



SAGE

SCIENCE IN AUSTRALIA
GENDER EQUITY

SAGE Cygnet Award Application



WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY

WSU Parents and Carers

Name of Institution	Western Sydney University
Date of Application	16 th March 2026
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

With respect for Aboriginal cultural protocol and out of recognition that its campuses occupy their traditional lands, Western Sydney University acknowledges the Darug, Eora, Dharawal and Wiradjuri peoples and thanks them for their support of its work in their lands across Greater WSU Sydney and beyond.



Image Details

Those Who Came Before Us, 2021. WSU Sydney University collaborative artwork.

Created by staff, students and community, under the cultural guidance of Allan McKenzie of Wiradjuri and Gamilaroi nations. On site for view in Chancellery foyer, WSU Sydney University, Parramatta South Campus.

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GLOSSARY

Glossary of Western Sydney University Organisational Terms	
Acronym/Abbrev.	Full Title
CIA	Cygnets Impact Assessment
COVID	Coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, COVID-19
EDWP	Equity & Diversity Working Party
DEI	Diversity Equity and Inclusion
EIB	Equity, Inclusion and Belonging
EKN	Education Knowledge Network
EPN	Engaged Parents Network
FIF	First in Family to attend University
GEDI	Gender Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
HDR	Higher Degree Research
LGBTIQA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer, Asexual
ND	Neurodiverse
NSW	New South Wales
NTEU	National Tertiary Education Union
PCWP	Parents and Carers Working Party
SoE	School of Education
SoCDMS	School of Computer, Data and Mathematical Sciences
SoHCA	School of Humanities and Communication Arts
SoHS	School of Health Sciences
SOSS	School of Social Sciences
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
SWAG	SAGE Working Aggregate Group (SAT Subgroup)
TGD	Trans and Gender Diverse
VC	Vice-Chancellor and President
VC-GERRAC	Vice-Chancellor's Gender Equity and Respectful Relationships Committee
VC-GEF	Vice-Chancellor's Gender Equity Fund
WSU	Western Sydney University

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Gender

Western Sydney University (WSU) recognises gender diversity. WSU staff, students and community include women, men, non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals, all of whom are valued by the University.

As a standard, WSU SAGE uses the following representations in data:

- Women are represented in figures as W
- Men are represented in figures as M
- Non-binary or gender diverse people are represented in figures as X

Data for non-binary and gender non-conforming staff throughout the period of interest for this application is lower than WSU SAGE's minimum reporting threshold of 10. This data would be especially identifiable at disaggregation by discipline group or year. As such, the predominance of data provided in this document refers to WSU staff who identify as woman (W) or man (M).

Further gendered data analysis presented throughout this document (that is, any analysis beyond the simple presentation of data by raw numbers) also excludes non-binary and gender non-conforming data so as to protect against identifiability. For clarity, initial references are coupled with the caveat: (W/M Only). For concision, secondary references to these terms use only "gender" as their descriptor. Nevertheless, all references to "gender data" or "gender gap analysis" throughout the document should be read as gender referring to women (W) and men (M) only.

Indigenous / Non-Indigenous

Following WSU protocol, this document uses "Indigenous" as a collective term for people who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. As a correlative, the document uses "non-Indigenous" as a collective term to refer to staff who do not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Cultural, Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity

Following consultation, Western SAGE uses "culturally, ethnically and linguistically diverse" as a collective identifier for groups of staff or students of diverse cultural backgrounds, ethnicities, language groups and/or racialised minorities. For concision, this grouping of staff is represented in data and figures as CEALD.



WESTERN SYDNEY
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WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY: SAGE CYGNET #5

	✓ Current Cygnet	Barrier ▪ List the Barrier addressed in this Cygnet ▪ List the Barrier for Cygnets already submitted
Institution-wide barrier	1	Flexible Work
Institution-wide barrier	2	Academic Promotions
Sub-group barrier	3	Indigenous Staff
Institution-wide barrier	4	Gender Equity in COVID-19 Response
Sub-group barrier	✓	WSU Parents & Carers

KEY BARRIER

Experiences of WSU staff who are parents and carers vary depending on gender, work type, and individual caring responsibilities. Barriers include poor visibility of caring responsibilities, conflation of parenting and care, low awareness of supports, and inconsistent implementation of relevant policies. This Cygnet describes WSU's work to advance equity for parents and carers by addressing these areas and ensuring continuous improvement.

EVIDENCE OF BARRIER

The MyVoice all staff survey in 2018 (n=2254) offered staff the capacity to identify as having dependent children (n=955) and/or as a primary carer (n=189). The following results were noted:

- Staff with dependent children significantly differentiated ($\pm 5\%$) from other staff in only one category, Workload (-5%). Primary Carers showed lower scores to non-Primary Carers in this category (-9%).
- Primary Carers also significantly differentiated ($\pm 5\%$) from other staff across several categories: Work/Life Balance (-12%); Flexibility (-12%); Wellness (-10%); Resources (-9%); Rewards & Recognition (-9%); Diversity (-8%); Involvement (-5%); Research (-5%).

Our SAGE Parental Leave Survey (VC GEF project 2017–2018) canvassed WSU Parental Leave takers (n=139) and found that, concerningly, 19.3% of staff reported that they have “felt discriminated against within [their] School/Institute/Division because of [their] caring responsibilities”. The following key findings were noted:

Parental leave:

- High awareness of parental leave entitlements for women professional staff (88%) but low for others, especially women academics (52%) and men overall (48%).
- High satisfaction with existing parental leave entitlements for women professional staff (97%) and women academics (83%), but low for men (53%).
- Just under one third (31.46%) of respondents reported “difficulties accessing or discomfort in asking for special personal leave, parental leave, flexible working hours”

Flexible work:

- Less than half of all respondents felt that their “School/Division/Institute offers staff engaged in flexible work arrangements the same opportunities as those who are not”.
- Parent experiences varied depending on role characteristics and the attitudes and policy interpretations of individual supervisors.

Workload:

- More than half (55.7%) of respondents believed that “the expected workload at Western Sydney University makes it difficult to balance work and home responsibilities”.
- Significant shifts in before leave/returning to work experiences and highly varied experiences. Documented return-to-work concerns included: discrimination from supervisors due to caring responsibilities; high teaching loads allocated without choice or notice;

pressure or shame from colleagues that returning parents are not “pulling their weight”; discouragement from applying for promotion.

Between 2019 and 2025, WSU has actively worked to understand and acknowledge the lived experiences of parents and carers. This has in some part been achieved through the Vice Chancellor’s Gender Equity Fund (VC-GEF) projects which have built an evidence base to inform interventions and long-term strategies, delivering:

- Research capturing staff and student caregiving experiences and highlighting barriers and challenges.
- Pilot programs and partnerships with community organisations to inform best practice approaches to supporting caregivers in the work and study space.
- Awareness initiatives to improve visibility of caregiving roles and how they intersect with work and study.

Evidence of the barriers for parents and carers from various VC-GEF projects are presented at Table 1. Based on this evidence, we have identified the following themes for prioritisation: visibility, targeted supports, policy and process, and continuous improvement.

Table 1. Evidence of Barriers for Parents and Carers from VC GEF Projects

Policy, Process, Developmental and Cultural Barriers for Parent and Carer Equity		
Barrier	Barrier Detail	Theme
Parental leave application processes hindered by fragmented communication and limited information access	Information access and communication of leave application processes vague and difficult to locate (O’Shea et al 2017 ¹).	Policy & Process Enhanced Visibility
	Overwhelmingly, knowledge of online resources for expectant parents and carers (i.e. Supporting Parents Toolkit, Parenting Support, and Managing Family Responsibilities) are discouragingly low.	
	Application processes lacked formality with highly various interpretations of guidelines and informal practices rendering application processes difficult and time consuming (Aldrich-Wright & McKay 2017 ² ; O’Shea et al 2017 ¹)	
	Hesitation and concern over disclosing pregnancy to supervisor/line manager. Concern regarding immediate response with leave arrangements and associated disruption causing extra work for supervisors/line managers (O’Shea et al 2017 ¹).	
	Work redistribution was a key concern with academic staff reporting supervisors often rely on leave takers to coordinate their replacements and roles were infrequently backfilled (Aldrich-Wright & McKay 2017 ²).	
	Policy inequities with limited access to leave for adoptive and foster carers, male staff, de facto and same-sex partners (Aldrich-Wright & McKay 2017 ²).	
Poor understanding of entitlements and expectations whilst on parental leave	Leave takers’ and supervisors’ policy knowledge of targeted supports available while on leave was low. For example, knowledge that the University offers 10 days paid keep-in-touch leave is limited (Aldrich-Wright & McKay 2017 ²).	Targeted Supports
	Informal expectation that to redress career break setbacks women should continue to work and publish while on leave (O’Shea et al 2017 ¹).	Policy & Process

¹ O’Shea, M., Khan, A., Smith, M. (2017). Illuminating and understanding women’s and men’s experiences navigating family care responsibilities and their academic careers, Vice-Chancellor’s Gender Equality Fund Final Report 2017 Western Sydney University

² Aldrich-Wright, J., McKay, K. (2017). Improving access to information on parental leave entitlements, Vice-Chancellor’s Gender Equality Fund Final Report 2017 Western Sydney University

Structural limitations shape return-to-work experiences	Fragmented communication regarding return-to-work policy & procedure between central support functions and Schools/ Institutes/ Divisions (O'Shea et al 2017 ¹).	Policy & Process
	Inconsistent policy knowledge/low awareness regarding flexible work entitlements especially among supervisors and managers (Aldrich-Wright & McKay 2017 ² ; Francis 2017 ³ ; O'Shea et al 2017 ¹).	Enhanced Visibility
	Despite formal policy the application of flexible work arrangements is deeply fragmented and discretionary (Aldrich-Wright & McKay 2017 ²).	Targeted Supports
	Insufficient on campus childcare facilities, acutely problematic during school holiday periods (Francis 2017 ³)	
Workplace norms complicate return-to-work	Unsupportive colleagues (negative attitudes & remarks) together with the absence of structured peer support rendered return to work difficult (Aldrich-Wright & McKay 2017 ² ; O'Shea et al 2017 ¹).	Targeted Supports
	Maternity leave career break was perceived as incompatible with career development opportunities (Aldrich-Wright & McKay 2017 ² ; O'Shea et al 2017 ¹).	
	Difficulties balancing work and career responsibilities due to unrealistic and excessive workloads (Aldrich-Wright & McKay 2017 ² ; O'Shea et al 2017 ¹).	
	Potential benefits of phased return to work supports following maternity leave (i.e. employees work 80% normal hours for 40 weeks at 100% pay) negated by extreme stress in having to teach large new undergraduate units immediately upon recommencement and without advance notice (Aldrich-Wright & McKay 2017 ²).	
	Attempts to balance work and family meant returning mothers commitment to work and career was questioned (Francis 2017; O'Shea et al 2017 ¹).	
	Returning women felt discriminated against within their School/Institute/Division because of their caring responsibilities (Aldrich-Wright & McKay 2017 ²).	
Inadequate provisions for breastfeeding at work	Insufficient promotion of available breastfeeding friendly spaces on all WSU campuses (Burns and Triandafilidis 2017 ⁴).	Enhanced Visibility
	Inadequate access to private rooms and milk storage facilities on campus were significant barriers to breastfeeding (Burns and Triandafilidis 2017 ⁴).	Targeted Supports
Career breaks and flexible work for familial care perceived to be incompatible with career development and academic promotion	Caregiving responsibilities were framed as setbacks rather than legitimate life choices (Francis 2017 ³ ; O'Shea et al 2017 ¹).	Policy & Process
	Career breaks were associated with negative performance evaluations and significantly delayed promotion (O'Shea et al 2017 ¹).	
	Low perception that flexible work is encouraged at WSU especially acute among male staff with children (Aldrich-Wright & McKay 2017 ²).	Enhanced Visibility
	Lack of institutional funding and logistical support impedes conference participation for academic mothers (Francis 2017 ³).	
Parent and carer groups are often conflated	The language of institutional communications often collapses parental care and other types of caregiving (such as for an elderly parent, disabled dependant, friend, partner) into a single category of care. Correspondingly, the unique and nuanced temporal, emotional, and logistical demands of these care commitments can be overlooked.	Enhanced Visibility Continuous Improvement

³ Francis, L. Exploring barriers and facilitators to seeking promotion: level C and above academics and level B to level C academics, Vice-Chancellor's Gender Equality Fund Final Report 2017 Western Sydney University

⁴ Burns, E., Triandafilidis, Z. (2017). Breastfeeding friendly communities at WSU, Vice-Chancellor's Gender Equality Fund Final Report 2017 Western Sydney University

ACTIVITIES AND OUTPUTS

Since 2018 WSU has progressively introduced measures to increase visibility of parents and carers across the institution. The University has raised awareness of parent and carer issues and strengths, solidified supports, enhanced policy frameworks and created inclusive provisions for shared caring. This progression demonstrates a whole-of-institution investment and confirms WSU’s commitment to continuous improvement and remaining responsive to the evolving needs of parents and carers across our community. Activities designed to advance equity for parents and carers were organised into broad themes ().

Figure 1. WSU’s Themed Approach to Improving Outcomes for Parents and Carers, 2019–2025



Following WSU’s Bronze Award, a Parents and Carers SWAG was convened (see Table 2) to design new innovations and service implementation, with the Director of EIB engaged as Executive Sponsor.

Table 2. Parents and Carer SWAG Members, 2020 – 2026

Parents and Carers SWAG Members		
SWAG Role	Name	WSU Title
Executive Sponsor	Michelle Falconer	Director, Equity Inclusion and Belonging
Executive Sponsor	Kelly Whitney	Executive Director, Organisational Development & Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
SWAG Leader	A/Prof Chloe Taylor	SAGE Academic Lead
SWAG Leader	Dr Michelle O’Shea	Senior Lecturer, School of Business

SWAG Member	Dr Eleonora Egidi	Senior Research Fellow, Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment
SWAG Member	Katie Hayes	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Specialist
SWAG Member	Dr Cris Townley	Research Fellow, TeEACH Research Centre
SWAG Member	Dr Kieryn McKay	Senior Advisor and Programs Manager (Gender Equity, Diversity and Inclusion)
SWAG Member	Kim Nemetz	Academic Promotions Coordinator, Office for People
SWAG Member	Kimberley Pangilinan	Senior Advisor, LGBTIQA+ and Cultural Diversity
SWAG Member	Dr. Russell Thomson	Statistical Consultant, Graduate Research School

Theme 1. Increasing Visibility

Across the Cygnet Era, WSU established a robust strategic framework to drive parent and carer priorities across the institution.

Foundational Knowledge

Research funded by the VC-GEF has informed WSU’s approach to increasing the visibility of parents and carers through family-focused activities, communication campaigns, local advocacy and expanding understanding of the lived experience of parents and carers (Table 3).

Table 3. VC-GEF Projects Informing Approaches to Increasing Visibility of Parents and Carers

VC-GEF Parent and Carer Focused Projects				
Project	Focus Cohort	Est.	Key Findings	n*
Negotiating Motherhood and Academic Work (E. Gilbert)	Academic mothers	2019	This project made Academic mothers, often invisible in institutional narratives, highly visible through focus groups and a national survey. It revealed “care fault lines” creating compounded disadvantage, elevated mothers’ voices, and highlighted how policies mask workplace norms. By making caregiving experiences visible, it informed WSU and sector-wide inclusion and cultural change.	150
Western Dads (S. Duffy, A. Kahn, P. Van Esch, M. Smith)	Fathers	2019	This project increased visibility of fathers as active caregivers, challenging ‘breadwinner’ stereotypes across student, academic, and professional cohorts. Through events, storytelling, and campaign materials, it highlighted the impact of WSU’s parental leave, strengthened awareness of equity policies, and advanced the University’s reputation as family-friendly while informing long-term cultural change priorities.	100
Western Parents & Carers: Constructing a culture that celebrates care (M. O’Shea, S. Duffy, J. Cheng, D. Bowyer)	Academic and professional staff and student parents and carers	2021	This research examined how staff and students with caring responsibilities perceive WSU’s supports, situating their experiences alongside broader academic literature and sector comparisons. The review highlighted inconsistencies in how care is portrayed, offering WSU actionable insights to strengthen the visibility of carers in outward-facing messaging.	108

Leaving no parent behind: International student & newly arrived academic staff parents negotiating migration, parenthood, study & work in Australia (S. Tusasirwe)	International student parents and newly arrived academic staff parents	2021	This project amplified the voices of international student and newly arrived academic staff parents, increasing visibility of their experiences balancing migration, study, work, and caregiving. Conversations highlighted overlooked barriers and inconsistent recognition, providing WSU with insights to improve communication, support access, and culturally acknowledge parents, particularly those from international backgrounds.	15
BREAST - Breastfeeding and Returning to campus Education and Support Technologies (N. Bridges and V. Campbell)	Breastfeeding parents (students and staff)	2020	This project highlighted the lack of visibility and recognition of breastfeeding parents within university systems, framing this as an equity gap that limits access to tailored support for staff and students. The project strengthened the case for systemic, intersectional approaches to parent and carer equity, ensuring supports are visible, accessible, and normalised, not relying on individual negotiation, and created a dedicated online peer-support platform.	183

*Indicates participants in research focus groups, surveys or related events.

Engagement Activities and Reach

WSU undertook a number of activities to increase visibility for parents and carers across the WSU community (Table 4).

Table 4. Summary of Parent and Carer Engagement Activities and Reach 2019 – 2024

Key Engagement Activities and Impact			
Activity	Year	Detail	Reach
Western Dads Calendar	2019	The Western Dads calendar, developed as part of the related VC-GEF funded project, showcased fathers as caregivers across student, professional and academic cohorts, challenging ‘breadwinner’ stereotypes. Widely distributed and well-received, it also promoted WSU’s parent and carer support policies.	1,000 calendars distributed
Western Dads Launch Event September	2019	This Father’s Day launch event featured personal stories from staff fathers and leadership support. Promoted across platforms, it highlighted WSU’s life-changing parental leave provisions and challenged workplace perceptions, reinforcing the importance of leadership in encouraging dads to access institutional support. It was attended by staff, students and industry representatives.	Participants: 80 Social reach on Facebook and LinkedIn: +21,000 reach +2200 interactions
Families Week 12-18 May	2022	A children’s drawing competition and student design competition was held with over 45 participants engaging. The winning design was used to produce Family and Carer themed posters, which were then distributed and displayed across campuses. University libraries also set up displays of support information, and morning tea celebratory packs were provided to 16 teams with activities encouraging open discussion about caregiving in the workplace.	Participants: 150+ for activities with significantly greater reach through internal comms channels.

International Student Parent and Carer Morning Tea and Panel 31 August	2023	SoHCA and SoSS EDWPs partnered to deliver a Higher Degree Research (HDR) Parents Morning Tea in August. This event aimed to raise awareness of the equity challenges faced by HDR candidates who are parents. Participants were encouraged to share their challenges, coping strategies and lived experiences as students at WSU, and a summary of findings was tabled with the VCGERRAC.	45 student and staff participants
Celebrating Parents & Carers Videos	2023	Two interview style videos were professionally developed with direct involvement from academic and professional staff from diverse backgrounds - Supporting Parents and Carers and Celebrating Parents and Carers. Videos were published on social platforms and the University's Family and Carer webpage.	265 views (YouTube/Viva) 28 staff involved in production
Families Week 15-21 May	2024	A children's drawing and poetry competition was delivered and two scaled on campus events were piloted - a Sustainability and Science Family Fair, and a Healthy Families Orienteering event. Complimentary staff and student facing communication campaigns were delivered, utilising a series of vignette's reflecting personal caregiving experiences and available supports.	>250 participants for events 3x increase to support webpage for May 3,300+ views of related posts on VivaEngage
Carers Week 12-18 October	2024	WSU hosted carer specific events, workshops, and institution wide communications to recognise unpaid carers, promote connection, and share resources supporting study, work and wellbeing. University libraries also supported with carer information displays, giveaways and social posts	25 participants, 1,375 views of related posts on VivaEngage
Contemporary Fathering in Focus Event 29 August	2024	This event brought together researchers, practitioners, students and community members to explore contemporary fathering. Through presentations, panels and discussion, the event examined shifting roles, policy impacts and equity issues, fostering dialogue, collaboration and knowledge-sharing across disciplines.	40 participants

Several high-profile engagement and communication activities were delivered across 2019 – 2024 (as below).

Celebrating Strengths: Parents and Carers video series (2023)

Two unscripted videos focus on staff supports and highlight the value of parenting and care in developing empathy, compassion and resilience across the University community. The videos showcase academic and professional staff from all levels and various portfolios, sharing stories of their lived experiences, challenges and triumphs navigating work and caregiving. Our work on addressing the conflation of parent and carer roles is summarised in Spotlight Initiative #1 (see below).

National Families Week (2024)

For National Families Week in May 2024, WSU celebrated the role of families across our community by hosting on-campus activities, including a Family Fair, Healthy Families Orienteering, and Children's Drawing and Poetry Competition. These events brought staff and student parents, carers, and their families together to engage in educational and recreational activities.

Carers Week Activities (2024)

During National Carers Week in October 2024, WSU organised events to acknowledge and support unpaid carers. These included a Thank You afternoon tea, an institution wide communication plan, carer displays, and a staff workshop featuring presentations internal and external partners (Carers NSW, MERCER Care and Living, WSU's Student Welfare, and the DEI Team).

Vignette Series for Staff (2024)

During National Families Week, a series of vignettes, featuring quotes from WSU staff parents and carers was shared on the internal social platform VivaEngage and on digital screens across WSU campuses. This series aimed to showcase the diverse ways staff approach caregiving roles, and illustrate how they engage with WSU's support provisions, providing relatable insights for colleagues in similar circumstances and encouraging uptake of available supports.

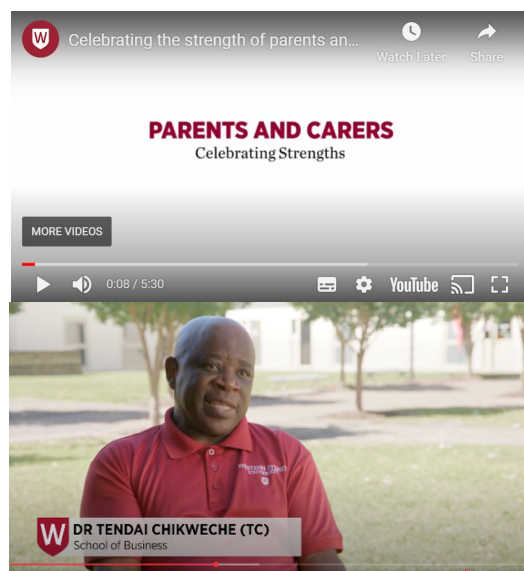


Figure 2. From Left: Celebrating Strengths in 2023; National Families Week in 2024

Spotlight Initiative #1: Addressing the Conflation of Parent and Carer Roles

Drawing on Lived Experiences: Research championed through the VC-GEF project, such as WSU Parents & Carers: Constructing a culture that celebrates care (M. O’Shea, 2019), provided contemporary data on the lived experiences of carers at WSU, highlighting differential care responsibilities and key recommendations to support the University in better visibilising and supporting carers as defined under the Carer Recognition Act 2010 (individuals providing unpaid care for someone with a disability, mental illness, drug or alcohol dependency, chronic medical condition, terminal illness, or someone who is frail and/or aged).

Improving Carer Insights: From 2020 onwards, to better understand the diversity of caring responsibilities, WSU refined its survey instruments. University culture surveys (MyVoice COVID-19 Check-In Survey, Culture Amp) incorporated disaggregated parents and carers questions, allowing trends and issues to be analysed and identified with greater accuracy.

Leveraging Visibility Through Research Impact: Across 2023/2024 WSU’s WSU Sydney University’s Research Theme Champions (RTC):

- Hosted two 2023 workshops supporting researchers on carers in the workplace, with a focus on building research roadmaps, partnerships, and funding strategies.
- Created a Carers and Workplace Hub, a new partnership with Carers NSW, collaborative publications and conference presentations, and multiple funding applications.
- Established a Teams site and research repository to share opportunities, track projects, and connect researchers across disciplines.
- Delivered a Research Week event focused on balancing work & caring responsibilities: Supporting Carers in the Workplace which included a panel discussion with industry and government partners aimed at developing a deeper understanding of the complexities encountered by organisations interested in exploring innovative ways to better support carers in the workplace.
- Expanded our research focus into two streams: (1) workplace opportunities and challenges in supporting carers, and (2) carers’ own experiences and barriers, alongside growth of the Hub’s membership and industry partnerships.



Figure 3. Research Week in 2023



Figure 4. From Top: Staff Vignette Series in 2024; Carer’s Week in 2024

Theme 2. Targeted Supports

Across the Cygnet Era, WSU renewed its investment in and commitment to strengthening targeted support for Parent and Carers, ensuring their views and experiences inform the decisions and activities across the institution.

Foundational Knowledge

Complementing Bronze-Era research findings, WSU worked to deepen understandings and acknowledge the lived experiences of parents and carers (Table 5).

Table 5. VC-GEF Projects Informing Approaches to Increasing Visibility of Parents and Carers

VC-GEF Parent and Carer Focused Projects				
Activity	Focus Cohort	Year	Key Findings	n*
Returning to Work after Parental Leave (Collaborative project by the Engaged Parents Network)	Academic & Professional Staff Parents	2019	This study used an appreciative inquiry approach to explore how WSU staff experience the transition back to work after parental leave, aiming to shift focus from deficits to potential strengths and supports. The study highlighted how the invisibility of parenthood, unclear communication, and inflexible practices undermine return-to-work experiences. Through co-design with staff, it identified strategies to increase visibility, improve policy communication, shift managerial attitudes, and embed responsive supports, demonstrating the value of making parent/carer status visible in institutional practice.	25
Moving WSU to “Employer of Choice for Parents:” Developing new campus-based childcare options (D. Bowyer, K. McBride, C. Ee, F. MacMillan, S. Marjanovic and E. Burns)	Staff and Students	2020	The study emphasised that embedding visible, responsive childcare solutions strengthens equity, retention, and WSU’s reputation as a family-friendly university. It also explored innovative childcare supports, including drop-in care, holiday programs, and child-friendly spaces. Surveys and interviews revealed strong demand for flexible, affordable options. Findings showed limited childcare undermines staff productivity and student engagement, highlighting the need for increased supports to enhance equity, and institutional culture.	115

*Indicates participants in research focus groups, surveys or related events.

Expanded Supports and Community Programs

VC-GEF projects informed both immediate interventions and long-term strategies to improve supports, examples of which are below.

Information Access and Awareness – Support and Guidance Resources

Between 2019 and 2024 several resources were developed and/or refined to support staff and student understanding of and engagement with existing or emerging supports (Table 6). These

resources are framed to provide advice and guidance to student and staff parents and carers and their managers/supervisors to ensure informed, consistent and inclusive approaches when navigating caregiving conversations.

Table 6. Student and Staff Parent and Carer Relevant Toolkits

Student and Staff Parent and Carer Focused Toolkits		
Activity	Published	Purpose
Supporting Parents Toolkit for Staff	2019 (v2)	This toolkit is a practical resource assisting new and expecting parents and their supervisors to navigate the transition to new parental responsibilities. It includes information on parental leave, supports for returning to work and checklists for staff and supervisors.
Flexible Work Toolkit for Staff and Supervisors	2020 (updated to V2 2023)	This toolkit provides consolidated information to facilitate the adoption and preservation of flexible work practices among individuals and teams. It includes information about relevant legislation, types of flexible work options, processes for applying, and checklists for staff and supervisors. Its development emerged from conversations at the then Gender Equity Committee which highlighted inconsistencies in the application of flexible work provisions across WSU, and it was informed by insights from the EDWP Network.
Supporting Our Parents and Carers – A Toolkit for Students	2022	This toolkit was developed in consultation with WSU’s Student Parent Union and outlines the supports and provisions available to assist students who are parents and carers as they navigate their study experience. The resource includes information about peer support and mentoring, and top tips for student parents and carers.
Supporting Carers – Toolkit for staff and supervisors	2024	This toolkit was designed to assist staff and supervisors in meeting the needs of carers in the workplace. The information included is informed by relevant legislation (Carer Recognition Act 2010 NSW) and provisions available via the relevant Enterprise Agreement at WSU. The resource was developed in consultation with staff carers and key stakeholders.

Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace Accreditation

Driven by VC-GEF findings, WSU quickly progressed to seeking recognition as a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace under the Australian Breastfeeding Accreditation program. Since 2019, WSU has strengthened breastfeeding supports for staff and students through upgraded facilities (18 parenting/breastfeeding rooms across campuses), policy improvements (*Breastfeeding on University Campuses Policy*), updated guidance for staff and managers, awareness initiatives to normalise breastfeeding on campus, and continuous consultation with stakeholders.



Figure 5. WSU Breastfeeding Support Webpage

Young Well Beings Online Program

WSU's School of Health Sciences worked closely with government and community-based health professionals and a team of young mums to create a mental health literacy resource for young mothers up to the age of 24. This award-winning resource equips young mothers with the strategies and coping mechanisms to stay well, build confidence and resilience, grow support networks, and find professional help.

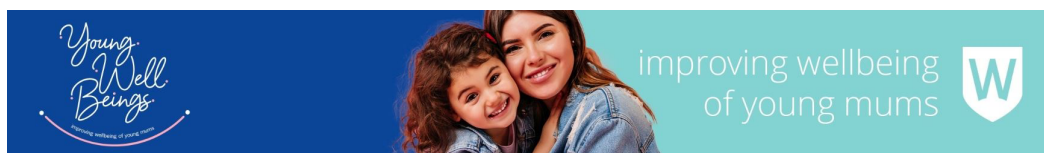


Figure 6. Young Well Beings Mental Health Literacy Resource

Supporting Parents and Carers through COVID

During the COVID-19 pandemic, WSU implemented a series of targeted initiatives to support parents and carers balancing work, study, and increased caregiving demands (Table 7). These interventions responded to the unique challenges of extended lockdowns, remote learning, and intensifying caregiver responsibilities by providing practical resources, peer connection, and tailored guidance.

Table 7. COVID Parent and Carer Interventions

Key COVID Parent and Carer Interventions			
Activity	Year	Detail/Impact	n
Engaged Parents Network Viva/Yammer Group	2020-2021	The Engaged Parents Network (EPN) VivaEngage group was mobilised for information sharing and peer support for parents and carers navigating increased caring responsibilities during lockdown.	172 members in 2021
EPN Coaching Sessions	2020 (May – July)	Six online coaching sessions for students and staff were delivered by DEI on behalf of the EPN. These sessions focused on managing work and family responsibilities during COVID-19 and maintaining work and study progression.	60
SoE EKN Home School Program	2020	EKN is the Education Knowledge Network which shares learning opportunities and resources with educators and adapted in COVID to support parents. EKN Home School was set up by the School of Education to support WSU staff (and then the wider community) with home-schooling during the NSW COVID-19 lockdown in 2021 - EKN program . The program provided an online resource hub with practical guidance for parents and drop-in Zoom support sessions for Q&A's about home learning challenges. Versions of resources were also developed in Mandarin, Vietnamese and Arabic to improve accessibility. (Refer Cygnet #5, Leadership for Gender Equity in COVID-19 for full details)	n/a
DEI Parents and Carers COVID Resources	2020	Two "Supporting Parents and Carers during COVID" information resources were developed, launched and promoted to staff parents and carers and supervisor at the commencement of COVID restrictions. Information for Staff and Students provided support information, tools and tips to navigating the new challenges COVID. Information for Managers and Supervisors provided tips and tools for supervisors supporting staff who were parents and carers.	n/a

Spotlight Initiative #2: Affordable and Alternative Childcare Supports

Child Care at WSU: WSU Early Learning Ltd provides high quality education, childcare and early learning experiences for children of staff, students and the general community. There are currently five Long Day Care Education and Early Learning centres located on campuses. Occasional/Casual education and care is also now available to students at all centres.

Understanding the issues: A recent study by WSU academics (Condie et al., 2023) has revealed a childcare 'desert' in Western Sydney with a lack of accessible and affordable early childhood education and care services. This can contribute to lower workforce participation by women, with current rates reflecting women in Western Sydney participate at a lower rate (65%) than those in other parts of Sydney (76%). There is a clear need to increase childcare availability and affordability to enable improved gender equity outcomes in our region.

Piloting Opportunity: The 2020 VC-GEF research project Moving WSU to "Employer of Choice for Parents: Developing New Campus-based Childcare Options" explored childcare supports at WSU and looked at innovative opportunities to improve access and affordability with options such as drop-in care, holiday programs, and child-friendly spaces. Recent pilots delivered at WSU in response to identified need include:

- Occasional Care Creche: Between 18th August and 20th October 2023 a group of academics, partnering with community organisation Liverpool Neighbourhood Connections, piloted a mobile creche care model at WSU's Liverpool City Campus. A total of 10 children of students who are parents were provided with free childcare services. The mobile creche care model was designed with the understanding that parents of children stayed on site, in the building or nearby, and a co-working/study space (quiet room adjacent to the creche) was set up. Evaluation of the pilot demonstrated the effectiveness of the approach in supporting students to balance care and study in a meaningful way.
- Next Gen STEM School Holiday Program: In July 2025 four school holiday programs were piloted across our Penrith, Parramatta and Campbelltown campuses. Over 85 primary and high school students from families of WSU staff, students, and the broader WSU Sydney community participated. These camps delivered hands on education in coding, cyber awareness, AI and sports science, with academic content experts from SoHS and SoCDMS leading program design. The program also provided a live project-based research learning opportunity for postgraduate students from the Accounting Professional Engagement Unit, who co-developed a sustainable camp business model for the camps. Evaluation of the program was very positive, and a model of delivery for future camps will be presented as part of the project's final report.



Figure 7. STEM School Holiday Program in 2025

Theme 3. Policy and Process

Across the Cygnet Era, WSU has bolstered recognition of parents and carers within policy and process to promote equitable parental and caregiving supports.

Foundational Knowledge

Audit, review, and policy and process improvement has been a consistent focus across VC-GEF research, including several pieces of work commissioned to support better understandings of the gendered levers and barriers to progression and engagement for parents and carers (see Table 8).

Table 8. VC-GEF Projects Informing Approaches to Policy and Practice

VC-GEF Projects			
Project	Year	Key Findings	n*
Uplifting Parents: How WSU can meaningfully support staff and student parents to work and study (S. Duffy, M. O'Shea, E. Gilbert and A Eward)	2022	This project benchmarked parent support policies across Australian universities, revealing student and staff parents face structural and cultural barriers. Student parents face assumptions of a “young, carefree, child-free” student norm, and staff findings reveal a heavy focus on early parenting leave with minimal structural supports beyond infancy, particularly for fathers and carers of school-aged children. Findings highlighted the need for visible, accessible, and equitable supports to enhance participation, retention, and inclusion for parents and carers.	B'marked against 38 universities
Voice of Western Through Data Unlinkability: Setting the agenda for better equity and inclusion of Western staff and students with diverse genders, sexualities, and sex characteristics (A. Denejking, D. Lim, G. Turner, A. King, E. Shatnawi, R. Singh, B. Marjadi)	2022	This project identified three top-tier priorities: inclusive policies, non-gendered policy in relation to parent/s caring for children, and recognition of chosen families many queer people have in relation to personal leave.	60
Parental Leave at WSU: Examining common practices, barriers, and best practice for parental leave coverage (G. Niedermayer, K. Jenkin, B.Perry, E. Gilbert, C. Taylor)	2023	This project involved analysis of parental leave experiences among academic staff at WSU between January 2022 and June 2024. It included insights from staff who took parental leave and managers responsible for supervising and backfilling their roles. The primary issue reported by staff was inadequate backfilling of roles, with 47% stating that their positions were not covered during their absence. While most staff utilized flexible work options upon their return to work, 69% reported that coverage during their leave was insufficient, leading to increased workloads upon return. Managers reported insufficient knowledge of parental leave processes, with none of the respondents aware that they could access funding through the central Parental Leave Replacement Fund. Despite preferences for dedicated replacements, coverage was often informal, with responsibilities falling on existing staff.	20
*Indicates participants in research focus groups, surveys or related events.			

Recognising the importance of shared caring: Inclusive parental leave and flexible work provisions

The introduction of gender-neutral parental leave marked a significant shift in WSU's approach to supporting parents and carers. In 2021 expanded and gender-neutral parental leave options, including for foster care, adoption, stillbirth, and miscarriage, were updated to the Gender Equity Policy. In 2022, these provisions were enshrined in the University's academic and professional staff Enterprise Agreements. Flexible work clauses were also updated, allowing staff to request to work-from-home up to two days per week (see *WSU Cygnet #1, Flexible Work*). This approach recognises the value of shared parenting and supports diverse family structures and improved gender equity outcomes.



Figure 8. WSU Academic Staff Agreement 2022

Policy updates

Table 9 outlines policy changes relevant to parents and carers and **Error! Reference source not found.** highlights the work towards WSU's Inclusive Policy Framework.

Table 9. Recent Policy Changes

Recent Policy Changes and Initiatives		
Change/ initiative	Year	Summary
Increased leave provisions	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Introduction of gender-neutral Parental Leave, Adoption Leave, Foster Parent Leave and Partner Leave provisions ▪ Introduction of Primary Carer Partner Leave (total 20 weeks) ▪ Introduction of Miscarriage Leave (5 days on each occasion) ▪ Continued access to Parental Leave provisions in the event of a stillborn baby or death of child ▪ Personal Leave expanded to include compassionate grounds circumstances for stillbirth and miscarriage ▪ Parental leave provisions where there is a surrogacy ▪ Leave provisions for those caring for family members experiencing Domestic and Family Violence (10 days)
Remote working arrangements	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 'Right to apply' for remote work arrangements enshrined in Professional Staff Enterprise Agreement
Equity considerations for Academic Promotions	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expanded articulation of Achievement Relative to Opportunity (ARTO) and Equity Considerations, with emphasis on non-linear career paths, part-time work, career interruption, and non-traditional patterns of achievement ▪ Natural Disasters or Global Events and Pandemic Circumstances included as an additional (optional) Equity Consideration from 2020 ▪ Compulsory equity training for Academic Promotions Committee members, with focus on Achievement Relative to Opportunity
Inclusive Policy Review Framework (in progress)	2021 -	See Spotlight Initiative below

Spotlight Initiative #3: WSU'S Inclusive Policy Framework

Findings from VC-GEF foundational knowledge research and related projects examining staff experiences of intersectional (dis)advantage at WSU (e.g., Robinson et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2021) highlighted several systemic policy-making issues. These included potential implicit bias within policy frameworks and structural misalignment between policy intent and procedural supports.

To address these systemic issues a cross-disciplinary working group was established in 2021 to perform a GEDI gap analysis of a sample of care-related WSU policies and to develop an analytical policy-benchmarking tool to replicate this process across policy contexts. The group comprised of academic and professional equity scholars and practitioners.

Drawing on substantial academic scholarship around intersectional approaches to policy analysis and inclusive policy-making practice, the group has developed a draft Inclusive Policy Framework (IPF), a novel framework for conceptualising, writing, reviewing, implementing, and assessing inclusive policy at WSU. Grounded in positional reflexivity, this framework assists policymakers, reviewers, and others to:

- Determine diversity, inclusion and equity-related gaps in policy writing and evaluation;
- Formulate policy that encompasses the breadth and complexity of staff and student experience, and;
- Ensure an inclusive approach to policy-writing into the future.

The complex work of embedding the IPF into institutional practice at WSU is still in development. To progress this work, the IPF will be further consulted with stakeholder groups and scaffolded with educational resources to guide its implementation, with the aim of embedment as a practical tool the review and development of all University policies moving forward.

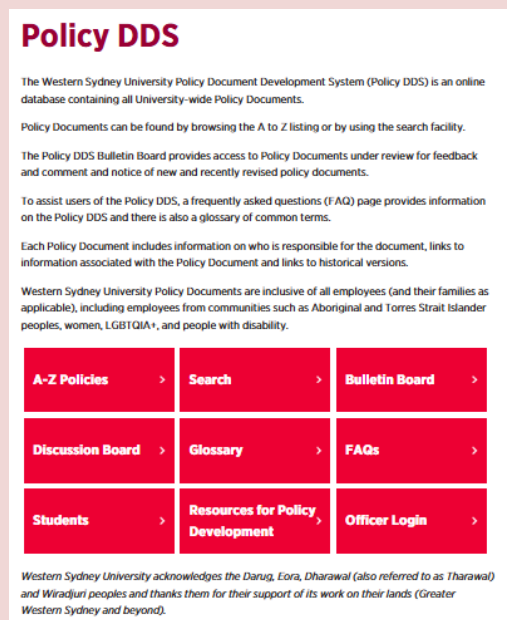


Figure 9. WSU Policy Document Development System

Theme 4. Continuous Improvement

Across the Cygnet Era, continuous improvement has been a consistent focus across VC-GEF research and laid the groundwork for the next phase of action, embedding findings into policy and process and informing action planning for systemic change.

Foundational Knowledge – looking to the future

WSU has built a robust evidence-base to understand and acknowledge the lived experiences of parents and carers (Table 10).

Table 10. Key VC-GEF Projects Informing Approaches to Continuous Improvement

Key VC-GEF Projects Informing Approaches to Continuous Improvement			
Activity	Year	Key Findings	n*
A Reconciliation of Parenting & Studying: The Role of HE Policies in Supporting Student Parents (D. Bowyer, M. Deitz, T. Dune, H. Hammond, A. Jamison, A. Eseosa Ogbeide, C. Taylor and J. Vassallo)	2020	The study examined university systems affecting student parents, identifying how policies around enrolment, verification of carer status, special consideration, and communication processes render parent/carers status invisible. Key recommendations included policy revision to embed identification, streamlined processes, and dedicated governance mechanisms to normalise supports and align process with equity practice.	95
Equity, policy and practice: disruptions to candidature and barriers to career progression for women HDR candidates (C Smith, C Townley, K Huppatz and P Bansel)	2021	The study reviewed HDR-candidature policies and institutional processes, revealing how normative expectations (full-time enrolment, uninterrupted progress) disadvantage women with caring responsibilities, and interviewed 13 women HDR candidates. Findings highlighted how policies are underpinned by an expectation of the “Unencumbered Bachelor”, that HDR candidates are free of caring responsibilities, acting as autonomous, individual, competitive agents with no restrictions on their physical presence. Sixteen recommendations were made, and a set of vignettes of women HDR candidates with caring responsibilities developed. It recommended reforming policy language, offering flexible candidature modes, and embedding equity oversight in procedural frameworks to align institutional processes with diverse lived realities.	13 HDR women
Developing a Research and Audit- Informed Framework to Support Working Carers: A Focus on University Workplaces (Dr Michelle O’Shea and Leila Frijat)	2024	Using standardised criteria, the study audited publicly available (via university websites and enterprise agreements) carer policies and institutional supports across Australian publicly funded universities. Audit criteria criterion was modelled and modified against Carer NSW’s ‘Carer + Employer’s Accreditation Program’ framework. The audit’s key findings are relevant to policy language and carer definitions – the language used to describe carers was frequently found to be inconsistent and inaccurate. Parents and carers were commonly conflated together with a general absence of carer-specific policies and practices.	38 Australian publicly funded universities
Supporting Student Parents at WSU (C. Taylor, K. Huppatz, K. McKay, M.	2024	The aim of this project was to audit current provisions, local constraints, and future possibilities for short, medium, and long-term action to improve outcomes for student parents at WSU.	100 (survey)

O'Shea, A. Matthews, S. Tusasiirwe, N. Naidoo, R. Gamsjaeger, S. Dagistanli, J. Condie, K. Jenkin, M. O'Shea, S. Tusasiirwe and J. Haines)		Key areas to address include student parent identification, simple ways to ensure academic accommodations, and the significant challenge of affordable and flexible childcare, including access to occasional care. See Spotlight below for more details.	20 (focus groups, interviews, networking events)
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Expanding capacity: intersectional understandings of caregiving

VC-GEF and Western SAGE projects have actively championed research, policy and practice initiatives that recognise and expand intersectional understandings of how identity, power, and social structures inequitably shape staff and student caregiving experiences. A key approach is accounting for the specificities and complexities of care circumstances within research design. Examples include:

- Recognising that Indigenous kinship, community and family structures differ from non-Indigenous models, our *Gathering Insights* (Kennedy, McKay and Talbot-Mundine, 2024⁵) research report asked Indigenous staff survey respondents whether policies and practices are sufficiently inclusive of Indigenous staff needs;
- Parents and Carers Impact Assessment and VC-GEF *Supporting Student Parents* surveys embedded expanded demographics that are inclusive of various types of care circumstances (e.g., sole parenting and/or caring, sandwich caring, distance caring) and included diversity identifiers not only for staff/students but also for caring relationships (i.e., the persons being carer for) in order to identify specific and additional intersectional needs and potential inequities in access to supports.
- Our VC-GEF report on women HDR candidates with caring responsibilities developed carer vignettes to articulate a range of intersectional carer experiences (Smith et al., 2022)⁶.
- Developing a research and audit-informed framework to support working carers (O'Shea & and Frijat, 2025)⁷

Building Support for Student Parents and Carers

Comprised of academic and professional GEDI stakeholders and scholars, a Parents and Carers Working Party (2021-2022) was designed to triage foundational VC-GEF recommendations about barriers faced by staff and student parents and carers. It aimed to identify priorities to strengthen institutional support, address policy inconsistencies, and optimise outcomes. Alongside staff-related action described across this Cygnet, PCWP work culminated in the development of a student-focused Action Plan based on priority areas identified (Table 11), with significant work already underway.

⁵ Kennedy, S., McKay, K., Talbot-Mundine, G. (2024). *Gathering insights and embedding workplace improvements for indigenous staff at WSU*, WSU SAGE Impact Report.

⁶ Smith, C., Townley, C., Huppatz, K. and Bansel, P., (2022) *Equity, policy and practice: disruptions to candidature and barriers to career progression for women HDR candidates*, Vice-Chancellor's Gender Equality Fund Final Report 2022 Western Sydney University

⁷ O'Shea, M., Frijat, L. (2025). *Developing a Research and Audit- Informed Framework to Support Working Carers: a Focus on University Workplaces*, Vice-Chancellor's Gender Equality Fund Final Report 2025 Western Sydney University

Table 11. PCWP 2021-2022 - Identified Priority Areas

PCWP 2021 -2022 - Identified Priority Areas for Student Parents and Carers	
Priority Identified	Details
Childcare Response	Flexible/occasional care options/holiday programs. What is possible and how can we better accommodate student parents on campus.
Extension requests tutorial allocation for undergrad and post grad students	How are parent/carer considerations explicitly reflected in assessment processes.
Policy provisions for parents and carer	Mapping existing provisions, or lack thereof, and their current applications.
Awareness raising and education	Raising staff awareness of student parent/carer considerations and accepted University practices.
Introduce targeted support for international students	To support the intersectional issues international students face in accessing support. It's often difficult to navigate processes and supports in a new country, and this is magnified when you have children.
Student Examinations Policy and Processes	Ensuring breastfeeding and parent/carer needs are explicitly considered with regards to special consideration/lactation breaks etc.

Spotlight Initiative #4: Student Parents and Carers

The VC-GEF project 'Supporting Student Parents' (Taylor et al., 2025) engaged student parents with a range of experiences, representing domestic and international, undergrad and postgraduates, single parents, and those with children overseas. The research process included surveys, interviews and focus groups with student parents, as well as networking events (student parents and stakeholders) and sector benchmarking to systematically examine priorities, barriers and opportunities to implement recommendations against the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education framework.

The networking events, which included student parents and stakeholders, helped to raise awareness amongst staff, both the challenges faced by student parents and the current supports available, as well as getting staff from key areas to discuss what needs to be done.

Access to affordable and flexible childcare stood out as the most significant challenge. Findings also indicated that the opportunity to identify as a student parent is important and that access to information/supports and staff awareness of those supports is lacking. It was recommended that processes for allowing student parents to have accommodations made to support their studies need to be simpler and more consistent across the University. The focus groups also suggested that student parents want opportunities to connect with one another.

It was recommended that similar policies and processes be in place for student parents as they are for student carers, with an equivalent to the Carer Verification Statement to allow easy access to academic accommodations. A Student Parent and Carer Identification Pilot is ongoing.

The piloting of STEM Camps in July 2025 represents the initial steps towards the provision of affordable school holiday care. Awareness raising amongst staff will be pivotal to improving supports for student parents. Lastly, a sustainable model is required for the Student Parent Union.

OUTCOMES

Improvements across the Cygnet era (2018–2025) were captured in the Cygnet Impact Assessment, which involved a rigorous evaluation of progress across the key themes. There were 135 participants in total (Table 12, Table 13, Table 14). Participants were asked their views and experiences on matters across a range of areas. Our findings are reported as a series of outcomes and areas for improvement. The first outcome compares Cygnet Assessment Data to the 2018 All Staff survey to assess whether there has been any improvement overall since 2018. The remaining outcomes are organised by the four themes of Increasing visibility (4 outcomes); Targeted Supports (4 outcomes); Policy and Process (4 outcomes); and Continuous Improvement (2 Outcomes).

Table 12. Participation of Parents, Carers, Supervisors, and EDWP Members in the Cygnet Impact Assessment Survey 2024

Participation in Cygnet Impact Assessment Survey, 2024: staff parents and/or carers, supervisors, EDWP members			
Focus Cohort	Gender Response	% of Focus Cohort	n
Staff member with parental or caring responsibilities	Woman	82%	108
	Man	16%	21
	Non-binary	1%	1
	I use a different term	1%	1
	Prefer not to say	0%	0
		Total:	131
Supervisor or Manager of WSU Staff	Woman	96%	22
	Man	4%	1
	Non-binary	0%	0
	I use a different term	0%	0
	Prefer not to say	0%	0
		Total:	23
Equity and Diversity Working Party (EDWP) member	Woman	75%	9
	Man	17%	2
	Non-binary	8%	0
	I use a different term	15%	0
	Prefer not to say	8%	1
		Total:	12
Total Participants			135

Table 13. Self-identification Across Staff Parents and Carers in Cygnet Impact Assessment Survey 2024

Participation in Cygnet Impact Assessment Survey, 2024: Staff Parents and/or Carers		
Self-identification	% of cohort	n
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander	4%	6
Culturally, ethnically and/or linguistically diverse background	20%	28
Being from a faith-based community	7%	10
LGBTIQA+	5%	7
Transgender, Non-binary, and/or Gender Diverse	0%	0
Person with disability	6%	8
Neurodiverse	11%	15
First in family to attend University	24%	33
None of the above	41%	56
Prefer not to say	2%	3

Table 14. Parent and Carer Types, Cygnet Impact Assessment Survey 2024

Participation in Cygnet Impact Assessment Survey, 2024: parent and carer types		
Parent and Carer types	% of cohort	n
Adoptive Parent	1%	2
Foster Parent	1%	1
Guardian (legal or informal)	7%	9
Sole parent and/or carer	9%	12
Shared parenting arrangement	11%	15
Step parent	4%	6
Extended or community caring for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander family and/or community members	1%	1
Queer family or queer community caring	2%	3
Sandwich caring	16%	22
Distance caring	6%	8
Caring for partner, spouse, or co-parent	9%	12
Caring for grandchildren	3%	4
Pregnant or expecting child(ren)	3%	4
Prefer not to say	4%	5
None of the above	46%	64

Identifying and addressing parenting gaps

Outcome: Improved or sustained outcomes for parents across key areas including opportunities to contribute, and meeting family responsibilities and work expectations (Table 15).

Areas for improvement: Keeping stress at an acceptable level remains a challenge for WSU parents (see Action Plan, item 1).

Table 15. Identifying and Addressing Parenting Gaps

All Staff Survey 2018 and Impact Assessment 2024 (parents): Identifying and Addressing Parenting Gaps					
Question	2018 parents	2018 non-parents	2018 Parenting gap	2024 parents	Change
I am given the opportunity to contribute to the best of my ability	63%	63%	0%	74%	+11%
I am encouraged to give feedback about things that concern me	62%	62%	0%	62%	0%
I am able to meet my family responsibilities while still doing what is expected of me at work	64%	69%	5%	69%	+5%
I am satisfied with my access to flexible work options	79%	78%	-1%	81%	+2%
I am able to keep my stress* at an acceptable level	59%	61%	2%	51%	-8%

The rewards and recognition I receive from my job are fair	54%	55%	1%	55%	+1%
Overall, I am satisfied with my job	75%	76%	1%	70%	-5%
I can see a future for me at WSU	69%	62%	0%	67%	-2%

*The 2018 all-staff survey asked specifically about 'job stress', and the 2024 impact assessment referred to 'stress' more generally.

Colour Legend			
	5-9% lower than 2018 result		5-9% higher than 2018 result
	10+% lower than 2018 result		10+% higher than 2018 result

Theme 1. Increasing Visibility

Visibility and accommodation of caring responsibilities

Outcome: Staff generally believe that parent responsibilities are accommodated at WSU, with particularly strong agreement amongst supervisors/managers, and EDWP members (Table 16).

Areas for improvement: Visibility and accommodation of carer responsibilities continue to be key areas for improvement (see Action Plan, item 4).

Table 16. Staff Positivity for Parent and Carer Visibility Prompts

Staff Positivity for Parent and Carer Visibility Prompts, Cygnet Impact Assessment, 2024					
Prompt	Positive Response Rate by Cohort				
	WSU	Parent	Carer	Supervisors	EDWP
SUBJECT OF INTEREST: PARENTS					
Staff parent responsibilities are visible at WSU	51%	51%	56%	72%	73%
Staff parent responsibilities are accommodated at WSU	74%	75%	64%	89%	92%
WSU celebrates the strengths of staff who are parents	27%	22%	44%	39%	25%
WSU is committed to equity for staff who are parents	53%	48%	60%	78%	58%
SUBJECT OF INTEREST: CARERS					
Staff carer responsibilities are visible at WSU	30%	33%	24%	50%	58%
Staff carer responsibilities are accommodated at WSU	50%	47%	48%	61%	82%
WSU celebrates the strengths of staff who are carers	19%	18%	28%	28%	27%
WSU is committed to equity for staff who are carers	39%	34%	40%	61%	58%

Colour Legend			
	5-9% lower than WSU result		5-9% higher than WSU result
	10+% lower than WSU result		10+% higher than WSU result

Visibility and accommodation of caring responsibilities across different types of care

Outcome: Table 17 reflects the parent and/or carer demographics and shows largely positive responses from men and from parents and carers who are from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Areas for improvement: The lower visibility and accommodations scores are clear amongst identified equity groups (first in family and neurodiverse) and specific types of care (shared care and sole carers) (see Action Plan, items 2 and 4).

Table 17. Staff Positivity for Parent and Carer Visibility Prompts according to demographics of parent/carer

Staff Positivity for Parent and Carer Visibility Prompts (reported according to the demographics of the parent/carer), Cygnet Impact Assessment, 2024								
	Positive Response Rate by Cohort							
	WSU	W	M	FIF	CEALD	ND	Shared	Sole
SUBJECT OF INTEREST: PARENTS								
Staff parent responsibilities are visible at WSU	51%	50%	56%	44%	50%	43%	43%	50%
Staff parent responsibilities are accommodated at WSU	74%	72%	89%	63%	81%	57%	64%	60%
WSU celebrates the strengths of staff who are parents	27%	27%	22%	16%	27%	29%	21%	30%
WSU is committed to equity for staff who are parents	53%	51%	61%	38%	62%	50%	50%	60%
SUBJECT OF INTEREST: CARERS								
Staff carer responsibilities are visible at WSU	30%	30%	33%	22%	42%	14%	21%	10%
Staff carer responsibilities are accommodated at WSU	50%	49%	61%	41%	65%	21%	43%	40%
WSU celebrates the strengths of staff who are carers	19%	20%	17%	9%	27%	14%	29%	20%
WSU is committed to equity for staff who are carers	39%	40%	39%	31%	50%	36%	43%	50%
<i>Note: Reporting threshold of ≥10 was not met for Indigenous, LGBTIQ+, or non-binary and/or transgender staff</i>								

Colour Legend			
	5-9% lower than WSU result		5-9% higher than WSU result
	10+% lower than WSU result		10+% higher than WSU result

Outcome: When considering the demographics of ‘carees’, i.e. those being cared for, there were largely positive responses from parents and carers who care for people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds or faith-based communities (Table 18).

Areas for improvement: The accommodation of responsibilities and perceived visibility of carers was particularly low for carers of neurodiverse people (see Action Plan, items 2 and 4).

Table 18. Staff Positivity for Parent and Carer Visibility Prompts according to the Demographics of the Caree

Staff Positivity for Parent and Carer Visibility Prompts (reported according to the demographics of the caree), Cygnet Impact Assessment, 2024							
	Positive Response Rate by Cohort						
	WSU	W	M	CEALD	ND	Disability	Faith-based
SUBJECT OF INTEREST: PARENTS							
Staff parent responsibilities are visible at WSU	51%	50%	56%	52%	45%	53%	80%
Staff parent responsibilities are accommodated at WSU	74%	72%	89%	81%	65%	63%	80%
WSU celebrates the strengths of staff who are parents	27%	27%	22%	26%	25%	26%	30%
WSU is committed to equity for staff who are parents	53%	51%	61%	63%	55%	58%	70%
SUBJECT OF INTEREST: CARERS							
Staff carer responsibilities are visible at WSU	30%	30%	33%	41%	20%	32%	50%
Staff carer responsibilities are accommodated at WSU	50%	49%	61%	63%	40%	53%	80%
WSU celebrates the strengths of staff who are carers	19%	20%	17%	26%	15%	16%	20%
WSU is committed to equity for staff who are carers	39%	40%	39%	52%	40%	53%	70%
<i>Note: Reporting threshold of ≥10 was not met for Indigenous, LGBTIQ+, or non-binary and/or transgender staff</i>							

Colour Legend		
	5-9% lower than WSU result	
	5-9% higher than WSU result	

10+% lower than WSU result	10+% higher than WSU result
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Experiences with supervisors/managers and immediate colleagues

Outcome: High levels of positivity from both parents and carers about their supervisor/manager’s understanding and consideration of caring commitments and support of flexible work arrangements (Table 19).

Areas for improvement: More pro-active provision of information from supervisors/managers about supports for parents and carers, with greater attention on addressing inequities for first in family, CEALD, and neurodiverse staff (see Action Plan, item 3).

Table 19. Parent and Carer experiences with supervisors/managers and immediate colleagues

Parent and Carer Experiences with Supervisors/Managers and Immediate Colleagues, Cygnet Impact Assessment, 2024									
Survey prompt	Positive Response Rate by Cohort								Parent-Carer Gap
	WSU	W	M	FIF	CEALD	ND	Parents	Carers	
My supervisor/manager is understanding of my caring commitments	79%	77%	88%	74%	74%	69%	82%	78%	-4%
My supervisor/manager treats staff with caring responsibilities fairly	78%	75%	94%	71%	65%	58%	82%	78%	-4%
My supervisor/manager is supportive of flexible working	84%	83%	88%	77%	87%	77%	86%	85%	-1%
My supervisor/manager provides me with information regarding parent and/or carer supports available at WSU	41%	40%	41%	42%	26%	31%	42%	44%	+2%
My supervisor/manager appropriately applies policy and procedure relevant to my caring responsibilities	68%	69%	59%	58%	61%	62%	70%	66%	-4%
My immediate colleagues are supportive of my need to balance work and caring commitments	75%	73%	88%	74%	70%	69%	80%	68%	-12%

Colour Legend			
	5-9% lower than WSU result		5-9% higher than WSU result
	10+% lower than WSU result		10+% higher than WSU result

Theme 2. Targeted Supports

Access to and awareness of resources for parents and carers

Outcome: The majority of participants were aware of resources and supports, including high awareness amongst supervisors/managers (Table 20), which may be indicative of the engagement levels of the supervisors who chose to participate in the survey.

Areas for improvement: Increase and improve the supports, resources, and initiatives for carers, in addition to providing support for supervisors and managers (see Action Plan, item 3).

Table 20. Staff Positivity for Parent and Carer Resources Prompts

Staff Positivity for Parent and Carer Resources Prompts, Cygnet Impact Assessment, 2024										
Survey prompt	Positive Response Rate by Cohort									
	WSU	W	M	All parents	All carers	FIF	CEALD	ND	Sup/ Mgr	EDWP
I am aware of resources, supports and initiatives relevant to my/my staff's circumstances	50%	55%	29%	52%	52%	50%	46%	50%	81%	60%
I know where to seek guidance about matters of relevance to my/my staff's caring circumstances	50%	53%	41%	52%	52%	56%	46%	43%	94%	70%
WSU has sufficient workplace resources, supports and initiatives in place for staff who are parents	43%	41%	47%	46%	50%	38%	24%	43%	56%	42%
WSU has sufficient workplace resources, supports and initiatives in place for staff who are carers	29%	28%	29%	29%	29%	34%	24%	29%	44%	58%
WSU has sufficient workplace resources, supports and initiatives in place to support supervisors/managers for staff who are parents and/or carers (asked of supervisors/managers only)	50%	53%	0%	-	-	40%	40%	0%	50%	-

Colour Legend			
	5-9% lower than WSU result		5-9% higher than WSU result
	10+% lower than WSU result		10+% higher than WSU result

Parent and carer resources, initiatives, and supports

Outcome: When resources were accessed, they were deemed to be helpful by most parents and carers.

Areas for improvement: Access was low for some resources, particularly the Supporting Carers Toolkit and Flexible Work Toolkit amongst carers (see Action Plan, item 3).

Table 21. Helpfulness of Parent and Carers Resources, Initiatives, and Supports

Helpfulness of Parent and Carers Resources, Initiatives, and Supports, Cygnet Impact Assessment, 2024							
		Helpful		Unhelpful		Not accessed	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
TOOLKITS							
Flexible Work Toolkit	Parents	24	89%	3	11%	55	67%
	Carers	8	89%	1	11%	30	77%
Supporting Parents Toolkit	Parents	15	83%	3	17%	64	78%
Supporting Carers Toolkit	Carers	5	71%	2	29%	33	83%
ON CAMPUS FACILITIES							
Parental and/or breastfeeding facilities on campus	Parents	1	50%	1	50%	9	82%
Childcare on campus – Early Learning Centres	Parents	24	89%	3	11%	56	67%
OTHER RESOURCES/INITIATIVES/SUPPORTS							
Career Interruption Grants	Parents	9	82%	2	18%	32	74%
	Carers	2	67%	1	33%	22	88%
Lactation breaks	Parents	3	75%	1	25%	7	64%
Engaged Parents Network	Parents	10	63%	6	37%	67	81%

Inclusivity of supports for parents and carers

Outcome: When staff were asked about whether supports for parents and carers are sufficiently inclusive, the highest positive response rates were observed in supervisors/managers (Table 22).

Areas for improvement: ‘Unsure’ responses were fairly high across cohorts when asked about inclusivity of supports and imagery, including for specific equity groups (Table 23), which likely reflects the low access rates (see Action Plan, item 3).

Table 22. Inclusivity of Supports for Diversity of WSU Parents and Carers

Inclusivity of supports for diversity of WSU parents and carers, CIA 2024			
	% Response		
	Yes	No	Unsure
“In general, do you feel that University supports for parents and carers are sufficiently inclusive of the breadth and diversity of WSU’s staff parent and carer communities?”			
WSU	45%	19%	36%
Parents	46%	16%	38%
Carers	38%	30%	32%
Supervisors/Managers	71%	0%	29%
EDWP Members	42%	29%	29%
“In general, do you feel that WSU’s visual imagery of parents and carers and their families, friends, and/or communities reflects the breadth and diversity of WSU’s staff parent and carer communities?”			
WSU	39%	16%	45%
Parents	38%	15%	47%
Carers	24%	24%	51%
Supervisors/Managers	50%	7%	43%
EDWP Members	42%	29%	29%

Table 23. Inclusivity of Supports for Parents and Carers for Equity Cohorts

Are University supports for parents and carers sufficiently inclusive? CIA, 2024				
“Do you feel that University supports for parents and carers are sufficiently inclusive of...”	Responses from Relevant Cohort			
	Cohort (n)	Yes	No	Unsure
Carers	34	35%	35%	30%
Staff with disability, neurodivergence, and/or mental health condition(s)	28	25%	36%	36%
Culturally, ethnically and/or linguistically diverse (CEALD) staff	26	27%	35%	38%

Note: Reporting threshold of ≥10 was not met for Indigenous, LGBTIQ+, or non-binary and/or transgender staff

Sharing of resources

Outcome: Amongst all groups, the familiarity with all resources was high, as was the sharing of relevant policies and leave provisions.

Areas for improvement: The sharing of toolkits could be higher amongst all groups, but particularly EDWP members where greater awareness of these resources may help. Supervisors should also be sharing more resources (see Action Plan, item 3).

Table 24. Sharing of Resources for Parents and Carers

Sharing of Resources for Parents and Carers, Cygnet Impact Assessment, 2024						
Resource	Parents and Carers		Supervisors/Managers		EDWP members	
	Familiar	Shared	Familiar	Shared	Familiar	Shared
POLICY AND LEAVE PROVISIONS						
Parental Leave Entitlements (inc. Parental Leave, Adoption Leave, Foster Parent Leave and/or Partner Leave)	81%	4%	93%	36%	75%	63%
Personal Leave entitlements as they relate to parenting and/or care	87%	50%	100%	79%	88%	75%
WSU policy as it relates to parenting and/or care	86%	39%	100%	79%	86%	57%
TOOLKITS						
Flexible Work Toolkit	72%	24%	86%	64%	38%	38%
Supporting Carers Toolkit	62%	8%	79%	7%	13%	0%
Supporting Parents Toolkit	63%	14%	79%	21%	13%	0%
ON CAMPUS FACILITIES						
Parental and/or breastfeeding facilities on campus	73%	22%	93%	50%	50%	25%
On Campus Childcare - Early Learning Centres	81%	38%	100%	64%	63%	38%
OTHER RESOURCES/INITIATIVES/SUPPORTS						
Career Interruption Grants	59%	16%	79%	29%	50%	50%
Lactation breaks	68%	14%	86%	36%	50%	0%

Theme 3. Policy and Process

Parental leave uptake

Outcome: Significant and sustained increases in staff taking various forms of parental and carers leave (Figure 10). Particular increases were observed for academic men (Figure 11).

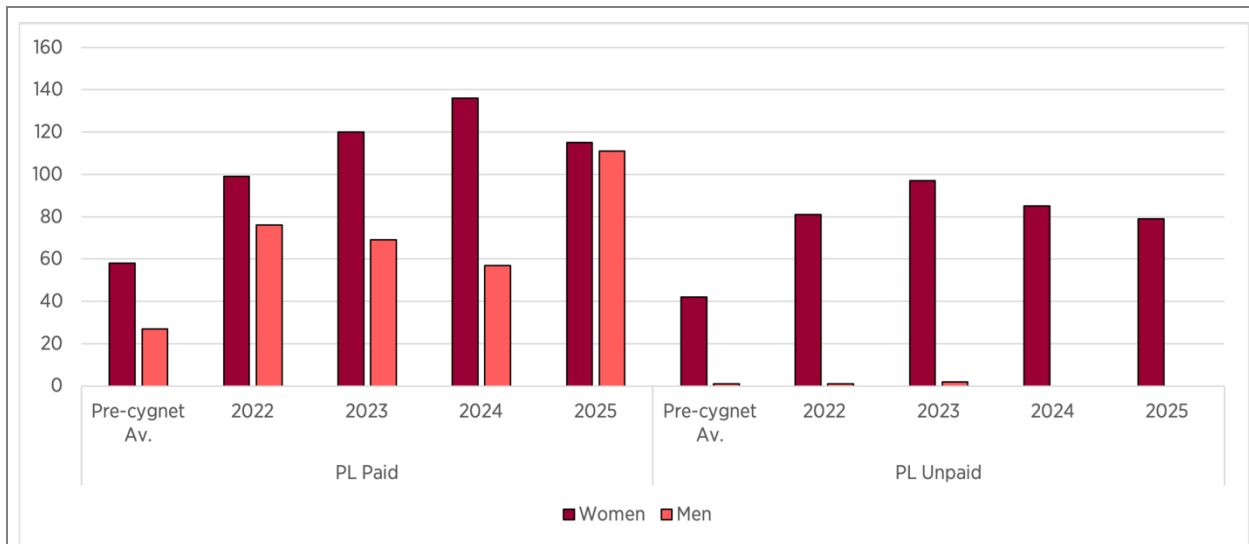


Figure 10. Number of Staff taking Paid and Unpaid Parental Leave by Gender

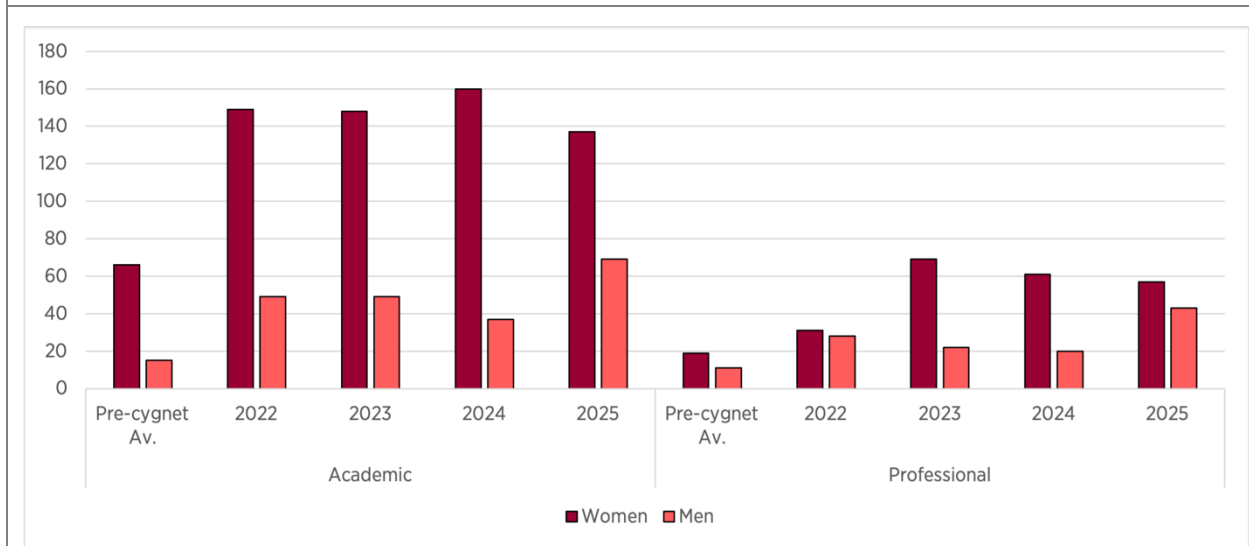


Figure 11. Number of Staff taking Parental Leave by Gender and Employment Type

Note: No non-binary or gender diverse staff were recorded in HR systems as having accessed parental leave across the period.

Sufficiency of parental leave provisions

Outcome: The majority of respondents deemed the relevant leave provisions to be sufficient across parental, partner and adoption leave (Table 25).

Areas for improvement: Although the number of ‘keep in touch’ days were generally deemed to be sufficient, awareness of this provision was lower (see Action Plan, item 3).

Table 25. Familiarity and Sufficiency of Parental Leave Provisions

Parental Leave Provisions: Familiarity and Sufficiency, Cygnet Impact Assessment, 2024					
Parental leave Provision	% Response				
	Not familiar	Not applicable	Yes, sufficient	No, not sufficient	Deemed sufficient if accessed
Parental Leave (20 weeks)	5%	37%	36%	23%	61%
Primary Carer Partner Leave (up to 20 weeks)	18%	64%	15%	4%	80%
Adoption Leave (20 weeks)	9%	84%	5%	3%	67%
Non-Primary Carer Partner Leave (up to 8 weeks)	19%	61%	14%	6%	69%
Foster Parent Leave (up to 6 weeks)	10%	84%	3%	4%	43%
Keep in Touch days whilst on Parental Leave (10 days)	36%	44%	17%	2%	88%

Flexible Working Arrangements

Outcome: Flexible work is extremely valuable, with at least 95% of staff who accessed specific flexible work arrangements deeming them to be helpful (Table 26).

Table 26. Uptake and Effectiveness of Flexible Work Arrangements

Flexible Working Arrangements: Uptake and Effectiveness, Cygnet Impact Assessment, 2024							
Flexible Working Arrangement		Helpful		Unhelpful		Not accessed	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Phased Return to Work	Parents	12	95%	1	5%	24	52%
Part-time work options	Parents	27	96%	1	4%	54	66%
	Carers	12	100%	0	0%	27	69%
Job share arrangements	Parents	0	-	0	-	79	100%
	Carers	1	100%	0	0%	34	97%
Formal Work from Home arrangements	Parents	28	93%	2	7%	9	23%
	Carers	12	100%	0	0%	2	14%
Flexible start/finish times	Parents	60	95%	3	5%	20	24%
	Carers	22	100%	0	0%	16	42%
Compressed working week	Parents	12	100%	0	0%	68	85%
	Carers	7	100%	0	6%	27	79%
Personal Leave for caring reasons	Parents	59	95%	3	5%	21	21%
	Carers	34	100%	0	0%	4	11%

Purchase of Additional Leave (PAL) for parenting or caring purposes	Parents	2	100%	0	0%	78	97%
	Carers	2	100%	0	0%	31	94%
Other provision or working arrangement	Parents	6	100%	0	0%	53	90%
	Carers	7	100%	0	0%	22	76%

Importance of recent changes and/or initiatives

Outcome: Although the rankings differed somewhat between groups, every change was deemed 'very important' or 'extremely important' by at least 50% of respondents (Table 27).

Table 27. Importance of Recent Changes and Initiatives

Importance of Recent Changes and Initiatives, Cygnet Impact Assessment, 2024			
% Response of 'very important' or 'extremely important'			
Recent change/initiative (ranked by importance to parents and carers)	Parents and Carers	Supervisors/Managers	EDWP members
Personal Leave expanded to include compassionate grounds circumstances for stillbirth and miscarriage	79%	86%	88%
Continued access to Parental Leave provisions in the event of a stillborn baby or death of child	78%	86%	88%
'Right to apply' for remote work arrangements enshrined in Professional Staff Enterprise Agreement	78%	79%	63%
Leave provisions for those caring for family members experiencing Domestic and Family Violence (10 days)	77%	86%	88%
Introduction of Miscarriage Leave (5 days on each occasion)	76%	71%	75%
Introduction of Primary Carer Partner Leave (total 20 weeks)	72%	64%	88%
Introduction of gender-neutral Parental Leave, Adoption Leave, Foster Parent Leave and Partner Leave provisions	65%	64%	75%
Parental leave provisions where there is a surrogacy	64%	71%	50%
Vice-Chancellor's Gender Equity Fund research projects on parenting and care	61%	64%	63%
Establishing of Equity and Diversity Working Parties	60%	71%	75%
	ACADEMIC STAFF ONLY		
Equity Considerations statement for Academic Promotions applications	87%	86%	80%
Compulsory equity training for Academic Promotions Committee members, with focus on Achievement Relative to Opportunity	76%	100%	100%
Natural Disasters or Global Events and Pandemic Considerations statements for Academic Promotions applications	63%	57%	60%

Theme 4. Continuous Improvement

Parent vs Carer gap

Outcome: Establishment of baseline data for carers at WSU that allows the ‘parent vs. carer’s gap’ to be quantified and explored going forward.

Areas for improvement: To close the gap between parents and carers through inclusive policy and practice (Table 28; see Action Plan, items 2 & 4).

Table 28. Establishing a Baseline for Carers

Impact Assessment 2024: Establishing a Baseline for Carers			
Question	Caring status	2024 Impact Assessment	Parent vs. Carer gap
I am given the opportunity to contribute to the best of my ability	Parents	74%	-9%
	Carers	65%	
I am encouraged to give feedback about things that concern me	Parents	62%	+6%
	Carers	68%	
I am able to meet my family responsibilities while still doing what is expected of me at work	Parents	69%	-21%
	Carers	48%	
I am satisfied with my access to flexible work options	Parents	81%	-6%
	Carers	75%	
I have been able to more effectively manage my work/life balance under the Flexible Work Pilot (remote work up to 2 days/week) than before it was introduced	Parents	66%	+2%
	Carers	68%	
I am able to keep my stress at an acceptable level	Parents	51%	-11%
	Carers	40%	
I am able to keep my mental health at an acceptable level	Parents	54%	-8%
	Carers	46%	
I have equal access to career development opportunities	Parents	45%	+5%
	Carers	50%	
I have equal access to leadership opportunities	Parents	39%	+9%
	Carers	48%	
The rewards and recognition I receive from my job are fair	Parents	55%	-5%
	Carers	50%	
Overall, I am satisfied with my job	Parents	70%	-12%
	Carers	58%	
I can see a future for me at WSU	Parents	67%	-19%
	Carers	48%	

Colour Legend			
	5-9% lower than Parent result		5-9% higher than Parent result
	10+% lower than Parent result		10+% higher than Parent result

Progress and commitment to advancing equity for parents and carers

Outcome: Supervisors and managers were particularly positive about the University’s commitment to advancing equity for staff with caring responsibilities (Table 29).

Areas for improvement: Advancing equity for neurodiverse staff parents and/or carers and preventing discrimination on the basis of caring responsibilities (see Action Plan, items 2 & 4).

Table 29. Progress and Commitment to Advancing Equity for Parents and Carers

Progress and Commitment to Advancing Equity for Parents and Carers, Cygnet Impact Assessment, 2024										
	Positive Response Rate by Parent/Carer Cohort									
Survey prompt	WSU	W	M	All parents	All carers	FIF	CEALD	ND	Sup/Mng	EDWP
There has been more genuine commitment to advancing equity for staff with caring responsibilities	55%	58%	50%	54%	67%	48%	52%	46%	71%	38%
There has been meaningful progress advancing equity for staff who are parents at WSU	53%	58%	31%	55%	56%	45%	52%	46%	79%	38%
There has been meaningful progress advancing equity for staff who are carers at WSU	45%	46%	44%	46%	51%	42%	52%	31%	79%	50%
Discrimination on the basis of caring responsibilities is prevented and discouraged at WSU	50%	46%	75%	54%	46%	58%	57%	38%	71%	38%

Colour Legend			
	5-9% lower than WSU result		5-9% higher than WSU result
	10+% lower than WSU result		10+% higher than WSU result

IMPACT

This impact evidence is derived from quotes that illustrate the impact of our work in this area in the words of parents, carers, and supervisors. The impact data has been organised to reflect the positive impacts of the work on increasing visibility (Table 30), targeted supports (Table 31), and policy and process (Table 32), followed by a series of themes that reflect what we have learnt about sticking points for staff with caring responsibilities that provide the foundations for continuous improvement. This set of thematic areas were constructed through the analysis of open text survey responses, interviews and focus groups from the Cygnet Impact Assessment survey, and event/initiative feedback.

Table 30. Impact: Increasing Visibility

Increasing Visibility	
Sub Theme	Sample Feedback
Visibility of parenting	<p>"The calendar that was done for dads... that was hanging up in our [work] kitchen for that whole year. It was just a beautiful visual representation of dads at Western. I loved that. I thought that was a really simple but clever way for people to bring parts of their whole self to work..." (Professional, woman, parent)</p>
	<p>"I loved bringing the kids to work so they feel involved in what I do and to share that with them." (Parent attending Families Week event)</p>
	<p>"...It is a beautiful video. Thanks for sharing the immense value of parenting and caring, the empathy it brings, understanding of others, compassion, and insight into the complexity of life. Those skills are so enriching and valuable. I think many people will feel seen and acknowledged through this." (Staff member commenting on Celebrating Strengths video via Viva Engage)</p>
	<p>"What we've seen institutionally is a propensity to conflate parenting with care. But institutionally again, I think we're showing through practice leadership and that we're saying well the needs of our parents and carers are inherently different and within parents and care groups, there's significant diversity and Western is a diverse institution." (Celebrating Strengths video: Woman, academic, parent)</p>
	<p>"I think probably one of the other things that I really respect about Western is that they're doing good work. But there's also a recognition very vocally that we can always do better and that continuous improvement piece I think is really important. So, it's celebrating the wins but also owning where we can do better. I think one of the big spaces where that's starting to happen is certainly this idea of parents as distinct from mothering and that policy is very much encouraging men who often don't take parental leave to really go about that and feel that's legitimate and that they should play a role in terms of the primary care of their children at that early stage and or as it may be the case in same sex or other relationships" (Celebrating Strengths video: Woman, academic, parent)</p>
	<p>"And I don't think that the messiness of life is a problem that I need to manage to be a more productive worker. I think that there needs to be space and a holding of space for people who are prioritizing the relational and the care work that makes life meaningful." (Academic, woman, parent, carer for partner)</p>
Support from colleagues with similar lived experiences	<p>"I have a strong relationship with the people in my school... and they're just naturally supportive people, regardless of whatever policies there are in place. So, I'm very, very lucky in that regard." (Professional, man, carer of elderly parent)</p>
	<p>"Strong networks have been absolutely instrumental for me, particularly being able to share experiences and listen to other academic mothers at the University. I'm really grateful to be part of a group where when one person has to step back a little bit due to family circumstances, everybody else rallies round and picks up the task for the project. It's such a wonderful group to be a part of, meaning that I can both give and receive that kind of support." (Celebrating Strengths video: Woman, academic, parent)</p>
	<p>"Much of my experience of visibility for parenting comes from supportive colleagues in a similar boat, so we have our own local 'culture' of support and inclusion." (Academic, woman, parent)</p>
	<p>"No issue with my actual colleagues. And things that, yeah, they're really, really great. There's a few of us that have got things. So, one of my other colleagues that's on campus there, her husband had a stroke a few years ago and he has almost full care needs. So, there's somebody else who's in a similar situation" (Academic, woman, parent and carer for child with a disability)</p>

Supportive supervisors/managers	<p>"Since becoming a parent, I have had a change in supervisor a number of times. Mostly all supervisors were understanding of parenting commitments and flexible work arrangement (e.g., the phased return to work has been something that I truly valued)." (Academic, woman, parent)</p>
	<p>"I've always felt really comfortable self-advocating at work, and I have the confidence to do that..." (Professional, woman, parent)</p>
	<p>"There is such a culture of I don't know... collegiality and support in my school as well. So, it's not like you feel you can't talk about things with your supervisor. I can, and that makes a huge difference, too. As I've had to have conversations with her a couple of times about managing my workload alongside my caring responsibilities. So having a supervisor, you know, and having a culture where you feel you can, you know, have those conversations. It helps. If I didn't have the flexibility that I have in my school at Western Sydney University as a single parent and a carer, I don't know if I'd be able to maintain a full-time job." (Academic, woman, sole parent, carer)</p>
	<p>"I think the university does a really good job in creating the framework for support for parents and carers. I also think on the ground it's about supervisors having that understanding of caring commitments and parental responsibilities and that careful negotiation around work commitments so that we're able to meet the objectives of the business but also be available when we need to for those special times for family and key school events. So, I think there's a great policy framework, but there's also some really good, I guess, emotionally intelligent leaders who really take on board the needs of parents and carers within the workplace" (Celebrating Strengths video: Woman, professional, parent)</p>

Table 31. Impact: Targeted Supports

Targeted Supports	
Sub theme	Sample Feedback
Collegiality and information about supports	<p>"Networks like the Engaged Parent Network were really critical for me, especially over the COVID period. It was really important to my mental health, and being able to engage with colleagues who had that lived experience really helped maintain my engagement in the workforce and develop my career along the way." (Vignette series: Woman, professional, parent)</p>
	<p>"Information about parenting and caring supports usually comes laterally from colleagues with similar experiences" (Academic, woman, parent)</p>
Grant opportunities	<p>"I got funding for a career interruption which really helped get my research back started again... If I didn't have that money, I think it would have been really tough to get [my student] to finish her project on time, and you know... that's a pot of money that I'm not sure if other universities have incentives like that. But I feel fortunate to be able to access things like that here." (Academic, woman, parent)</p>
	<p>"Career interruption and women's grants to support research have all been amazing that I have accessed (or plan to). They have had a beneficial impact on my work and family." (Academic, woman, parent)</p>
	<p>"I've been fortunate to be supported by the university through the Researcher Development Awards. I'm grateful to have received a women's fellowship as well as two Career Interruption grants. They've been really helpful in helping me sustain and increase my research track record alongside bring up a young family." (Vignette series: Woman, academic, parent)</p>
	<p>"I found support in the Western community through the Gender Equity Fund, where I worked on a project on mothering and negotiating mothering in the workplace. This</p>

	brought me in contact with other mothers who are academics. Together, we formed strong research connections and built a program of research around parenting in the workplace, specifically in higher education.” (Vignette series: Woman, academic, parent)
Access to relevant mentoring	“I participated in the university’s mentoring program, and I was matched with the most wonderfully gracious mentor who had already navigated that return to work. She had older children and it just made a significant impact to have a sounding board to take some time out of the workplace to discuss some of those issues of blending the two worlds ... that really helped to smooth that transition and to have that support or I could call her or catch up for a coffee” (Celebrating Strengths video: Woman, senior leader, parent)
	“I also accessed the Uni mentoring program - and was paired with a working mum with grown children - this was really useful in supporting the juggle and my mentor provided great support and practical advice.” (Professional, woman, parent)

Table 32. Impact: Policy and Process

Policy & Process	
Sub theme	Sample Feedback
Leave provisions	“... the policies at Western, I think, are good, and they’re very progressive. When I was on maternity leave, sort of 10, 15 years ago ... the provision of 20 weeks paid maternity leave was unheard of amongst my friends and for me, financially, it enabled me to have children and not take a huge financial hit, so for that, I’m really grateful and thankful, and I think Western was really progressive before, you know, before the rest of Australia caught up, and government policy caught up to that ...” (Academic, woman, parent)
	“Western has several initiatives in place that make being a parent or carer easier than it otherwise would be. Personally, I’ve taken advantage of parental leave as well as carers leave.” (Vignette series: Man, academic, parent, carer)
	“The parental leave conditions were really good compared to lots of other places of work...” (Academic, woman, parent)
	“I feel that WSU has had sector and workplace leading maternity leave provisions and I was very grateful to WSU for enabling that critical time with my little people when they entered the world. I was also the envy of all of my friends. Things are getting better now, but 15 years ago, WSU’s mat leave provisions meant I could effectively plan my family, and this is not lost on me. The phased return to work also made the transition back so much easier – again, an amazing provision.” (Professional, woman, parent)
	“I wouldn’t have been able to maintain my engagement with the workforce without the supports provided in this sector and by Western over recent years. I accessed parental leave, phased return-to-work, and flexible work provisions in discussion with my supervisor.” (Vignette series: Woman, professional, parent)
Phased return to work	“Phased return to work was really beneficial in managing transition back to work.” (Professional, woman, parent)
	“...all four of my children have been born while I’ve been working in higher education and I don’t think without the supports provided in this sector and by Western over recent years, that I would have been able to maintain my engagement with the workforce. So, I’ve been able to access parental leave and take the time I need. I’ve had access to phase return to work which was really critical in coming back into the workforce and re-engaging with the work that I do. I’ve had flexible work provisions, which has meant being able to shift start and finish times and change daily hours in sort of discussion with supervisors” (Celebrating Strengths video: Woman, professional, parent)
	“For me, it was the phased return to work for sure. I really enjoyed having that extra time just one day a week with my kids. As you sort of getting back to work, I really, really valued that time...” (Academic, woman, parent)

Flexible work	<p>“Well, the university’s approach to flexible work is an important principle, of recognising that our people, are our most valuable assets. The other principle that underpins our commitment is we understand that the separation between work life and personal life can be quite fuzzy. So, there isn’t a really hard line... understanding the pressures especially of modern life on people’s time, our people’s time, means that we need to provide a set of arrangements that give people space to fit both their personal lives and their work life.” (Celebrating Strengths video: Man, senior leader)</p>
	<p>“Flexible work matters to me because parenting, being a parent, being a father is a huge part of my life. It’s fundamental and my work’s important as well. I don’t see why one should outweigh the other and it’s a win-win.” (Celebrating Strengths video: Man, professional, parent)</p>
	<p>“I think flexible work is important for gender equity and inclusion in the workplace because it allows for full participation in the workforce. It means that people who have responsibilities outside of the organisation can actually thrive in an organisation and it’s particularly important for gender equity because we know that women predominantly are the primary carers and you know, this is evidenced in the fairly low full-time workforce participation for women who are parents. And really without flexible work, it means that we’re hindering participation in our organisation. Flexible work when it’s properly managed by supervisors can be the major ingredient to a high-performance culture within the organisation and within the university in our context. And managers should not only see it as a concession that we make to staff through some process, through some negotiation process, but they really should recognise it’s one of the things they have in their toolkit in order to empower their staff to be the best that they can be. That contributes not only to their productivity but contributes to their health and wellbeing. And I think they are all necessary for a positive workplace and a productive university.” (Celebrating Strengths video: Woman, academic, parent)</p>
	<p>“It’s a really positive way of working and I find it empowering and you feel valued because they trust you to do those things.” (Professional, man, carer of elderly parent)</p>

The following thematic areas provide opportunity for continuous development:

- “You Gotta Know the System to Use the System”
- Interpreting the Policy
- The Work Needs to be Done
- Trust Me to Get the Job Done

“You Gotta Know the System to Use the System”

Responses suggested that, not only do you have to know about the policies to be able to negotiate flexibility, you also have to know how the IT systems work, to know how to fill forms in effectively, and you need to know something about the legal rights and possibilities that you have open to you. Sometimes this means knowing who to call in to back you up when you aren’t getting a workable outcome (Table 33).

Table 33. Impact: Continuous Improvement – “You Gotta Know the System to Use the System”

“You Gotta Know the System to Use the System”	
Sub theme	Sample Feedback
Recognising the importance of managers’ training	“I think everyone’s situation is different. And the first thing you can do to help the staff that you’re supervising or managing is know what the available options are. Because it’s often the case that the employees themselves aren’t aware of the options available to them. So, educating ourselves and then imparting that knowledge on our employees and making them aware of the flexible options that are available to them is the first step I think in getting them to choose the right options so that they’re able to make the best of the flexible work options that are available.” (Celebrating Strengths video: Man, academic, parent, carer)
	“Training is needed for supervisors in this area to really know about how to put themselves in some of these situations and really understand what it is like from the other side, but also so that supervisors know what support they have to support people who need that. Carers needs. Because if you’re not supporting the supervisor who is allowing that flexibility, then the system is going to slow down. Because the pressure is just gonna build.” (Professional, woman, carer, supervisor)
	“Where I work there is very little knowledge of the policies for the managers and they are very chill about it, no problem returning to work when I ask them questions. But I think the managers perspective of it is they don’t know a lot. So that’s a little bit frustrating sometimes because I need the information, like even information around hiring somebody to take my place while I’m gone. They aren’t able to give definite answers on that.” (Professional, woman, currently pregnant)
	“My experience with my supervisor/manager demonstrated they were unaware of policy/procedure/enterprise agreement in spite of my furnishing such and required intervention from a senior executive to resolve issues arising. This took several months and resulted in me abandoning my caring role in order to retain my employment, leaving my family member unsupported.” (Professional, woman, carer)
Centralised HR support for policy implementation	“It would be wonderful if there was a unit or staff member who would actively communicate with staff with caring/parenting responsibilities to check in and see what help they need. There is so much red tape and information. We need to have it explained to us how we can make the most of it for our personal circumstances.” (Professional, woman, parent)
	“It would be great to have better communication from HR - for example, I wasn’t contacted when my period of ‘phased return to work’ ended (or ever given a date for it) and had to keep track and follow it up myself. While on maternity leave, I contacted HR about my superannuation entitlements and was given incorrect information. My manager also gave me incorrect information about my contract and how the period of leave would impact my employment. All of this has added substantial additional stress to the already challenging situation of being a young parent in academia.” (Academic, woman, parent, currently pregnant)
	“...it took four months to get back fill... We already knew six months before that, and were trying to get recruitment in place... not only I was without somebody for four months, but my workload was already also intensified because I was training that backfill person so the recruitment phrase, manage recruitment, whatever you want to call it... It is almost dissuading people from wanting to allow flexible working.” (Professional, woman, carer, supervisor)
Recognising the importance of managers’ invisible work	“Supervisors play such an important role in informing staff about appropriate resources and supports and in creating a culture that allows staff to speak about their caring responsibilities and how they are impacting on their work (or vice versa!)” (Academic, woman, sole parent)

	<p>“What comes with that training is, you know the workload allocation as well like that’s the other piece not just in terms of supervisors doing more training but I think also just the time it takes for people in the supervisory role to take on that, you know that co-regulation, using all of that, you know, emotional intelligence, the empathy that, that just the time that it takes for me to be an empathic leader, to write all the emails, the right way, to be checking in on all my people like that emotional load. That’s the invisible work that we do that isn’t encapsulated in the workload and I dare say mostly done by women. So that’s a whole other piece.” (Academic, woman, supervisor)</p>
	<p>“I believe this is very much driven by individual supervisory empathy and duty of care. This has been astounding with some supervisors and dismal with others. For my first child, I had zero idea of the affordances and policies and as a result, I was disadvantaged.” (Academic, woman, parent)</p>
<p>Recognising importance of accessible information</p>	<p>“I know that the university has policies in place. But... it’s a matter of how do I find the information, the website is rubbish in terms of navigating... We need the information at the time that we need the information, which is not usually when we are given the information... So, I think that’s the difficult part. Getting access to the information when you need it and knowing what to do with that information.” (Academic, woman, supervisor)</p>
	<p>“[We need] direct and easy to find web pages, with direct and easy to interpret information, with search functionality useful to those looking for the information.” (Professional, woman, parent)</p>
	<p>“I wasn’t aware of some of the changes in policy and leave mentioned in this survey and the carers toolkit. I think more needs to be done to disseminate this information.” (Academic, woman, parent, carer)</p>
	<p>“Actually make this information/ resources/ leave entitlements public knowledge. Maybe it’s just the school I work in but sometimes these things seem like siloed information or on a ‘need to know’ basis. Again, If I don’t know where or what to look for on our website how will I find them? Do we have a specific representative that can answer questions for parents with unique circumstances? The one size fits all through a toolkit does not work.” (Academic, woman, parent)</p>
	<p>“The intranet is not transparent enough for these resources without having to ask colleagues. In certain situations, staff wish to seek information privately to understand their options prior to commencing discussions with colleagues and superiors.” (Professional, woman, parent)</p>

Interpreting the Policy

Individual managers and supervisors were a major determinant of whether it was possible to negotiate flexible working arrangements. Different managers have different levels of experience and willingness when it comes to interpreting policy. One manager ‘scoffed’ and HR and the NTEU had to be involved. Others don’t understand the lived experience of being a parent / carer, which limits how sensitive they can be in interpreting policy, or how creative they can be in finding solutions that work for that circumstance. There were instances of making people adhere to the letter of attendance at work policies for no business benefit at all. Having a good supervisor who could have supportive, problem-solving conversations was valued (Table 34).

Table 34. Impact: Continuous Improvement – Interpreting the Policy

Interpreting the Policy	
Sub theme	Sample Feedback
Inconsistency in policy implementation	“...My partner’s experience was completely different. A lot of pressure was put on her to come back for no particular reason. And even though and, you’ll probably find this a lot, even though the policies are the same across the university, it’s how they’re implemented that can make all the difference.” (Professional, man, carer of elderly parent)
	“...there’s no planning or support to actually properly coordinate that leave... There’s a disconnect about supporting parents, even though there are policies in place. I think there’s two different things that you’re always dealing with, that the university says this, but then your direct supervisor or your school is doing that, and so it’s very tricky that I feel so fortunate in lots of respects and then I also don’t feel very supported in lots of respects.” (Academic, woman, parent)
	“I think it is highly dependent on the work environment and, again, the quality of the relationship, or the level of ... I want to use the word maturity, but it’s probably not. The level of experience of your manager in understanding and interpreting the policy, but also making the work environment sensitive enough to be able to work around people’s personal requests” (Professional, woman, parent)
	“In terms of setting the conditions for enabling people to take up part-time work, I don’t know if we’re fully there yet... I think it still relies on personal advocacy and the discretion of a supervisor to make it work. The commitment of a supervisor to really think creatively about the ways in which it can work” (Professional, woman, parent)
	“I agree that caring and parent responsibilities are accommodated, however this is dependent on your manager. I have had very different experiences under different managers” (Academic, woman, parent, carer for partner)
	“My current manager is very accommodating to my parental responsibilities. However, in my previous role, the manager believed “flexible” meant she approved for me to take a whole day off to attend to a medical appointment for a child, but I was not entitled to work around the appointment. If I had to leave work early to collect a sick child from day-care, she would not allow me flexibility to log back in from home once the child was asleep to finalise tasks from the day. There was no flexibility. I had to only mum or employee only in one day. This would be incredibly frustrating as staff in the directorate, but under a different manager, would be working from home with their children regularly bouncing in and out of professional meetings. There was not equality through the division, every manager was able to dictate their interpretation of “flexible” and raising questions of this meant less flexibility.” (Professional, woman, parent)
	“I personally think it comes down to the supervisor’s personal experience. And again, this comes into the operational relationship, psychological safety space. If the supervisor has enough personal experience to be able to know what’s needed and is flexible themselves and can help their staff do those shifts, rearrange workload and make sure that you know, support is put in place, it works well.” (Professional, woman, carer, supervisor)
Issues with presenteeism	“But the policies, like one of the interim deans insisted on applying the policy and telling me I needed to be on campus two days a week. And I can’t, even during my study leave and I can’t understand. Why do I need to be there two days a week to sit in my office, when I have a home office, and my husband’s sickbed is around the corner and I run between that and the kitchen” (Academic, woman, parent, carer for partner)
	“The supervisor now is very supporting. In the past I’ve had less positive experiences. I once argued for flexible work arrangements to work from home some days given my role is non-student facing. This was denied in the past with the claim that the policy did not support it, even though it did at the time. It was a very frustrating situation that lasted for a number of

	<p>years until COVID came along and provided a relief from the stalemate. Since then, this situation has not been an issue.” (Professional, woman, parent, carer)</p>
	<p>“But whenever the kids are sick in those first few years of daycare, I was always really conscious of trying to minimise the impact of that at work. I was really hypersensitive to that but it’s always... it’s always mum that they call first. No matter what.... and then you have that heightened state of stress of, I can’t, I can’t, but then you pick your sick child up and you go.” (Professional, woman, parent)</p>
<p>Broadening the scope and definition of carers</p>	<p>“I think maybe they [supervisors] need to recognise that caring responsibility is not restricted to parents only in terms of the scope and definitions... especially for those like having family members overseas, sometimes that can be the parents, or they can be the children overseas. But yeah, we need more time compared to those living with family in the same city, same country. It’s a quite different situation, I think, that has to be taken into consideration in terms of the policy coverage.” (Academic, woman, carer for elderly parent overseas)</p>
	<p>“Firstly, it appears that most support options for staff with caregiving responsibilities are directed primarily toward those with children, with limited attention given to those caring for elderly parents. Additionally, there is currently no specific provision for staff who have family caregiving responsibilities overseas, aside from the option to use personal annual leave. This lack of consideration makes staff with family obligations overseas feel unsupported and unprotected under the current policy framework. While there are some special arrangements available for staff in need, the ultimate approval often depends on the discretion of senior management within each school. Without a clear policy ensuring access to these supports, such provisions may exist only nominally rather than as reliable, actionable entitlements.” (Academic, woman, carer)</p>
	<p>“While some colleagues have been supportive, a number of my colleagues have been insensitive likening end-of-life care of a family member with high needs of caring for a young child; staff have called me on my personal phone after hours to discuss work matters; without consultation, colleagues have adjusted supervisory panels upon which I am the primary supervisor; without consultation a staff member took my name off a successful NCP grant and replaced it with their name; a staff member referred to my unwillingness to take on new projects during this time as “lazy”. There is a general lack of understanding of how the ebb and flow of caring affects work over time as the person being cared for can move between being extremely unwell and on occasion hospitalised... And palliative care support, finding a rhythm with the latter, enabling the carer to be more active in the workplace.” (Academic, woman, carer)</p>

The Work Needs to be Done

This theme is about how the university can better manage the absence of a staff member for a period of time, after which they will return. Whilst the parental leave conditions are good, the approach to planning and organising how the work will be done in someone’s absence is inadequate (Table 35). The responsibility for finding a replacement interim subject co-ordinator is placed on the parent or carer rather than the School or manager. This increases parent/carer stress. Attempts by parents and carers to plan ahead are sometimes stymied, later resulting in an urgent need to backfill. Managers also need support from the institution to do this. Currently backfilling responsibilities can rely on ‘the good graces and generosity’ of other staff. One interviewee described a central fund for backfilling roles, which their school was reluctant to use.

Table 35. Impact: Continuous Improvement – The Work Needs to be Done

The Work Needs to be Done	
Sub theme	Sample Feedback
Structural and operational barriers to negotiating parenting and care commitments	<p>“There’s not that flexibility with regards to the hours that you’re actually working, with permanent academic staff to be able to purchase additional leave. Because we’re not actually allowed to take any time off during formal teaching periods ... [and] now when we’re applying for any leave, we have to negotiate with somebody else to actually cover our roles in our absence of our leave.” (Academic, woman, parent, carer for child with a disability)</p>
	<p>“I guess from the academics’ perspective we can just easily hire a sessional right? [but it depends] on when it happens. Obviously, it’s easier if you’re going into a semester to just put on an extra sessional. It’s a little bit trickier if you’re halfway through a semester to find someone to cover, and I’ve also had to do that and call on the good graces and generosity of full-time ongoing staff to pick up extra load.” (Academic, woman, supervisor)</p>
	<p>“... [Casuals] are in this weird in between where if they’re not available, then someone has to cover for them and they don’t get paid... things like sign posting, access to services and things like that are even worse... I think there needs to be a little bit more there for our, for our casual staff as well.” (Academic, woman, parent, supervisor)</p>
	<p>“...even when you look at the wording of things and it’s like flexibility is available, but it is at the discretion of the supervisor and the operational requirements of the unit and it’s amazing how many operational requirements are suddenly needed sometimes.” (Academic, woman, parent, supervisor)</p>
	<p>“At the same time, you know, you’ve still got to do the work. It was a bit frustrating when filling out my workload: my phased return to work was taken into account for my overall work, and then everything got prorated... and yet the work doesn’t decrease at all, and you’re still doing the same amount of work. It did feel like there was lots of weeks where I was just trying to fit in 5 days’ worth of work into 4 days.” (Academic, woman, parent)</p>
	<p>“...the poor structure of the workload plan means that reduced working week doesn’t mean reduced workload - work doesn’t really get reassigned properly (either when I was on parental leave, or when I returned during the phased return to work). Team members have to take on additional workload whilst I took my parental leave, and upon return to work, it felt as though the same amount of workload needed to be completed, with one less day to do it in. It feels as though there is a mismatch between university-level support and what occurs at a School level - in terms of planning for, and accommodating parental leave/phased return to work.” (Academic, woman, parent)</p>
	<p>“When I tried to attend Keep in Touch days, I had to fight for it to be entered into the system that way (for months).” (Professional, woman, parent)</p>
	<p>“It feels like a lot of the progress that has been made by the university is lip service, because of the reluctance at the school level to properly support parents and carers.” (Academic, woman, parent)</p>
Inadequate institutional resourcing and support for backfilling roles	<p>“.. the central fund for backfilling roles... seems to be available, but for whatever reason our school has been very, very reluctant to go for it, apply for it, because it seems to be financially better to get casuals to backfill... And even though people are asking for it to be accessed, it’s still not happening... But I think that would help with the backfilling, which also helps with the stress around returning to work after maternity leave. Also, it will hopefully take the stress off the people that are remaining that are trying to cover...” (Academic, woman, carer for elderly parent overseas)</p>
	<p>“Again, I think at a university level there have been great improvements to policy, grants, staff benefits etc. I very much appreciated being able to access phased return to work after my parental leave - this was a valuable time that I got to spend with my kids that I know most workplaces don’t provide. However, I feel though there is a disconnect of how these initiatives</p>

	and benefits are applied or accessed at a school level. For example, there have been multiple staff within my school over the past three years who have had to take parental leave (between 8 - 40 weeks), and there is a central university fund to back-fill these positions. However, not a single staff member who has taken parental leave in the past few years has their work duties properly back-filled, even if this has been requested multiple times by staff to the Dean/Deputy Dean. It is cheaper to casualise teaching, overload other staff with the admin that remains, and it has been deemed too hard to work with HR (i.e. to advertise and coordinate interviews) to get a replacement for just a semester, even if it places a large burden on the staff who have to back-fill the work (and often the person who has also taken the parental leave). It is frustrating to know that the university has a lot of great resources/policies in place, but these are not accessed because the school would prefer to save a little bit of money (at the expense of their staff)." (Academic, woman, parent)
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Trust Me to Get the Job Done

This theme relates to ongoing minor disruptions to working patterns that parents and carers work around regularly. This works better if parents and carers have the autonomy to manage this in a way that works best for them, and they do this cognisant of what needs to be done at work too (Table 36). This can mean planning a teaching load across the year that they know will be manageable, given these ongoing minor disruptions. Sometimes Schools push back and insist on a different schedule that is less workable. In some cases, parents and carers felt a responsibility to ‘minimise the impact’ of a disruption like sick children.

Table 36. Impact: Continuous Improvement – Trust Me to Get the Job Done

Trust Me to Get the Job Done	
Sub theme	Sample Feedback
Cultural stigma	"Caring responsibilities are often invisible - and sometimes people who are caring for family members with dementia may not want to divulge this situation because of the shame/stigma that still exists with this condition." (Professional, woman, parent, carer)
	"Where I think there are problems...there are cultural norms that imply that you would be creating an inconvenience. If you availed yourself of these services because it's costing the organization money. There's a kind of trickiness in an organization saying, all this stuff's available. But then, you wonder, if I apply for a promotion, or if I have leave turned down and stuff, there's a kind of passive bullying that occurs if you avail yourselves of things that they always tell you are available." (Academic, man, supervisor)
	"Unfortunately, the prevention and discrimination on the basis of caring responsibilities is not uniform across various areas within the university. Subcultures and workplace cultures based on fear from top down prevent some supervisors from adhering to University policy and procedure." (Professional, woman, carer)
The way I am treated makes things harder	"The lack of acknowledgement that women carry out the vast majority of the work of caring is widespread. Many of the senior men have wives who don't work and culturally they are way out of line with community expectations in this regard. Despite the rhetoric of gender equality WSU is a deeply sexist and gendered place and this trickles down. In my situation until very recently, over 10 years every single senior person in my line of accountability was a man- and a white man too! Instead of congratulating themselves on how equal they are on paper there needs to be a huge push for positive discrimination in favour of women in management roles. All the policies in the world won't help until there is a culture change at the top." (Academic, woman, parent, grandparent).

	<p>“Everyone is very supportive in principle, they’re morally supportive and empathetic, but often I need extra hours in a day, extra days in a week, sleep or some quantifiable productive or active form of support. Once I opened up about how overwhelmed I felt, breaking down and crying uncontrollably in front of my kids or in the car to work, and more senior female colleagues console me by telling me that the staff bathroom is a safe place to cry. This was horrifying to me, because it suggests that the struggle is systemically normalized and going to the bathroom to cry is the best pragmatic solution. I aspired to be like my senior colleagues and they just told me that it doesn’t get better in terms of the parental/care struggles.” (Academic, woman, parent)</p>
	<p>“As the only parent in my team, I feel like they don’t understand my situation at all. Some have been very supportive, but some have not been. My direct manager has been the least understanding and supportive. I have gone to some of my immediate colleagues in tears, and they have been supportive in the way I have been treated and made me feel less alone, telling me that it’s not just in my head, they can see that the way I was being treated is obvious to them too. It was a big turning point for me because I really did feel so alone and ready to resign but them telling me ‘No we see it; this is so unfair what is happening to you’ gave me the strength to fight for what I am entitled to.” (Professional, woman, parent)</p>

FURTHER ACTION: PARENTS AND CARERS

REF.	RATIONALE	ACTIONS & OUTPUTS	TIMEFRAME	RESPONSIBILITY	ACCOUNTABILITY	SUCCESS INDICATORS
1.	<p>We have improved leave and flexible work entitlements but need to ensure proper access to entitlements as intended. For example, phased return to work is managed poorly (VC-GEF project, EPN - Bowyer et al. 2019) with staff reporting full time loads on part-time schedules. Backfilling for staff on parental leave is not consistently applied across WSU Schools (VC-GEF project, Niedermeyer et al., 2025). Parents and carers report difficulty accessing long service leave (despite requisite 6-months notice). Ensuring policies are implemented as designed is essential for ensuring caregiver wellbeing. In 2024, only 51% of parents and 40% of carers responded positively to the prompt: "I am able to keep my stress at an acceptable level". Furthermore, 74% of staff believe that parent responsibilities are accommodated at WSU, but only 50% believe that carer responsibilities are accommodated. In response to the prompt: "WSU is committed to equity for staff who are parents" 53% of staff responded positively, with 39% responding positively to the equivalent prompt about equity for staff carers.</p>	<p>Reduce slippage between policy and practice through a review of policy implementation and supervisor education, including regarding the specific management of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Phased return to work - Backfilling for staff on parental leave - Long Service Leave for academics 	<p>2027-2030</p> <p>Aligned with:</p> <p>Leadership Capability Framework</p>	<p>Office for People</p> <p>Organisational Development & Diversity, Equity and Inclusion</p> <p>Deans</p>	<p>Chief People Officer</p> <p>Executive Director Organisational Development & Diversity, Equity and Inclusion</p> <p>Provost</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Backfilling for parental leave and phased return to work is implemented as designed. - Academics report appropriate access to LSL. - Sustain strong positive response rates for prompt "I am satisfied with my access to flexible work options" (81% parents; 75% carers) - Increase parent and carer reporting around stress manageability +10% - Increase staff belief (+25%) that WSU is committed to equity for staff who are parents and carers. - Sustain positivity for parents and increase positivity for carers regarding the accommodation of caregiving responsibilities at WSU (min 75%).
2.	<p>The Impact Assessment indicated that only 46% of parents believe that "WSU has sufficient workplace resources, supports and initiatives in place for staff who are parents", and 29% of</p>	<p>Improve policies to ensure they are inclusive of staff with caring responsibilities by:</p>	<p>2027-2028</p>	<p>Office for People</p> <p>Organisational Development &</p>	<p>Chief People Officer</p> <p>Executive Director Organisational</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indigenous staff report increasing care-related policy inclusion - Staff of all caring circumstances and equity

REF.	RATIONALE	ACTIONS & OUTPUTS	TIMEFRAME	RESPONSIBILITY	ACCOUNTABILITY	SUCCESS INDICATORS
	carers believe that “WSU has sufficient workplace resources, supports and initiatives in place for staff who are carers.” Challenges arise for staff and supervisors where policies do not reflect caregiver circumstances. Importantly, current definitions of carer do not fully encompass Indigenous care arrangements and could be reimagined to facilitate greater access to caregiver supports for Indigenous staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expanding Carer definitions such that they are inclusive of Indigenous care arrangements; - Implementing the draft Inclusive Policy Framework and associated educative scaffolding, embedding intersectional learnings 		Diversity, Equity and Inclusion SAGE	Development & Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Provost	<p>backgrounds are appropriately supported by caregiver-related policy and practice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parent and carer positivity around sufficiency of resources, supports, and initiatives increases to 75%.
3.	Awareness of supports is low among caregivers, with 52% of both parent and carer groups indicating that they are aware of resources, supports and initiatives relevant to their circumstances, and particularly low awareness amongst men (29%). Although there is strong familiarity across existing resources amongst supervisors and managers, sharing of these resources is as low as 7%. Familiarity amongst EDWPs is highly variable (as low as 13%) and therefore so is the sharing of some resources, with some not shared at all. The provision of targeted supports is hampered by challenges in identifying parents and carers. Furthermore, the ‘parents vs carer’s gap’ continues to persist, indicating carers need stronger support (VC-GEF project, O’Shea & Frijat, 2024).	Consolidate learnings from Impact Assessment, VC GEF projects, sector best-practice models, and accreditation frameworks (i.e. Carer Accreditation Program) to increase caregiver and supervisor awareness of supports. This may include refining caregiver support information, creating a portal for caregivers and supervisors, developing a comms strategy, embedding supports for supervisors into existing and planned supervisor/manager training, and improving means of identifying staff caregivers. This could be informed by the establishment of a parent and carer round table group, meeting annually (during families week) to ensure ongoing issue identification.	2026-2029	Organisational Development & Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Communications DEI Committee SAGE Faculty Executive	Executive Director Organisational Development & Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Office of Vice Chancellor Provost Executive Deans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase staff parent and carer positivity for the prompt: “I am aware of resources, supports and initiatives relevant to my circumstances” to 75% with gender alignment. - Sustain/increase familiarity amongst supervisors/managers across all key resources to a minimum of 75%. - Sustain/increase familiarity amongst parents and carers to a minimum of 75%.
4.	The visibility of caregiving remains a challenge at WSU, with 51% of staff agreeing that parent responsibilities are visible and 30% agreeing that carer	Make use of existing resources (such as carer vignettes) to develop and embed educational messaging for all staff , particularly supervisors	2027-2028 Aligned with:	Organisational Development & Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	Executive Director Organisational Development &	Improved positivity (+25%) around visibility and celebrating strengths prompts with intersectional alignment.

REF.	RATIONALE	ACTIONS & OUTPUTS	TIMEFRAME	RESPONSIBILITY	ACCOUNTABILITY	SUCCESS INDICATORS
	responsibilities are visible (SAGE Cygnet Impact Assessment). Furthermore, only 27% of staff believe that WSU celebrates the strengths of parents, and 19% believe WSU celebrates the strengths of carers. Enhanced messaging around caregiving and the many types of care is needed to increase visibility and ultimately move toward a culture of valuing care. Positivity around visibility of carer responsibilities was particularly low amongst sole parents and/or carers (10%) and those who are neurodiverse (14%).	and leaders, to increase visibility and understanding for the full diversity of staff caregiving circumstances and the diversity of the parent/carer community at WSU. Consider opportunities to revitalise the Engaged Parents Network with the aim of developing a sustainable model of advocacy, raising visibility and sharing information.	Leadership Capability Framework Staff Onboarding Review Mandatory Staff Diversity Training Review	Faculty Executive Supervisors and Managers	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Executive Deans	
5.	A significant body of research has designated many areas of Western Sydney as 'childcare deserts' (Centre for Western Sydney project, Smith et al., 2024). Staff who utilise ELC childcare on campus report 89% positivity. However, the lack of affordable and flexible childcare remains a significant barrier to staff participation and progression (VC-GEF project, Bowyer et al. 2020). Occasional care is also a specific barrier to student retention and progression (VC-GEF project, Tusasiirwe, 2021; Taylor et al., 2025).	Investigate an ongoing and sustainable solution to regular and occasional childcare. Work with WSU Early Learning Centres to raise awareness of regular and occasional childcare opportunities, review relevant enrolment practices for equitable accessibility, and embed ELC information into onboarding processes.	2028-2032	Organisational Development & Diversity, Equity and Inclusion DEI Committee Property & Commercial	Executive Director Organisational Development & Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Office of Vice Chancellor Chief Operating Officer	Availability and uptake of occasional care at WSU Early Learning centres. Childcare proposal developed with a series of targeted recommendations for ongoing and sustainable regular and occasional childcare. New-starters report awareness of ELC offerings (min 75%).