness of REACH and other research support schemes for career disruption

2B	Lack of ability to monitor DEI training completions	Ensure tracking of DEI training through ERP systems	2026	Head of Learning and Organisational Development	Executive Director, People and Culture	Improved tracking of DEI training completions by senior executives
2C	Lower success rates for non-STEM academics	Provide application support for non-STEM faculties	Q1 2026 to Q4 2027	Associate Deans in non-STEM faculties	Non- STEM faculty Deans	<10% disparity between promotion success rate between STEM and non-STEM faculties by 2028
2D	Lower rate of applications by women in FEIT to Level D	Support programs for promotion to Level D for women	Q1 2026 to Q42027	Heads of School and Discipline Leads in FEIT People Unit	Dean FEIT	Improved application rate and success of Level D women in FEIT by 2027
2E	Lower rate of applications to level E by women in Science and Health Persistent application gap at Level D	Develop relevant support strategies for senior STEM women and gender diverse academics (Action 2E)	Q3 2026 to Q4 2028	Heads of School and Discipline Leads in Science and Health People Unit	Dean Science Dean Health	Improved application rate and success of Level D/E women and gender diverse staff in STEM
2F	Success rates for promotion to Level D and E are lower for CARM academics	Targeted support for CARM staff to prepare promotion applications	Q3 2026 to Q4 2028	CSJI People Unit	DVC Research	Promotion success rates are similar for CARM and non- CARM academics by 2027

2G	STEM academics living with disability reported improvement for career support	Incorporate concepts from Inclusive Career Conversations into DEI training	Q1 2026 to on-going	Director EDI Head of Learning and Organisational Development	Executive Director, People and Culture	Academics living with disability at UTS report improved supervisor support
2H	Developing leadership skills for inclusive career conversations supports career aspirations of staff impacted by life circumstance s	Create opportunities for supervisors to reflect collectively on Inclusive Career Conversations concepts prior to the annual period for work planning meetings	Q2 2026 to on-going	Heads of School	Deans	Academic staff from under-represented groups report supervisor support for career progression
*This aligns with Action 1.E1 in our Recruitment Cygnet and with Action 3.2 in the Cultural Diversity and Anti-Racism Action Plan.						