



SAGE Cygnet Award Application

Name of Institution	Defence Science & Technology Group
Date of Application	11/03/2025
Contact for Application	Assistant Director STEM Diversity & Inclusion (Gender)
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DSTG: SAGE Cygnet 2

Key Barrier: Attraction, retention and/or progression of women in STEM disciplines

Barrier type:

- Institution-wide Barrier ⁱ
- Sub-group specific Barrier ⁱ

Barrier description: DSTG identified difficulties in attracting Women STEM professionals to the entry-levels of the organisation.

DSTG has also submitted

- Cygnet #1 Flexible Work as an institutional-wide Barrier
- Cygnet #2 Attraction of Mid-Career Women in STEM as a sub-group specific barrier

Word limit and actual word count

Section	Word limit	Actual word count
Cygnet submission	2,500	2,307
<i>Key barrier</i>	100	117
<i>Evidence of barrier</i>	200	333
<i>Progress</i>	600	346
<i>Outcomes</i>	700	769
<i>Impacts</i>	700	730
<i>Future Action Plan</i>	200	12

Acknowledgement of country

Defence acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Lands throughout Australia. Defence recognises their continuing connection to traditional lands and waters and acknowledge they were the ones who paved the way as our very first Innovators, Scientists and Technologists. Defence would also like to pay respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have contributed to the defence of Australia in times of peace and war.

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ACRONYMS

ATSE	Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering
CALD	Culturally And Linguistically Diverse
CDS	Chief Defence Scientist
DGELP	Defence Graduate and Entry-level Programs
DSTG	Defence Science Technology Group
IEP	Industry Experience Program
LGBTIQA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual, plus other diverse genders, sexes and sexualities
M	Men
R&I	Research and Innovation
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic and Time-bound
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics
STEMM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, Medicine
SVP	Summer Vacation Placement
S&T	Science & Technology
T	Total
W	Women
Z	Prefer Not to Say

1. KEY BARRIER

This Cygnet addresses the attraction of women to early career STEM roles within DSTG. Three sub-barriers contribute to this key barrier:

Sub-barrier 1.1: **Lack of data to understand the contribution of DSTG pre-entry STEM experience programs on the gender diversity of the entry-level program talent pool.**

Sub-barrier 1.2: **The DSTG Research and Innovation (R&I) Graduate and entry-level STEM recruitment process is not achieving equal representation of men and women.**

Sub-barrier 1.3: **Key stakeholders are misaligned with DSTG's Gender Equity aims of the STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate program.**

Figure 1 illustrates DSTG programs that address this key barrier.

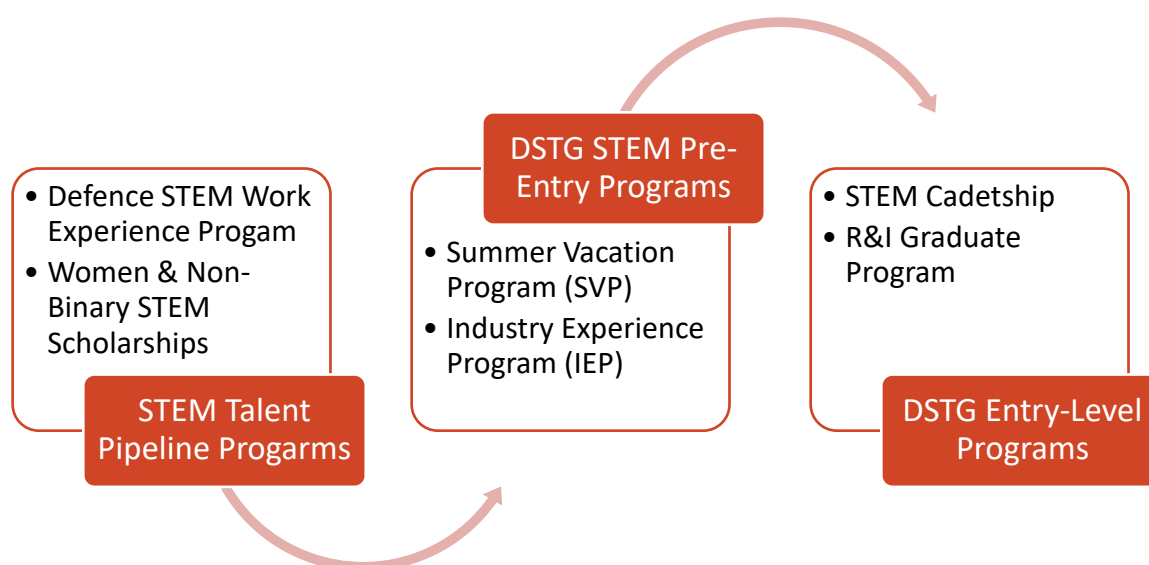


Figure 1. Overview of DSTG STEM programs that contribute towards improving the representation of early-career women STEM professionals

Seven data sources established a baseline and measured changes to Defence's STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate programs (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of data sources used in Cygnet application

Data Source	Date	Description
Workforce STEM demographics		Baseline data describing the gender profile of DSTG's entry level STEM workforce by classification
	2016	n= 1,807, Women = 294 (16%), Men = 1,512, (84%), Z= 1
	2017	n= 1,771, Women = 293, (17%), Men = 1,477, (83%), Z= 1

Data Source	Date	Description																																																												
	2018	n= 1,899, Women = 330, (17%), Men = 1,568, (83%), Z= 1																																																												
Industry pre-entry programs: Industry Experience Program (IEP)/Summer Vacation Program (SVP) demographics	2018 - 2025	Baseline data describing the diversity profile and recruitment pipeline of IEP/SVP program participants																																																												
Defence STEM Work Experience Program data	Q4 2024	Baseline data describing program participant demographics collected by Defence/DSTG																																																												
Women and Non-Binary STEM Scholarships	Q4 2024	Baseline data describing program participant demographics collected by Defence in partnership with the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE)																																																												
STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate recruitment data	2018-2025	Baseline data describing the diversity profile and recruitment pipeline of DSTG STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate program participants																																																												
STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate Program participant online survey	Nov 2024	Quantitative review from past program participant's on the attraction and recruitment of women into entry-level STEM disciplines, via DSTG's STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate Intake Programs																																																												
		<p>Overall participants*: n = 52 responses, Women = 20 (38.5%), Men = 29 (55.7%), Z= 3 (5.8%)</p> <p><i>Indigenous n=0</i> <i>CALD n=33 (Women= 11, Men= 19, Z= 3)</i> <i>LGBTIQA+ n=10 (Women = 5, Men= 4, Z= 1)</i> <i>Disability n= 5 (Women= 3, Men=2)</i> <i>Neurodiverse n=6 (Women= 3, Men = 3)</i></p> <p><i>*Response rate is unable to be calculated as the survey was an open invitation to current and past participants currently employed at DSTG</i></p>																																																												
		<p>STEM Cadet program participants:</p> <p>n = 18 responses (35%), Women = 5 (28%), Men = 12 (67%), Z = 1 (5%)</p> <p>Participant responses by year:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="4">2019</th> <th colspan="4">2021</th> <th colspan="4">2022</th> <th colspan="4">2023</th> <th colspan="4">2024</th> </tr> <tr> <th>W</th><th>M</th><th>Z</th><th>T</th> <th>W</th><th>M</th><th>Z</th><th>T</th> <th>W</th><th>M</th><th>Z</th><th>T</th> <th>W</th><th>M</th><th>Z</th><th>T</th> <th>W</th><th>M</th><th>Z</th><th>T</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>0</td><td>0</td><td>1</td><td>1</td> <td>0</td><td>2</td><td>0</td><td>2</td> <td>1</td><td>3</td><td>0</td><td>4</td> <td>3</td><td>4</td><td>0</td><td>7</td> <td>1</td><td>3</td><td>0</td><td>4</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><i>No respondents contributed to the survey from cohorts prior to 2019 nor in 2000</i></p>	2019				2021				2022				2023				2024				W	M	Z	T	W	M	Z	T	W	M	Z	T	W	M	Z	T	W	M	Z	T	0	0	1	1	0	2	0	2	1	3	0	4	3	4	0	7	1	3	0	4
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<p>R&I Graduate program participants:</p> <p>n = 34 responses (65%), Women = 15 (45%), Men = 17 (50%), Z = 2 (5%)</p>																																																														

Data Source	Date	Description																																																												
		Participant responses by year: <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="4">2019</th> <th colspan="4">2021</th> <th colspan="4">2022</th> <th colspan="4">2023</th> <th colspan="4">2024</th> </tr> <tr> <th>W</th><th>M</th><th>Z</th><th>T</th> <th>W</th><th>M</th><th>Z</th><th>T</th> <th>W</th><th>M</th><th>Z</th><th>T</th> <th>W</th><th>M</th><th>Z</th><th>T</th> <th>W</th><th>M</th><th>Z</th><th>T</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>1</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>1</td> <td>0</td><td>2</td><td>1</td><td>3</td> <td>5</td><td>8</td><td>0</td><td>13</td> <td>5</td><td>5</td><td>1</td><td>11</td> <td>4</td><td>2</td><td>0</td><td>6</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> No respondents contributed to the survey from cohorts prior to 2019 nor in 2000	2019				2021				2022				2023				2024				W	M	Z	T	W	M	Z	T	W	M	Z	T	W	M	Z	T	W	M	Z	T	1	0	0	1	0	2	1	3	5	8	0	13	5	5	1	11	4	2	0	6
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STEM Cadet & R&I Graduate Program Stakeholder interviews	Dec 2024	Qualitative review of feedback from participants and stakeholders including DGELP, DSTG STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate program management team as well as supervisors, on attraction and recruitment of women into entry-level STEM disciplines, through DSTG's R&I Graduate and Cadet pathway programs																																																												
		Total n = 19, Women = 12 (63%), Men = 7 (37%) <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="4">DGELP</th> <th colspan="4">DSTG Team</th> <th colspan="4">Participants</th> <th colspan="4">Supervisors</th> </tr> <tr> <th>W</th><th>M</th><th>Z</th><th>T</th> <th>W</th><th>M</th><th>Z</th><th>T</th> <th>W</th><th>M</th><th>Z</th><th>T</th> <th>W</th><th>M</th><th>Z</th><th>T</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>3</td><td>1</td><td>0</td><td>4</td> <td>1</td><td>1</td><td>0</td><td>2</td> <td>3</td><td>2</td><td>0</td><td>5</td> <td>5</td><td>3</td><td>0</td><td>8</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	DGELP				DSTG Team				Participants				Supervisors				W	M	Z	T	W	M	Z	T	W	M	Z	T	W	M	Z	T	3	1	0	4	1	1	0	2	3	2	0	5	5	3	0	8												
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2. EVIDENCE OF BARRIER

In the 2019 Athena Swan SAGE Bronze submission, DSTG described the underrepresentation of women in entry-level Defence (S&T) roles (Table 2).

Table 2. Representation of women for entry-level S&T roles by classifications, 2016-2018

	2016			2017			2018		
	M	W	%W	M	W	%W	M	W	%W
S&T 3-4A	48	4	8%	50	4	7%	55	9	14%
S&T 3-4B	509	137	21%	400	119	23%	351	101	22%

Sub-barrier 1.1: Lack of data to understand the contribution of DSTG pre-entry STEM experience programs on the gender diversity of the entry-level program talent pool

The SVP and IEP pre-entry programs offer women exposure to a Defence STEM career whilst undertaking tertiary studies offering the potential to improve the well-documented limited STEM talent pool available for Defence R&I Graduate and entry-level programs. However, data describing the conversion of IEP/SVP participation to DSTG's STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate Cohort is incomplete.

Baseline data (Table 3) from 2020 describes the low representation of women, SVP (15%) and 2020, IEP (12%). Approaching equal representation will improve the diversity of the talent pool for DSTG entry-level programs.

Table 3. Representation of women during SVP and IEP recruitment, 2020

Program	Applicants			Shortlisting			Successful		
	M	W	%W	M	W	%W	M	W	%W
SVP	292	56	16%	101	23	18%	29	5	15%
IEP	112	18	14%	50	11	18%	35	5	12%

Sub-barrier 1.2: The DSTG R&I Graduate and entry-level STEM recruitment process is not achieving equal representation of men and women

The 2019 Bronze Athena Swan award application (Tables 4 and 5) describe how women in the R&I Graduate program, compared to men are less likely to be shortlisted (women 39% vs men 60%), whilst the opposite is true for the STEM Cadet program (women 31% vs men 22%). However, for both programs the success rates for women are equal to (R&I Graduate program women 7% vs men 7%) or greater than men (STEM Cadet women 19% vs men 16%). This suggests that the key to boosting the percentage of women in the programs is getting more women to apply.

Table 4. Representation of women during the R&I Graduate recruitment pipeline during 2018

Applicants			Shortlisting			Successful			Application Rate		Shortlisting Rate		Success Rate	
M	W	%W	M	W	%W	M	W	%W	M	W	M	W	M	W
115	57	33%	69	22	24%	8	4	33%	67%	33%	60%	39%	7%	7%

Table 5. Representation of women during the STEM Cadet recruitment pipeline during 2018

Applicants			Shortlisting			Successful			Application Rate		Shortlisting Rate		Success Rate	
M	W	%W	M	W	%W	M	W	%W	M	W	M	W	M	W
125	42	25%	27	13	33%	20	8	29%	75%	25%	22%	31%	16%	19%

Sub-barrier 1.3: Key stakeholders are misaligned with DSTG's gender equity aims of the STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate program

DSTG Senior leaders and supervisors play important roles in approving STEM Cadet/ R&I Graduate positions and are central in ensuring DSTG achieves its program equity aims. The poor recruitment outcomes for women presented in Tables 4 and 5 point to systemic issues. Strong leadership support for initiatives has not resulted in practical changes across the different levels of the workforce.

3. PROGRESS (ACTIONS AND OUTPUTS)

Table 6 describes the activities implemented to address attraction of women to early career STEM positions with some activities addressing multiple sub barriers.

Table 6. The relationship between the key barrier, sub-barriers and actions taken 2000-2024 to address them. Highlighting which activities are Defence or DSTG led.

Key Barrier:	Attraction of women into entry-level STEM roles		
Sub-barriers	Lack of data to understand the contribution of DSTG pre-entry STEM experience programs on the gender diversity of the entry-level program talent pool	The DSTG R&I Graduate and entry-level STEM recruitment process is not achieving equal representation of men and women	Key stakeholders are misaligned with DSTG's gender equity aims of the STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate program
Activities	50% women recruitment target for Defence S&T pre-entry and entry-level programs- <i>DSTG led</i> .		
	Industry pre-entry STEM Experience Programs: Summer Vacation Program (SVP) & Industry Experience Program (IEP) – <i>DSTG led</i>		
	Defence STEM Work Experience Program – <i>Defence led</i>		
	Women and Non-Binary STEM Scholarships – <i>DSTG led</i>		
	Defence Women in STEM Ambassadors – <i>DSTG led</i>		
		Influencing a Marketing and Recruitment campaign to attract diverse applicants for the Defence R&I Graduate Program and STEM Cadetship program – <i>Defence led</i>	
		Defence R&I Graduate and Entry-level STEM recruitment and selection program – <i>Defence led</i>	
			Educating key stakeholders on diversity & inclusion to support inclusive recruitment - <i>DSTG led</i>
			Supporting key stakeholders throughout the assessment and selection process to build awareness of the barriers and enablers that affect women's participation in the program - <i>DSTG led</i>
			Stakeholder communication regarding the 50% recruitment target for women in the Defence R&I Graduate program and STEM Cadetship program - <i>DSTG led</i>

Defence (through the Defence Graduate and Entry-level Programs team (DGELP)) and DSTG dedicate significant resources to addressing the attraction of women to early career STEM roles as described in Table 7.

Table 7. Program components and delivery teams

Delivery Team	Program Component
DGELP Marketing team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing and recruitment campaign for the Defence STEM Cadetship and R&I Graduate program
DGELP Recruitment team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> STEM Cadetship and R&I Graduate program candidate assessment and role offer
DGELP STEM Cadetship Program Management Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> STEM Cadetship Program experience and transition to DSTG ongoing role/ R&I Graduate Program
DGELP Graduate Management Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> R&I Graduate Program experience On boarding and off boarding to DSTG roles
DSTG Graduate and Entry-level Programs Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attracting, assessing, generating offers to DSTG STEM Cadets & R&I Graduates DSTG operational and strategic direction to improve cohort diversity.
STEM Outreach & Engagement Team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summer Vacation Program (SVP) Industry Experience Program (IEP) Defence STEM Work Experience Program Women and Non Binary STEM Scholarship program Defence Women in STEM Ambassadors

A New Recruitment Target

In June 2023, the Assistant Minister for Defence announced that Defence would work towards implementing a 50% target for women's participation including the Defence R&I Graduate and STEM Cadetship Program, (Chief Defence Scientist announcement, Figure 2).



Figure 2. Welcoming the announcement, Prof Tanya Monro (CDS) noted 'by setting targets for women's participation in our STEM entry programs we draw more fully on our nation's talent pool, allowing Defence science to deliver greater impact to the ADF [Australian Defence Force]'

Growing the Talent Pipeline of Women in Defence

DSTG offers a diverse range of programs to improve the talent pool available for its R&I Graduate and entry-level programs as described in Table 8.

Table 8. STEM outreach programs designed to increase the talent pipeline of women in Defence

Program Name	Target	Format	Description	Remuneration
IEP- Industry Experience Placement Program	Tertiary students required to undertake a 6 or 12 month STEM industry placement as part of their course work	Offered as full time or part time for up to 12 months	Provides tertiary students the option to undertake industry experience at DSTG as part of their degree. The placement will further develop their skills and knowledge in a research environment pertinent to their tertiary studies.	APS employment conditions and earnings based on S&T 1-2 Below classification
SVP – Summer Vacation Program	Tertiary students who have completed 2 years of their STEM studies	Full time placement over a 12-week block during the summer university break	Tertiary students are allocated a suitable research project and will work on-site at a DSTG establishment under the local supervision of S&T research staff for 12 weeks.	APS employment conditions and earnings based on S&T 1-2 Below classification
Women and Non-Binary STEM Scholarships	Scholarships (2024 n=14, 2024 n=10) for Women and Non-binary students to commence STEM undergraduate or postgraduate studies	3-year scholarship program which includes: mentoring, peer support, professional development	Scholarships are part of the Elevate program in partnership with the Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering (ATSE). Refer to media release Figure 3.	\$30,000 over 3 years per scholar
Defence STEM Work Experience Program	Year 10-12 high school students	1 week	Designed to showcase a variety of STEM careers available in Defence Science and Technology Group (DSTG) and with Industry partners. Five	Nil

Program Name	Target	Format	Description	Remuneration
			programs were conducted in 2024, involving 156 students, in SA (32% women) and VIC (38% women).	

MEDIA RELEASE

More than one hundred scholarships awarded to boost diversity in STEM

The Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE) has today announced 116 scholarships to support women and diverse people to thrive in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers.

In the second round of the seven-year, \$41.2 million program funded by the Department of Industry, Science and Resources, ATSE is delighted to grow the number of scholarships on offer through the 2024 Elevate program with targeted support from the Department of Defence.

The 2024 cohort counts 14 additional undergraduate scholarships under a new partnership with the Australian Defence Science Technology Group (DSTG). The partnership aims to develop the urgently needed diverse STEM skills to support Australia's growing science and defence workforce needs amid the current STEM skills shortage.

ATSE CEO Kylie Walker said she is thrilled to see the Elevate program grow from strength to strength, with more than 1,200 applications this year demonstrating the massive demand from Australian women who are looking to study STEM as a fulfilling career path.

"We are thrilled to partner with the Defence Science and Technology Group to support even more women and diverse people to join the STEM workforce and contribute to building the opportunities of our STEM-fuelled future."

Figure 3. Snippet of Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering (ATSE) media release, November 2023

SVP and IEP Programs

Activities undertaken to achieve the 50% women representation targets include,

- Application of a text Gender Decoder to ensure neutral and inclusive language
- Targeting of women and non-binary focussed clubs/societies in Australian Universities
- Blinded gender assessment of applicants for shortlisting

Defence Science and Technology Group | Cygnet Award Application #3: Attraction of Early Career Women in STEM Disciplines

- Project supervisors undertaking shortlisting receive a reminder about the gender equity aims of the programs.

R&I Graduate and entry-level STEM recruitment and selection program

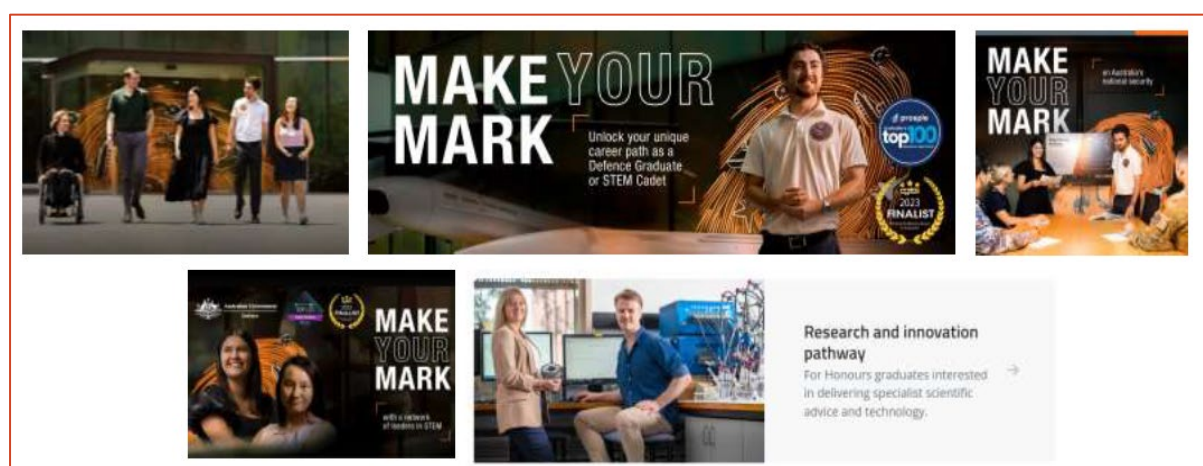
Table 9 highlights the strategic approach and actions undertaken across the recruitment pipeline.

Table 9. Summary of DSTG's actions across the STEM Cadetship and R&I Graduate Program recruitment cycle in 2024 and 2025

Recruitment pipeline stage	Action undertaken	Additional details
Defence marketing strategy	DSTG influenced Defence's marketing campaign to reflect a diverse R&I Graduate and STEM Cadetship cohort (see Figure 4)	The online campaign included lived experience and diverse intersectional representation in imagery and testimonials
Internal recruitment strategy	Consultation with DSTG senior leaders on strategy to drive significant impact towards the 50% gender target within both programs	Senior leadership support was critical to drive implementation and manage expectations of stakeholders and staff at all levels
Job card – additional information requested from applicants	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide location preferences for role 2. Opportunity to provide diversity data and understand how this is used in analysis of diversity data trends across the recruitment pipeline 3. Opportunity to advise if involved in a previous DSTG IEP/SVP placement 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. With seven DSTG locations across Australia it was important to clarify applicants location preferences early in the recruitment process 2. Increased diversity data to understand pipeline and process-based impacts on diversity across the recruitment cycle (Tables 19 and 20) 3. DSTG visibility of candidates previously engaged for Divisions to consider converting them to programs with ongoing roles (boosting ROI from IEP/SVP program, Tables 15 and 16))
Candidate short-listing for assessment centre	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recruit diverse panel of DSTG S&T staff to evaluate candidates and host information sessions to detail approach and commitment to gender target in programs 2. Implement blinded reviewing process 3. Divisions to identify DSTG's overall highest priority candidate list 4. Use all available data from previous recruitment cycles to understand trends in failure to attend assessment centre 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To facilitate diversity of thought when selecting candidates to progress to assessment 2. Non-gendered consideration of candidates based on location preference and degree discipline 3. Standardised selection of DSTG's shortlisted candidates based on input from subject matter experts. 4. Ensure short list contains enough candidates and diversity to protect against uncontrollable loss for lack of attendance (Refer Figures 6 and 7)
DSTG presence at assessment centre (for group activity and interview)	Recruit diverse assessors to showcase DSTG's commitment to diversity	Provides candidates a diverse representation from DSTG at group/interview panel.
Role offers	Expectation that divisions are accountable for providing gender diversity in role offers wherever	Achieving DSTG's gender target for the programs involves shared actions.

Recruitment pipeline stage	Action undertaken	Additional details
	possible (including 50% target across the role offer list).	
First contact with successful candidates	<p>Role offer acceptance email contains wording detailing Defence and DSTG's commitment to supporting women in STEM:</p> <p><i>"You may have heard the announcement from the Assistant Minister for Defence, Matt Thistlethwaite MP, regarding Defence's commitment to supporting Women in STEM, which is being progressed with a range of meaningful initiatives. We are delighted to offer you a role in the Defence STEM Cadetship Program; we congratulate you on this achievement and look forward to supporting you to build your career as a STEM professional within DSTG"</i></p>	From first engagement with DSTG, candidates are aware of commitment to supporting careers of women in STEM.

Figure 4. 2024 DGELP Marketing Campaign Promoting Diversity



Supporting Stakeholders to support DSTG's gender equity aims of the R&I Graduate and early career entry programs

Table 10 contains a summary of the internal DSTG stakeholders involved in the process who engage during the yearly recruitment cycle.

Table 10. Summary of DSTG internal stakeholders working collaboratively across the R&I Graduate and STEM Cadetship recruitment pipeline

Position	Role
Chief Defence Scientist	Drives DSTG's commitment to gender equity

Position	Role
First Assistant Secretary Research Technology and Operations	Responsible for R&I Graduate and Entry-Level Programs and recruitment strategy
Workforce Capability and Talent Team	Responsible for strategic direction and operations of recruitment from shortlisting to role offer.
Divisional Chiefs	Responsible for approving divisional recruitment priorities and candidates receiving role offer
Director of Divisional Operations	Supporting workforce coordinators and Divisional Chiefs to recruit into priority areas and meet DSTG's commitment to gender equity
Workforce Coordinators	Support Workforce Capability and Talent's recruitment messaging and expectation management of divisional staff in line with DSTG's gender equity commitment
Research/Group Leaders (staff who are supervisors)	Provide subject matter expertise to shortlisting, assessing candidates and identifying candidates of interest for role offer.

In addition to engaging with the Defence Recruitment team, DSTG's role has supported significant change over the 2024 and 2025 recruitment cycles by enhancing strategic direction, strengthening relationships and improving internal stakeholder's understanding of the collective effort required across DSTG divisions to meet the gender target. This is summarised in Table 11.

Table 11. Summary of DSTG's actions across the 2024 and 2025 recruitment cycles to boost gender diversity in the R&I Graduate Program and STEM Cadetship program cohorts.

Action	Additional details
Greater access to data, providing evidenced-based insights to achieve gender equity aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Influenced Defence Recruitment partners to collect and share data relating to candidate demographics during the application stage Maximised use of available data to understand trends and projections to make informed decisions supporting diversity across the recruitment pipeline and improvements for future rounds
Shaping an internal strategic direction towards gender equity across the recruitment pipeline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Key focus on controlling points of influence at the earliest possible point (i.e. shortlisting) to maximise diversity of talent pool for role offer Actively address historical underrepresentation of women/non-binary people in the applicant pool, to achieve gender equity in candidate shortlist for assessment
Increased communication regarding the gender equity aims of the program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designed a transparent, consultative and collaborative approach with internal stakeholders to work towards meeting the gender target together
Boosting gender diversity in DSTG's R&I Graduate and STEM Cadetship cohorts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2025, delivered DSTG's highest percentage of Women (54.5%) in STEM Cadetship program role offers. In 2025, delivered DSTG's highest percentage Women (44%) in R&I Graduate program role offers.

Despite the positive progress, there remains ongoing challenges to achieve gender equity in role offer due to the underrepresentation of women studying and applying with specific STEM backgrounds.

Ongoing effort is required to align stakeholders to the gender equity aims of the Defence early entry programs.

4. OUTCOMES

Table 12 summarises the key sources of outcome and impact data used in this Cygnet.

Table 12. Summary of desired outcomes, indicators and means of verification

Key Barrier: Attraction of women in early career STEM roles	Goal: Recruitment of women into entry-level STEM roles		
Sub-barriers	Desired outcome and/or impact	Indicator	Means of verification
Lack of data to understand the contribution of DSTG pre-entry STEM experience programs on the gender diversity of the entry-level program talent pool	#1. Improved data collection to validate a positive impact of DSTG pre-entry STEM experience programs on the gender diversity of the entry-level program talent pool	<p>Women completing the IEP and SVP have contributed to improved representation of women in the R&I Graduate and early career STEM programs</p> <p>Women R&I Graduate and early career STEM scholars, and stakeholders report a positive influence of DSTG pre-entry programs to improve gender diversity of program talent pool</p> <p>Increase in representation of women from 2019 to 2025 selected for IEP and SVP</p> <p>50% representation of women in pre-entry DSTG STEM experience programs</p>	<p>SVP and IEP recruitment data (Outcomes)</p> <p>STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate recruitment data (Outcomes)</p> <p>STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate participant survey and stakeholder interviews (Outcomes and Impact)</p>
The DSTG STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate and recruitment process is not achieving equal representation of men and women	#2. Achieve 50% representation of women participating in the R&I Graduate and early Career STEM program	Achieve 50% women recruitment targets for the DSTG R&I Graduate program and STEM Cadetship program	<p>STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate recruitment data (Outcomes)</p> <p>R&I Graduate and early career</p>

Key Barrier: Attraction of women in early career STEM roles	Goal: Recruitment of women into entry-level STEM roles		
Sub-barriers	Desired outcome and/or impact	Indicator	Means of verification
		Improve representation of women shortlisted, 2018 vs 2025 Women’s applicants link advertising campaign as a successful attractor to apply	STEM participant survey and stakeholder interviews (Outcomes and Impact)
Key stakeholders are misaligned with DSTG’s gender equity aims of the STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate program	#3. Key stakeholders are aligned with the gender equity aims of DSTG’s R&I Graduate and early career STEM programs	Stakeholders are aware of and deliver the program’s gender equity aims Stakeholders are engaged in selecting candidates in line with the program gender equity aims Stakeholders report a purpose-driven recruitment process that addresses gender inequities	R&I Graduate and early career STEM stakeholder interviews (Impact)

Desired outcome/impact #1; Improved data collection to validate a positive impact of DSTG pre-entry STEM experience programs on the gender diversity of the entry-level program talent pool

Efforts designed to improve representation of women in the DSTG’s pre-entry SVP and IEP (Table 13 and 14) have:

- Contributed towards improved representation of women in the applicant pool for both SVP (22% women applicants) and IEP (30% women applicants) during 2024.
- Supported a greater percentage of women being shortlisted in SVP (22% 2022/2023, 26% 2023/2024 and 28% 2024/2025) and IEP (20% in 2023, 27% in 2024)
- Contributed towards stronger representation of women particularly in the SVP program over the last two years (36% 2023/2024, 28% 2024/2025).

However, this fell short of our 50% target (women representation: 2024 SVP 38%, 2024/2025 IEP 28%). Women’s success rates mostly exceeded that for men in both programs, evidence that attracting applications from women is central to achieving this target (Table 13 and 14). Given this is

a complex issue requiring a long term coordinated effort, we also plan to adopt the shortlisting process successfully used in the STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate programs.

Table 13. Representation of women during the SVP recruitment process, 2018-2025

Year	Applicants			Shortlisting			Successful			Application Rate		Shortlisting Rate		Success Rate	
	M	W	%W	M	W	%W	M	W	%W	M	W	M	W	M	W
2019/ 2020	292	56	16%	101	23	18%	29	5	15%	84%	16%	36%	41%	10%	9%
2020/ 2021	499	164	25%	64	26	29%	23	12	34%	75%	25%	13%	16%	5%	7%
2021/ 2022	264	57	18%	54	14	20%	20	6	23%	82%	18%	20%	25%	8%	11%
2022/ 2023	199	35	15%	56	16	22%	22	9	27%	85%	15%	28%	46%	11%	26%
2023/ 2024	172	30	15%	57	20	26%	24	9	36%	85%	15%	33%	67%	14%	30%
2024/ 2025	344	96	22%	46	18	28%	23	9	38%	78%	22%	13%	19%	7%	10%

Note- Higher than normal number of applicants in 2020/2021 cannot be attributed to any specific DSTG actions.

Table 14. Representation of women during the IEP recruitment process, 2022-2024

Year	Applicants			Shortlisting			Successful			Application Rate		Shortlisting Rate		Success Rate	
	M	W	%W	M	W	%W	M	W	%W	M	W	M	W	M	W
2020	112	18	14%	50	11	18%	35	5	12%	86%	14%	45%	61%	31%	28%
2021	128	40	24%	51	20	28%	31	15	32%	76%	24%	40%	50%	24%	38%
2022	75	18	19%	43	10	19%	22	9	29%	81%	19%	57%	56%	29%	50%
2023	64	10	13%	32	8	20%	20	6	23%	87%	13%	50%	180%	31%	60%
2024	41	18	30%	19	7	27%	9	3	28%	70%	30%	46%	39%	22%	17%

Table 15 and 16 suggest that, during shortlisting, identifying scholars from the SVP and IEP programs could positively influence the gender diversity of DSTG's entry-level programs.

Whilst only a small percentage (2.2%) of DSTG's eligible applicant pool for the 2025 STEM Cadetship (Total n=370, Table 17) were previous IEP/SVP scholars (Total n=8, Women= 3, Men= 5), 20% of the total 2025 STEM Cadet cohort were an IEP/SVP conversion, notably all women, Table 15.

Table 15. Applicant pool for STEM Cadetship that were previous IEP/SVP scholars, 2025

STEM Cadet program	Applicant Pool		
	W	M	Total
Available SVP/IEP cohort*~	33	88	121
Actual SVP/IEP cohort applying to the 2025 STEM Cadet program	3	5	8
%	9%	6%	7%
2025 STEM Cadet Cohort that is an IEP/SVP conversion	2	0	10 STEM Cadet roles offered
%	100%	0%	20%

**(2022-2023 IEP/2022-2023 SVP). ~Includes 2 applicants (1W, 1M) who completed a DSTG pre-entry placement program similar to IEP/SVP*

Similarly, for the 2025 R&I Graduate cohort (Total n=329, Table 18) there was only a small (5.8%, Total n=19, Women 2 and Men 17) representation of IEP/SVP scholars (Table 16). The IEP/SVP conversion rate was 12.5% for the 2025 R&I Graduate cohort, which is less than the STEM Cadets and resulted in no women. However, the numbers do not describe that both women applicants were shortlisted, with one withdrawing and the other, although merit listed, did not receive a role offer, due to changing program priorities.

Table 16. Applicant pool for R&I Graduate program that were previous IEP/SVP scholars, 2025

Graduate program	Applicant Pool		
	W	M	Total
Available SVP/IEP cohort*~	24	117	141
Actual SVP/IEP cohort applying to the 2025 Graduate program	2	17	19
%	8%	14.5%	13.5%
2025 R&I Graduate Cohort that is an IEP/SVP conversion	0	1	8 Graduate roles offered
%	0%	100%	12.5%

**(2021-2025 SVP and 2022-2024 IEP). ~Includes 1 woman applicant who completed a DSTG pre-entry placement program similar to IEP/SVP*

Low numbers of IEP/SVP scholars applied to the 2025 R&I Graduate (Women 8%, Men 14.5%) and STEM Cadet programs (Women 9%, Men 6%). Given their preference in the process, a future action will encourage IEP/SVP scholars, in particular women to consider applying.

Desired outcome/impact #2: Achieve 50% representation of women participating in the R&I Graduate and early career STEM program

Figure 5 recognises DSTG's achievement in the recruitment cycle immediately following the Assistant Minister's announcement.

Figure 5. DSTG's 2024 R&I Graduate and STEM Cadetship program recruitment of women in STEM was recognised in Defence Annual Report 23-24.

Defence graduate and entry-level programs

Defence graduate and entry-level programs are instrumental in delivering people capability to address workforce challenges and emerging needs aligned to government requirements.

In 2023–24, 312 participants commenced Defence graduate and entry-level programs from a range of academic disciplines. Defence graduate and entry-level programs offer a unique experience across a range of career pathways, with access to cutting-edge technology where participants can bring their unique skills and experiences and make a meaningful impact to Australia's national security.

Defence actively participates in the Australian Government Graduate Program and whole-of-government entry-level programs using a centralised recruitment process to cultivate talent pipelines across the APS. This coordinated approach enhances outcomes efficiencies across government agencies, ensuring a steady inflow of skilled professionals while enabling candidates to be considered by multiple agencies with a single application.

Defence STEM Cadetship Program

University students who are currently studying a relevant STEM degree. STEM cadets are employed in the APS, where they are provided with real-world and practical work experience in Defence.

In 2023–24, 164 STEM cadets participated in the STEM Cadetship Program addressing future STEM workforce needs by promoting careers in Defence beyond the program.

Defence continues to shape the agenda of women in STEM in Australia, progressing towards a 50 per cent target for women on all entry-level STEM programs. Currently, women represent 38 per cent of all STEM Cadetship Program participants, which is a 17 per cent increase from the previous year. Within Defence Science and Technology Group, the STEM Cadetship Program increased from 29.8 per cent in 2023 to 42.9 per cent in 2024, and the Research and Innovation Graduate Program pathway increased from 24.3 per cent in 2023 to 33.3 per cent in 2024.



A Royal Australian Navy MH-60R Seahawk prepares to land on the flight deck of HMAS Adelaide during wet and dry environment rehearsals at the Cowley Beach Training Area, Queensland. IMAGE CREDIT: Corporal Michael Rogers.

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Despite the 2024 advertising campaign, there was no improvement in the gender diversity in the R&I Graduate applicant pool compared to DSTG's 2018 Bronze Athena Swann application (Table 18 26% in 2025 vs 33% in 2018). However, there has been a modest (10%) improvement in the application rate of women applying to the STEM Cadet program (Table 17, 35% in 2025 vs 25% in 2018).

In response, DSTG further refined its shortlisting strategy by engaging more closely with internal stakeholders, to identify DSTG's highest priority candidates. This active effort at the shortlisting stage had a positive effect outlined in Figures 6 and 7.

Table 17. STEM Cadet recruitment pipeline comparing gender outcomes 2018, 2024 and 2025

Defence Science and Technology Group | Cygnet Award Application #3: Attraction of Early Career Women in STEM Disciplines

STEM Cadet Program	# Applicants		Total	% applicants		#Women Shortlisted		Total	% Women Shortlisted		#Women successful		Total	% Women successful	
	W	M		W	M	W	M		W	M	W	M		W	M
	2018	42	125	167	25%	75%	13	27	40	32.5%	67.5%	8	20	28	29%
2024	84	174	258	33%	67%	21	59	80	26%	74%	9	12	21	43%	47%
2025	126	244	370	35%	65%	30	30	60	50%	50%	6	5	11	55%	45%

Table 18. R&I Graduate recruitment pipeline comparing gender outcomes 2018, 2024 and 2025

R&I Graduate Program	# Applicants		Total	% applicants		#Women Shortlisted		Total	% Women Shortlisted		#Women successful		Total	% Women successful	
	W	M		W	M	W	M		W	M	W	M		W	M
	2018	57	115	172	33%	67%	22	69	91	24%	76%	4	8	12	33%
2024	65	174	239	27%	73%	28	92	120	23%	77%	10	20	30	33%	77%
2025	85	244	329	26%	74%	30	30	60	50%	50%	4	5	9	44%	56%

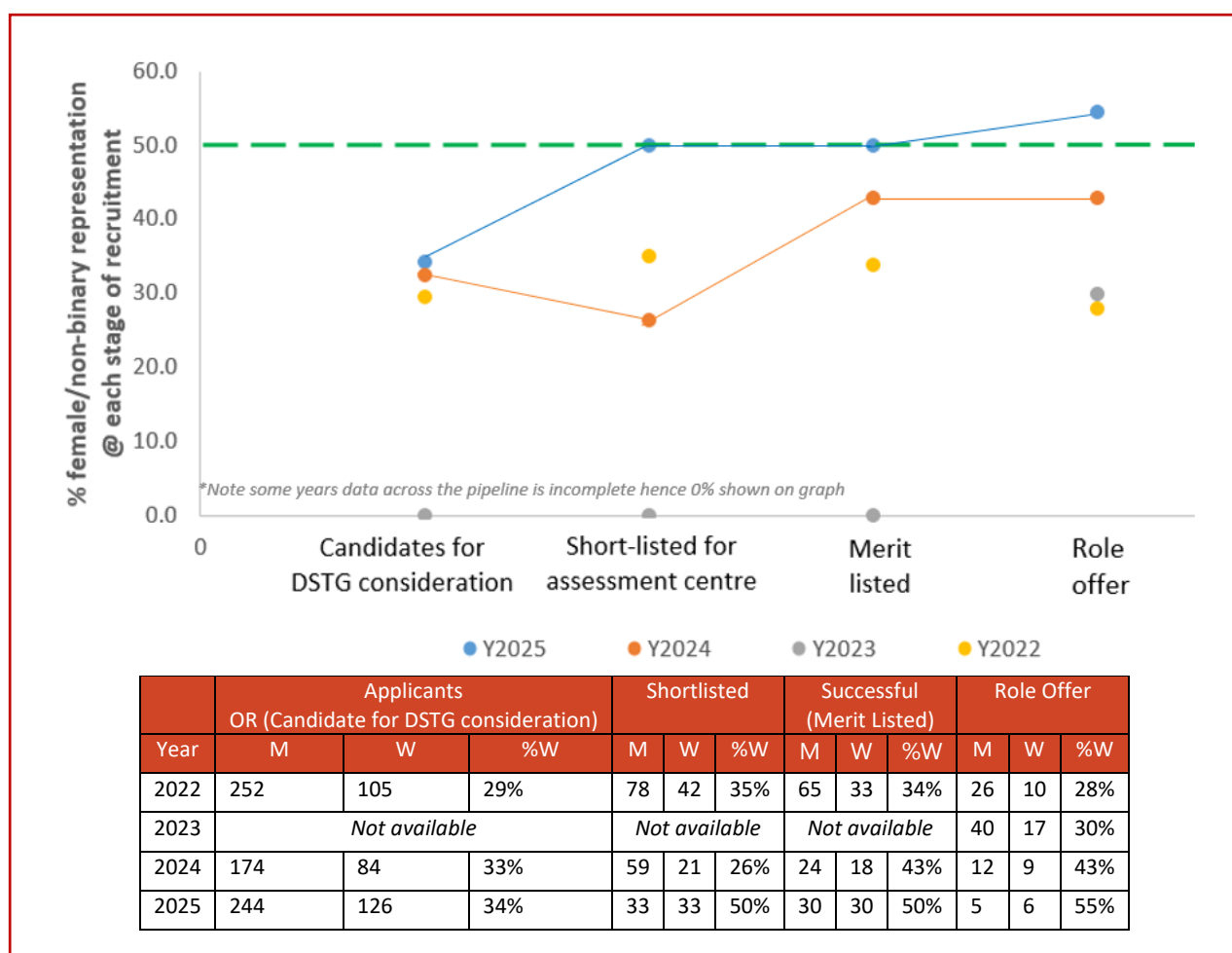
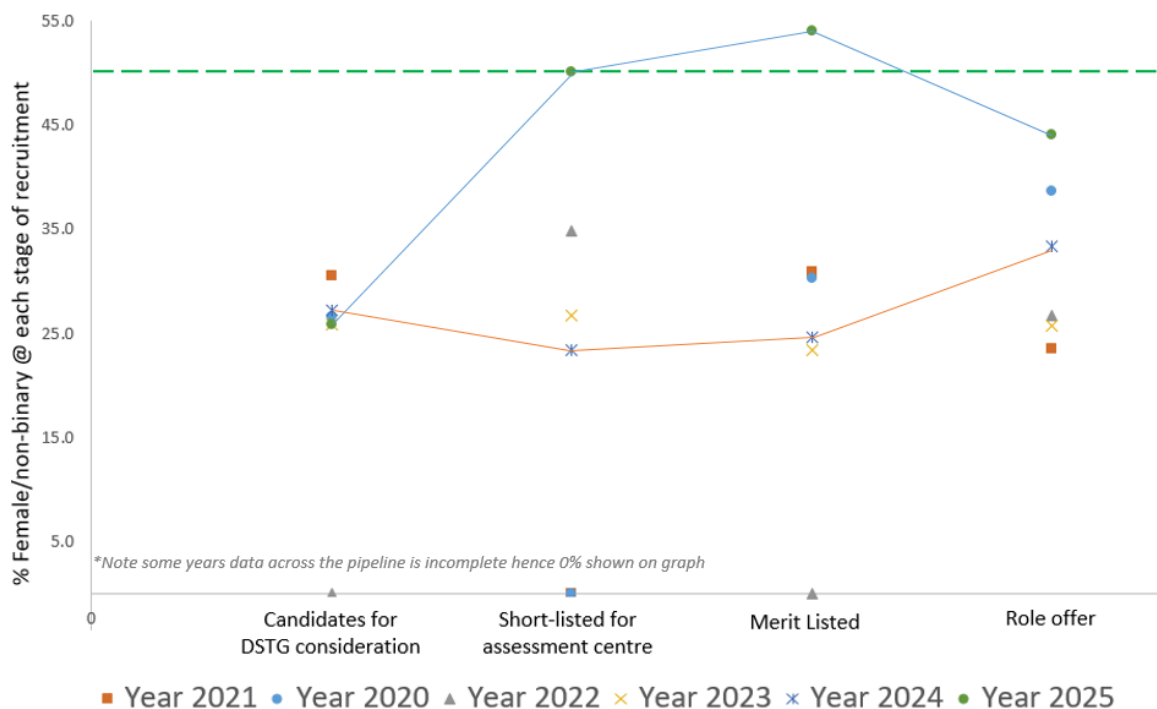


Figure 6. DSTG STEM Cadetship percentage women/non-binary candidates across the recruitment cycle from 2022-2025. In the 2024 recruitment cycle (orange line), DSTG implemented a new strategy with increased visibility of candidates by internal stakeholders and gender blinded assessment of candidates for shortlisting. In isolation this approach did not increase the gender diversity above the percentage women in the applicant pool. After shortlisting there are a number of uncontrollable factors influencing the gender diversity on the merit pool including candidates choosing to accept the invitation to attend assessment centre or being deemed suitable for the program. In 2024, more women than men chose to attend assessment centres and as such there was a significant increase in gender diversity on the merit pool. This increase enabled DSTG’s role

offer selection to maintain the same percentage women/non-binary people as was determined suitable for a role on the program, reaching DSTG’s highest diversity at 42.9%. In the 2025 recruitment cycle (blue line), there was no increase in gender diversity in the applicant pool (~34%). To address this barrier, DSTG built on the blinded short-listing strategy from 2024 reminding areas of the gender target to influence diversity in DSTG’s shortlist of highest priority candidates. Engaging more closely with internal stakeholders supported this strategy. This approach addressed the under representation of women/non-binary people in the applicant pool and mitigated some of the risk of uncontrollable loss influenced by candidates not attending assessment centres or not being deemed suitable for the merit pool. This active effort at the short listing stage had positive flow on effects with gender equity on the merit pool (50%) and provided a suitably diverse candidate pool for DSTG to meet the Assistant Minister’s gender target for the first time (54.5%).



Year	Applicants OR (Candidate for DSTG consideration)			Shortlisted			Successful (Merit Listed)			Role Offer		
	M	W	%W	M	W	%W	M	W	%W	M	W	%W
2020	183	66	27%	Unavailable			104	45	30%	27	17	39%
2021	196	86	31%	Unavailable			65	29	31%	26	8	24%
2022	Unavailable			195	104	35%	Unavailable			77	28	27%
2023	261	69	26%	176	64	27%	82	25	23%	55	19	26%
2024	174	65	27%	92	28	23%	49	16	25%	20	10	33%
2025	244	85	26%	30	30	50%	18	21	50%	5	4	44%

Figure 7. DSTG R&I Graduate program percentage women/non-binary candidates across the recruitment cycle from 2020-2025. In the 2024 recruitment cycle (orange line), DSTG implemented the same strategy as previously explained for the DSTG STEM Cadets. In 2024, men and women were equally likely to attend assessment centre and be deemed suitable. However, as the gender diversity of candidates deemed suitable for role offer was similar to the total applicant pool (24.6%), there was limited ability to reach gender equity in percentage women/non-binary people in the role offer pool (34.5%). While not meeting the Assistant Minister’s target, this was a 9% increase compared to 2023. In the 2025 recruitment cycle (blue line), there was no increase in gender diversity in the applicant pool (~25.8%). To address this barrier, DSTG undertook the **Defence Science and Technology Group | Cygnet Award Application #3: Attraction of Early Career Women in STEM Disciplines**

same process as the STEM Cadets. This active effort saw an increase in gender equity on the merit pool and (50%). Determination of candidates for role offer based on degree discipline aligned to priority areas and location of role achieved 44% women/non-binary representation, which is the highest representation for DSTG's R&I Graduate program cohort.

DSTG's evidence-based and iterative approach across the 2024 and 2025 recruitment cycles has had significant impact, most notably:

- 27.9% increase in representation of women in STEM Cadet role offers (43% in 2024 vs 55% in 2025)
- 33.3% increase in representation of women in R&I Graduate role offers (33% in 2024 vs 44% in 2025)
- Achieved the gender equity target for the STEM Cadetship Program in 2025, whilst still achieving a commendable 44% representation in the 2025 R&I Graduate program.

Intersectionality

An intersectional analysis of the STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate recruitment pipeline was undertaken with the most recent data available.

Of the women eligible to apply to the 2025 STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate programs, there was a high proportion who were CALD (44% STEM Cadet, 43% R&I Graduate program) and those who identified as LGBTIQ+ (22% STEM Cadet, 19% R&I Graduate program). Fewer women applicants declared a disability, with no First Nation's¹ applicants. The reasons for the lack of Indigenous applications are currently unknown and warrants further investigation. Through our shortlisting process, we maintained an almost similar intersectional profile, comparing eligible to shortlisted women applicants. 70% of women offered a place in either the STEM Cadet or R&I graduate program, identified with one or more minority group, specifically LGBTIQ+ and CALD.

We plan to prioritise the monitoring and reporting of intersectionality throughout the recruitment pipeline to influence further improvements.

5. IMPACTS

Desired outcome/impact #1; Improved data collection to validate a positive impact of DSTG pre-entry STEM experience programs on the gender diversity of the entry-level program talent pool

Program participants- when surveyed (Table 1) reported being positively influenced to pursue a career in STEM through STEM programs delivered in schools/universities (Women 20%, Men 31%, Z 66%), STEM work experience programs (Women 20%, Men 17%, Z 33%) and STEM scholarship (Women 15%, Men 7%, Z 0%) Figure 8 and Table 19.

¹ Noting there is a separate Indigenous government graduate program, which operates independently of the R&I Graduate program.

Figure 8. Participant's influencers for pursuing a STEM career

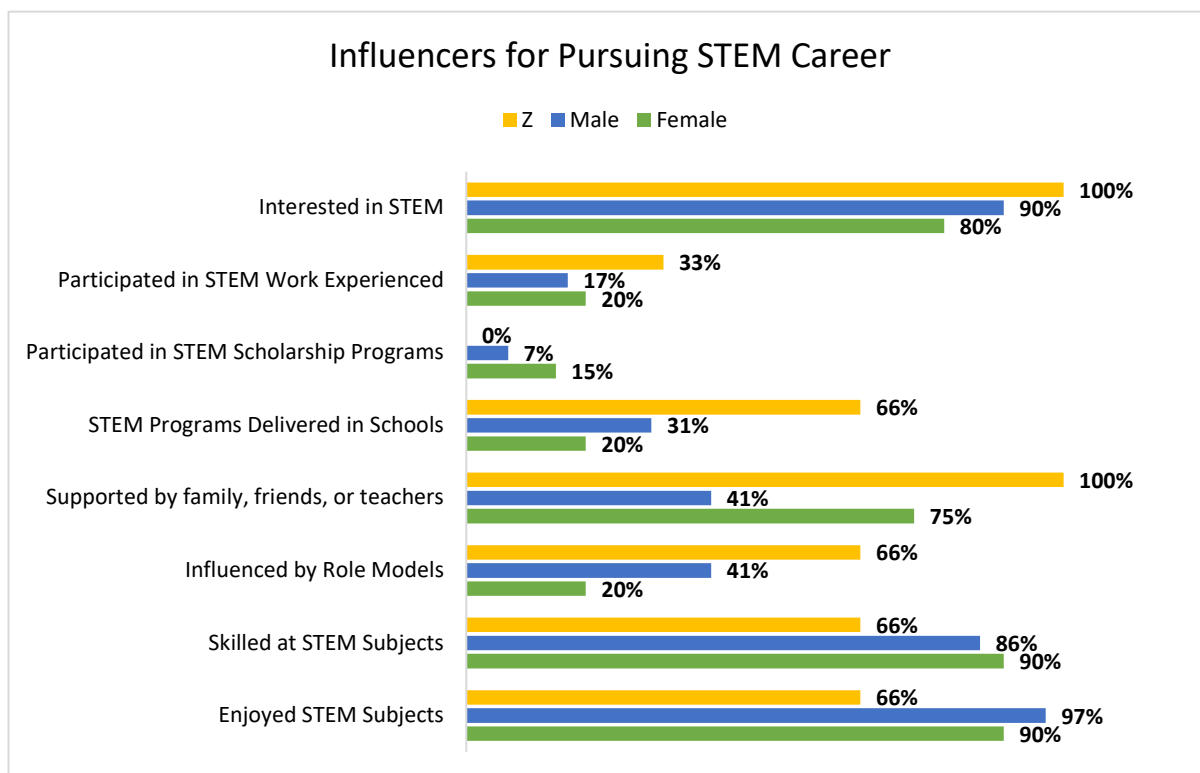


Table 19. Participant's influencers for pursuing a STEM career

<i>multiple answers per respondent</i>	Women	Men	Z
Interested in STEM	n = 16 (80%)	n = 26 (90%)	n = 3 (100%)
Participated in STEM focused work experience	n = 5 (20%)	n = 5 (17%)	n = 1 (33%)
Participated in STEM scholarship programs	n = 3 (15%)	n = 2 (7%)	n = 0
STEM programs delivered in schools/universities	n = 5 (20%)	n = 9 (31%)	n = 2 (66%)
Supported by family, friends, or teachers	n = 15 (75%)	n = 12 (41%)	n = 3 (100%)
Influenced by role models (e.g. family, friends, teachers, public figures)	n = 5 (20%)	n = 12 (41%)	n = 2 (66%)
Skilled at STEM subjects	n = 18 (90%)	n = 25 (86%)	n = 2 (66%)
Enjoyed STEM subjects	n = 18 (90%)	n = 28 (97%)	n = 2 (66%)
Other	n = 0	n = 1 (Opportunity)	n = 0

Encouragingly, these STEM outreach and engagement programs are consistent with those offered by DSTG. Women appeared to value more structured programs than men potentially as these are experiences attractive to prospective employers (Table 19 and Figure 8).

Improvements in STEM Outreach and Engagement initiatives was highlighted during stakeholder interviews (Table 20).

Table 20. Stakeholder quotes suggesting improvements to STEM outreach and engagement efforts

<i>“Defence programs have been hit and miss in engaging people from diverse backgrounds. [There] has been an increased focus on recruiting from diverse backgrounds, but percentage of overall applications has not markedly changed. Significant efforts to focus on women, CALD, neurodiversity, etc. New campaign focuses on diversity. But recruiting from small talent pool, with multiple organisations competing – sometimes Defence targets the talent pool too late, people already have sponsorships/scholarships”</i>
<i>“I heard about Defence’s R&I Graduate program from my parents who work at Defence. There was no promotion about the program from my university”</i>
<i>“I saw no advertising or outreach when I was at University. I believe this is the key area outreach should focus on”</i>
<i>“I saw very little advertising, so didn't really have something to compare expectations vs reality”</i>

When interviewed, program stakeholders emphasised the positive influence of pre-entry programs to grow a diverse talent pool for entry into the STEM Cadet and Graduate programs. In particular, they acknowledged the work needed in targeting schools and universities with STEM programs applying a diversity lens.

Program supervisors (Table 21) specifically acknowledged the advantage of program applicants who have previously completed the IEP or SVP as standout candidates in the recruitment process.

Table 21. Quote from a stakeholder describing how IEP/SVP scholars are desirable applicants for Defence’s STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate programs

<i>“There is a strong positive correlation between the quality of answers from applicants who have 12 months’ experience at DSTG v’s applicants who have no background. Having a program like IEP or similar where people can spend time at DSTG from 6 weeks- 6 months, providing the opportunity to work in a team and gain insights about what and how we work is a distinct advantage for both the applicant and DSTG”</i>
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This underpins DSTG’s continued efforts to target diverse groups to participate in evidence based pre-entry STEM experience programs.

Desired outcome/impact #2: Achieve 50% representation of women participating in the STEM Cadet and Graduate programs

To understand participant’s biggest influences when applying to the STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate programs, survey data was collected and summarised in Figures 9 and 10. This revealed that

promoting gender targets (STEM Cadet: Women 0%, Men 8%, R&I Graduate Women: 7%, Men 6%) and articulating a commitment to diversity and inclusion (STEM Cadet: Women 0%, Men 0%, R&I Graduate: Women 7%, Men 12%) had minimal impact on participant’s decision to apply, suggesting these efforts may not resonate as intended. Noting this feedback came from participants in programs prior to 2025, who were not exposed to overt messaging around diversity. Understanding the impact of diversity messaging on the 2025 cohort will provide valuable insights.

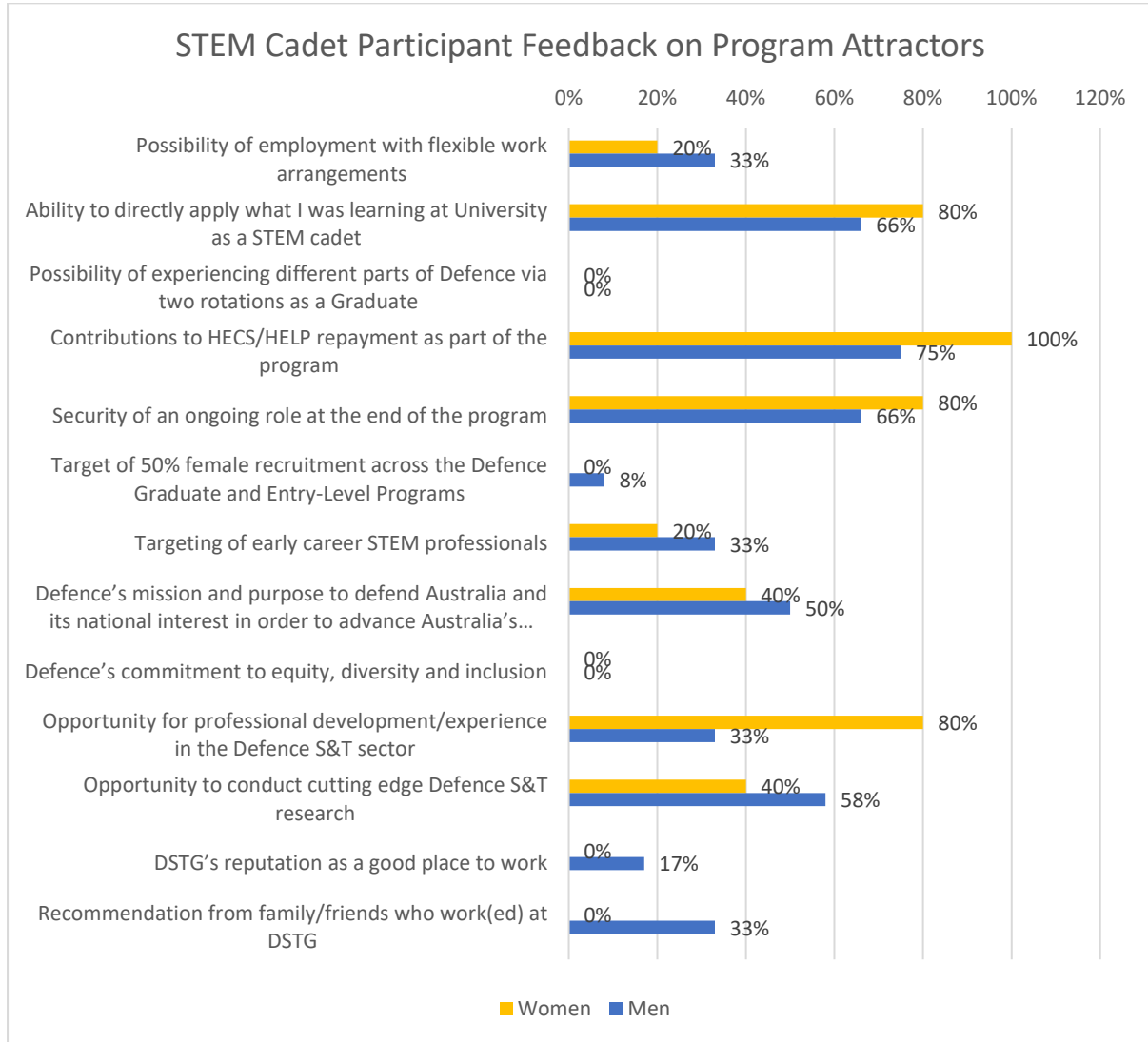


Figure 9. STEM Cadet participant feedback on program attractors, expressed in numbers and gender percentages (noting multiple answers per respondent)

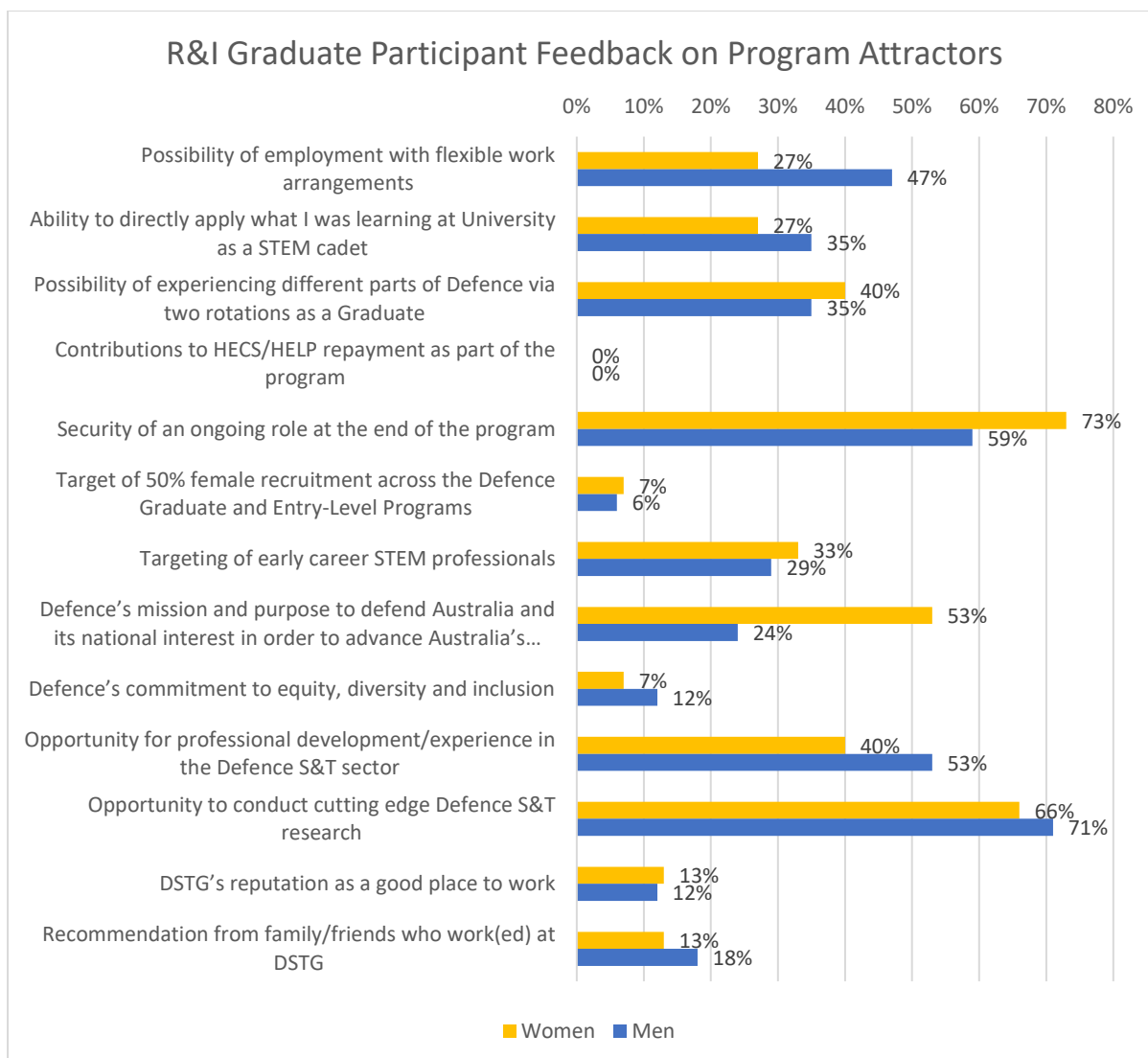


Figure 10. R&I Graduate participant feedback on program attractors, expressed in numbers and gender percentages (noting multiple answers per respondent)

Interestingly, the lack of resonance with diversity messaging is in contrast to feedback, documented in SAGE Cygnet #2, from women participants of DSTG's mid-career entry program, who viewed the gender targets more positively (Table 22).

Table 22. Participant feedback from DSTG's Entry-level and Mid-career recruitment programs on Gender targets as program attractor

Program	Women %	Men %
STEM Cadetship	0%	8%
R&I Graduate program	7%	6%
Mid-career entry program (SAGE Cygnet #3)	46%	7%

Detailed participant feedback in Figures 9 and 10 show clear similarities across gender and program categories, with practical experience, job stability, and financial benefits being the most influential

factor for attraction to both programs. For both women and men Cadets, the practical application of university knowledge and job security emerged as top priorities. Refocussing communication efforts around these benefits in future marketing campaigns may positively influence applicants, particularly women.

Improving the talent pipeline of women in STEM remains an important but stubborn barrier to dismantle, requiring coordinated efforts from government, industry, not-for-profits and individuals. Whilst attempts to improve the percentage of applicants from women did not materialise, DSTG still managed to improve its representation of women in both the STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate program. Rather it was the introduction of a more controlled shortlisting process, which saw a greater increase of women.

Table 23a and b; suggest that both women and men were ‘very satisfied’ and ‘satisfied’ with their contractual offers, detailing salary (Women 85%, Men 69%) and location (Women 70%, Men 69%).

Table 23a. Women’s response to level of satisfaction with their role offer.

Women (n = 20)	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	Prefer not to say
Salary	n = 2 (10%)	n = 15 (75%)	n = 2 (10%)	n = 1 (5%)	n = 0	n = 0
Location	n = 6 (30%)	n = 8 (40%)	n = 3 (15%)	n = 1 (5%)	n = 2 (10%)	n = 0
Stakeholder comment	<i>“pay is really, really important and what most people I know think of when they apply for this role”</i>					

Table 23b. Men’s response to level of satisfaction with their role offer.

Men (n = 29)	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	Prefer not to say
Salary	n = 3 (10%)	n = 17 (59%)	n = 3 (10%)	n = 3 (10%)	n = 2 (7%)	n = 1 (3%)
Location	n = 11 (38%)	n = 9 (31%)	n = 4 (14%)	n = 3 (10%)	n = 1 (3%)	n = 1 (3%)
Stakeholder comment	<i>“Positive experience overall, but the offer I was given back in 2022 was modified from the role I applied for with regards to remuneration (as it was advertised in 2021) without warning. This was the only real downside with my experience”</i>					

Desired Impact #3: Key stakeholders are aligned with the gender equity aims of DSTG’s R&I Graduate and early career STEM programs

Whilst most program stakeholders interviewed were vaguely aware of DSTG’s aim to improve gender representation, very few could quote the 50% target, nor the strategies underpinning this.

Researchers² describe “resistance talk”, as the ideas and arguments used to perpetuate gender inequity in STEMM organisations. During stakeholder interviews we encountered such resistance talk (Table 24) which primary focussed on ambivalence and or confusion about merit. This resistance

² Robyn Barnacle, Denise Cuthbert, Leul Tadesse Sidelil, Nicola Henry, Kay Latham and Ceridwen Spark Gender equality in STEMM: the legitimisation of existing inequalities through “resistance talk” (2024). Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal. Volume 43 Issue 8.

was also reported in DSTG's SAGE Cygnet #2 in relation to gender targets assigned to DSTG's mid-career recruitment program.

Table 24. Stakeholder's resistance talk to DSTG's 50% women representation targets for entry-level programs

<i>"Focus on gender equality creates focus on performance comparison. Sense of 'female favouritism' disincentives males and places females under additional pressure to perform. Recruitment should recruit the best person so that their capacity is unquestioned"</i>
<i>"Some women perceive targets as demeaning"</i>
<i>"Targets disadvantage men"</i>
<i>"Women are being offered positions when they are not the most qualified applicant"</i>
<i>"High level of hostility to programs with gender targets, is creating a significant issue for staff"</i>
<i>"Targets are 'unfair' for people who fall outside targeted cohorts"</i>

Plans will place greater emphasis on anticipating and overcoming organisational resistance to gender equity initiatives, specifically addressing understanding of merit and the role of targets.

Dismantling the existing systemic and structural barriers that exclude or place additional burdens on women and people from diverse cohorts pursuing and working in STEM careers requires more than commitment statements and gender targets, as summarised by program participants (Table 25):

Table 25. Participant's insights regarding systemic and structural barriers to gender equity

<i>"Getting to 50-50 gender balance is not going to solve all problems"</i>
<i>"Although everyone is respectful and I have a great supervisor, in a work group made up of mostly men, it is hard to feel completely comfortable"</i>

6. FURTHER ACTION

To this end, we have developed SMART actions described in Table 26.

Table 26. Future actions

Action name or reference	Rationale/evidence	Actions & outputs (description)	Timeframe (start & end)	Person/Group responsible for implementing action	Senior Leader accountable for action delivery	Desired outcomes, targets or success indicators
3.1 DSTG Pre-entry program	Not achieving equal gender representation in SVP/IEP pre-entry programs	<p>Target diverse groups to participate in evidence based pre-entry STEM experience programs.</p> <p>Adopt the shortlisting process successfully used in the graduate and entry-level programs to further improve representation of women in the SVP and IEP programs</p> <p>Encourage IEP/SVP scholars, in particular women to consider applying for Defence entry-level programs</p>	<p>June 2025 to capture next intake of SVP and IEP programs</p> <p>July 2025 and ongoing thereafter</p> <p>March 2025 and ongoing</p>	DSTG Pre-entry program manager	Executive Director Workforce Capability & Talent	<p>50% gender representation in SVP/IEP pre-entry programs</p> <p>Increase in percentage of Women IEP/SVP conversion into DSTG entry-level programs</p>

3.2 Attraction	No improvements in percentage of women applying to early-entry program	Review marketing campaign in light of feedback from past participants on key program attractors	From April- for 2026 intakes	DSTG Entry-level Program Manager and DGELP	Executive Director Workforce Capability & Talent	Increase percentage of applicants from women STEM professionals
3.3 Data	Continued monitoring of candidate demographics throughout the recruitment pipeline could further improve the diversity of the talent pool beyond gender	Influence further increase in cohort diversity beyond gender, in particular Indigenous, Disability, LGBTIQ+	From April- for 2026 intakes and ongoing thereafter	DSTG Entry-level Program Manager	Executive Director Workforce Capability & Talent	Improve representation of all candidate demographics
3.4 Organisational resistance	Organisational resistance by stakeholders to 50% representation targets and lack of understanding about merit	Communicate the gender equity aims of early entry programs and myth of meritocracy	July 2025 and ongoing	Workforce Capability and Human Resources	DSTG Gender Champion	Workforce understanding and broad support for programs gender – equity aims.

<p>3.5 Feedback from 2025 STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate cohort</p>	<p>2025 STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate cohort were unable to be surveyed as they had not started their placements, however it was this cohort that experienced further program improvements.</p>	<p>2025 STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate cohorts to complete the survey and results compared with this findings reported.</p>	<p>Nov 2025</p>	<p>DSTG Entry-Level Program Manager</p>	<p>Executive Director Workforce Capability & Talent</p>	<p>2025 STEM Cadet and R&I Graduate cohort respond more favourably to issues raised by cohorts from 2019, 2021-2024.</p>
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