



SAGE Athena Swan Silver Award Application

RMIT University

June 2026



Acknowledgement of Country

RMIT University acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nation on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University.

RMIT University respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present.

RMIT also acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia where we conduct our business.

Artwork 'Sentient' by Hollie Johnson

Hollie is a Gunaikurnai and Monero Ngarigo woman from Gippsland who graduated from RMIT with a BA in Photography in 2016.

Name of institution	RMIT University
Date of application	27 March 2026 (re-submitted 16 June 2026)
Contact for application	Prof. Kay Latham
Email	kay.latham@rmit.edu.au
Telephone no.	0429 988 018

Declaration

I declare that the information presented in this application (including data) is an honest, original, accurate and true representation of RMIT, and that the application complies with the 8,500-word limit.



Professor Alec Cameron
Vice-Chancellor & President

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

ABA	Australian Breastfeeding Association
ADVC	Associate Deputy Vice-Chancellor
AISSC	Accounting, Information Systems and Supply Chain (School of)
ARC	Australian Research Council
ARtO	Achievement Relative to Opportunity
ASIG	Athena Swan Implementation Group
ASSG	Athena Swan Steering Group
AUD	Architecture and Urban Design (School of)
AWEI	Australian Workplace Equality Index
AWM	Academic Workload Model
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CGEPS	Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector
DDA	Disability Discrimination Act
DIAG	Diversity and Inclusion Advocacy Group
DNSN	Disability and Neurodiversity Staff Network
DSC	Design and Social Context (College of)
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
EAP	Employee Assistance Program
EFM	Economics, Finance and Marketing (School of)
ELP	Equitable Learning Plan
F&T	Fashion and Textiles (School of)
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GEDI	Gender, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
GEAP	Gender Equality Action Plan
GSBL	Graduate School of Business and Law
GUSS	Global, Urban and Social Studies (School of)
HASS	Humanities and Social Sciences
HDR	Higher Degree by Research
HR	Human Resources
h-index	Hirsch Index (research impact metric)
IDAHOBIT	International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersex Discrimination, and Transphobia
IDEA	Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access

IDEAC	Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access Committee
IVF	In Vitro Fertilisation
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Asexual and other sexually or gender diverse people
M&C	Media and Communication (School of)
NTROs	Non-Traditional Research Outputs
PCPM	Property, Construction and Project Management (School of)
POC	People of Colour
R&I	Research and Innovation
RtW	Return to Work
SAGE	Science in Australia Gender Equity
SCT	School of Computing Technologies
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SENG	School of Engineering
SHBS	School of Health and Biomedical Sciences
SSCI	School of Science
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (College of)
STEMM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine
UEC	University Executive Committee
WGEA	Workplace Gender Equality Agency
WTWM	Working Together with Men

Context

Terminology

Language used in this application reflects RMIT's commitment to inclusivity and alignment with SAGE Athena Swan Principles. Key terms include:

- **Achievement Relative to Opportunity (ARtO):** A framework for assessing performance in light of circumstance, career interruptions or non-linear trajectories.
- **Gender-based violence (GBV):** Used as shorthand for a spectrum of behaviours including sexual harassment, sexual assault and gender-based harm.
- **Gender-diverse:** An umbrella term for identities outside the binary of man/woman, including non-binary and gender-fluid identities.
- **Gender identity:** Refers to an individual's internal sense of gender, which may differ from sex assigned at birth. Data categories include woman or female, man or male, non-binary, other, trans/gender-diverse, self-described and prefer not to say.
- **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD):** Cultural and linguistic diversity can encompass a range of aspects including a person's country of birth, their ancestry, where their parents were born, what language/s they speak, and their religious affiliation. CALD-status is self-identified, in this application.
- **Inclusive language:** Language that affirms diverse identities and avoids assumptions about gender, sexuality, family structure, or ability.
- **Intersectionality:** Recognises that experiences of inequity are shaped by overlapping identities (e.g., gender, race, disability, sexuality) and cannot be understood in isolation.
- **Neurodiversity:** The natural diversity of human brains meaning that everyone has a unique way of thinking, feeling and functioning.
- **People of colour (POC):** People of colour is a broad, self-identified term used to describe people who are racialised as non-White and who may experience systemic barriers, racism and racial discrimination. The term encompasses diverse racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds and is used in this application as an inclusive descriptor rather than a homogeneous identity category. POC-status is self-identified in this application.
- **People with disability:** Those who self-identify as having long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments, including health conditions, which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.
- **People with neurodivergence:** People who think, feel and function in ways that are considered less common, as opposed to people who are neurotypical. Neurodivergence is a non-medical, self-identifying term that may be used by people with a range of diagnoses including Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Tourette Syndrome and Specific Learning Disorders (SLD).
- **Underrepresented and/or marginalised groups:** Refers to cohorts historically excluded or disadvantaged in higher education and research, including women in STEMM, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, LGBTIQ+ communities and people with disability or neurodivergence.

Throughout this application, terms such as *women*, *men*, and *gender-diverse people* are used in ways that respect self-identification. In some cases, data categories are limited by system constraints. RMIT acknowledges that language evolves and commits to ongoing review to ensure terminology remains respectful and inclusive.

Data explainer

This application draws on a combination of qualitative and quantitative data to provide an evidence-based assessment of the barriers to attraction, retention and progression for women and gender-diverse people at RMIT.

1. Qualitative data

Together with the regular and rich insights of the Athena Swan Steering Group members, and the College Equity and Inclusion Advisory Groups (see Section 1), who were very much involved in the analysis and co-design of this body of work, the following additional qualitative data was collected.

Workshops

Five workshops were held towards the development of this application—one for each Key barrier identified. These workshops were attended by a total of 47 staff, including academic and professional staff and executive leaders. Attendees were representatives from College Equity and Inclusion Advisory Groups, the Athena Swan Implementation Group, the Diversity and Inclusion Advocacy Group (a group of academics from levels C-E from the Schools of Science, Computing Technology, Law, Fashion and Textiles and Economics, Finance and Marketing), participants in key programs—such as Working Together with Men—and other key stakeholders.

At each workshop, open-ended discussions were held, where two key questions were posed:

- ‘What have been your observations or experiences regarding...[key barrier]?’ and
- ‘What actions could address the key issues identified?’

Participants were first invited to brainstorm, using Miro, with follow-up and prompting questions asked to promote further exploration of ideas.

Further detail on the gender identity¹ and employment classification of participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Athena Swan Silver Award Workshop participants by gender identity and employment classification

Workshop	Woman	Man	Academic	Professional	Total
Key barrier 1	7	2	4	5	9
Key barrier 2	7	2	4	5	9
Key barrier 3	8	3	4	7	11
Key barrier 4	7	1	2	6	8
Key barrier 5	8	2	5	5	10
Total	37	10	19	28	47

A further session was held with two women academics at level E from Humanities and Social Science (HASS) disciplines to gauge a broader range of perspectives.

Listening sessions

A series of listening sessions were held with academics to understand women’s experiences in STEM College. These were attended by women-identifying² academics (levels A-E) and led by College executives. There were 45 participants across three sessions, including academics from Engineering, Computing Technology, Science, and Health and Biomedical Sciences. Some of their reflections are incorporated into the “staff experiences” sections of this application, across Key barriers 1-3.

¹ Gender identity markers were gathered via self-disclosure from participants.

² Attendance was limited to staff who identify as women, based on self-identification.

Staff Survey 2025 and Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) 2024 free-text responses

Free-text responses from the 2025 Staff Survey and the 2024 Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) employee survey have been drawn upon throughout this application to complement the quantitative data and provide additional insight into staff experiences. Demographic data is not available for these comments, as free-text responses are supplied in a randomised format to maintain respondent confidentiality and anonymity.

Disability and Neurodiversity Staff Network (DNSN) consultation

Further evidence in support of Key barrier 4 was collected through RMIT's Disability and Neurodiversity Staff Network between April and October 2024. At the time of data collection, the Network comprised 118 academic and professional staff members. Participants were invited to voluntarily and anonymously submit written case studies describing challenges and successes related to accessibility at RMIT. Submissions were guided by structured prompts covering role context, what occurred, outcomes, and reflections on what could have been improved. In total, 52 case studies were collected, comprising 44 challenges and 8 examples of good practice. These were consolidated into the DNSN's *Workplace Challenges and Successes Report* (2024) and later discussion paper (2025)—many insights from these are presented in this application.

Student survey and Higher Degree by Research (HDR) student focus groups

Further evidence in support of Key barrier 5 was gathered through a student survey on gender-based violence awareness, conducted in July–August 2025, completed by 595 students—no gender identity data is available.

Also, in support of Key barrier 5, evidence was gathered through dedicated focus groups with HDR student representatives. Representatives were invited to attend one of two focus groups to understand their perceptions of the University's efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based harm. The two sessions were attended by a total five students—three man/male-identifying one woman/female-identifying and one that did not respond regarding their gender identity.³

2. Quantitative data

Key quantitative sources and metrics presented in this application include:

- **Staff Surveys:** Data from RMIT's Staff Survey (2025) and Pulse Survey (2024), including staff perceptions of inclusion, workload, flexibility and respectful culture, disaggregated by gender identity, disability and neurodiversity status and sexual orientation.
- **Human Resources (HR) data:** Workforce composition by gender identity, academic level and employment classification (2025), drawn from RMIT's WorkDay platform.
- **Academic promotion data:** Academic promotion application and success rates by gender identity (2017–2025), reported to University Academic Promotions Committee.
- **Workload allocation data:** Self-reported data on academic workload distribution across teaching, research and engagement domains (2025).
- **External benchmarking:** Data from RMIT's reporting for the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) (2024) and auditing for the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector (CGEPS) (2025), including data about flexible work arrangements and parental and carers' leave uptake.
- **Research performance data:** Analysis of research outputs and impact using Australian Research Council (ARC) grant application and success data (2011–2026) and bibliometric indicators from Scopus (2025).
- **Student equity metrics:** Participation, retention and attainment rates for students with disability (2024).

³ Gender identity markers were gathered via self-disclosure from participants, via a survey.

- **Student surveys:** Data from the Student Experience Survey (2023) and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) prevention survey (2025).
- **Training and engagement data:** Completion rates and evaluation data for mandatory and targeted training programs, and engagement with awareness campaigns (2025).
- **Gender-based harm reporting data:** Number of disclosures and formal reports made to the University's Safer Community team, as well as number of disciplinary actions taken.

Details about the number of participants, by gender identity, for each data source for which this information is available—alongside further explanatory notes—is provided in Table 2, below.

3. Data limitations and ethical considerations

RMIT acknowledges several limitations in the data used. Demographic information such as disability, sexuality and cultural background relies on voluntary disclosure, resulting in incomplete datasets. For some cohorts, including non-binary staff, small sample sizes limit statistical reliability and require cautious interpretation. Additionally, some HR and workload data are point-in-time or self-reported, meaning they may not fully capture dynamic changes over time. These limitations have been considered throughout the application and inform the careful framing of conclusions. All data collection adhered to ethical principles of informed consent, privacy, and respect for participants.

Table 2: Data sources - number of participants, by gender identity, and explanatory notes

Source	Participant count						About this data source	Where is this data used?
	Total	Woman or female	Man or male	"Non-binary" and "A-gender", or "Trans/gender-diverse", or "Gender X or other", or "Other", or "Self-described"	Prefer not to say	Not specified or Non disclosed		
Staff Survey 2025 – all staff	5,370	2,021	1,427	51	149	1,722	The Staff Survey uses RMIT's preferred gender identity categories "woman or female", "man or male", "non-binary", "A-gender", "other", "prefer not to say" and "not specified". It also asks staff to optionally identify as a "person of colour" and as "living with disability and/or neurodivergence".	Key barriers 2, 3, 4 and 5
Staff Survey 2025 – academic staff	1,715	491	520	14	59	626	Where any one category is not included in the data presented in this application, that is because there were no responses, or insufficient responses in that category to make data meaningful. In the Survey, staff are asked the extent to which they agree with the relevant statement—answers are provided in this application as average percentage agreement with the relevant statement.	Key barrier 1
HR data from Workday system (Number of academic staff, by level, 2025)	1,867	861	989	10	NA	7	This data mixes sex and gender-identity categories, using the terms "female", "male", "other" and "trans/gender-diverse", and does not provide a "prefer not to say" option, in contrast to other data sources, such as the Staff Survey. Where this source is used, these terms are adopted. Unfortunately, this data source does not capture academic staff on fixed-term executive contracts (e.g. Deans).	Key barrier 1
Academic promotion reports to the University Academic Promotions Committee (Number of applications for promotion 2017-2025)	1,307	571	736	NA	NA	NA	Due to privacy agreements and the semi-manual input of data, the raw data is not available for analysis—instead, this data is extracted from a series of published annual summaries.	Key barrier 1

							These summaries have traditionally used the binary sex categories “female” and “male”. More recently, including in 2025, the category “Non-binary/ Transgender/Undisclosed” was adopted—but such a small amount of data is available for this category, and it is not consistent across Schools. As such, it is generally not reproduced in this application. CALD-identifying applicants are those who reported not being born in Australia and who indicated that they spoke a language other than English at home. Note that someone self-identifying as a ‘person of colour’ in the Staff Survey may or may not be captured as ‘CALD’ in this report, and vice-versa.	
Annual reporting to WGEA (Number of staff with formal flexible work arrangement 2025)	1,114	773	329	Unknown		NA	This data source uses the gender-identity categories “women”, “men”, “self-described” and “prefer not to say”. Where this source is used, these terms are adopted.	Key barrier 2
Annual reporting to WGEA (Number of staff who work part-time, by level)	5,547	3,123	2,311	73	40	NA		Key barrier 2
Bi-annual audit for CGEPS (Number of staff who took parental leave, by number of weeks taken, 2025)	151	63	87	█	NA	NA	This data source uses the gender-identity categories “women”, “men” and “self-described”. Where this source is used, these terms are adopted.	Key barrier 2
Bi-annual audit for CGEPS (Number of staff with formal flexible work arrangement, by arrangement type, 2025)	262	182	80	0	NA	NA		Key barrier 2

Australian Research Council (ARC) grant application and success data (Number of investigators on applications 2025)	6,594	2,392	4,202	NA	NA	NA	This data source uses the binary sex categories “female” and “male”. Where this source is used, these terms are adopted.	Key barrier 3
Bibliometric indicators from Scopus	500	209	274	NA	NA	17	Scopus is a comprehensive, multidisciplinary abstract and citation database that indexes peer-reviewed literature, including journals, books, and conference proceedings, to support research discovery and impact analysis. This data source uses the binary sex categories “female” and “male”. Where this source is used, these terms are adopted.	Key barrier 3
Academic Workload Allocation Model (AWAM) data	1,903	881	1,006	16	NA	NA	This data is self-reported by staff at a point-in-time and may not reflect the true workload apportioned throughout the year. This data source mixes sex and gender-identity categories, using the terms “female”, “male” and “gender X or other” (where “gender X” means participants may describe their gender as something other than the options available). Where this source is used, these terms are adopted.	Key barrier 3
Student Experience Survey 2023	4,405	Unknown				5,405		Key barrier 4
Gender-based Violence (GBV) Awareness Student Survey	595	Unknown				595	Feedback was compiled through the July–August 2025 student survey on gender-based violence awareness. Gender identity of participants was not collected.	Key barrier 5

Summary table: Bronze to Silver pathway

Table 3: Summary of actions taken throughout period from Bronze to Silver Athena Swan accreditation

Examples of impactful actions	Examples of outcomes and positive impact
Cygnets 1: Recruitment of women and gender-diverse staff in STEMM fields	
Extended the use of Special Measures to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people Implemented Achievement Relative to Opportunity (ARtO) framework for all academic appointments, as well as a communications strategy to ensure consistent understanding of ARtO Delivered a communications campaign with stories from women in STEMM and other under-represented disciplines/areas Built multivariate data analysis capability in relation to recruitment through the Athena Swan Dashboard and HR Insights Hub Rollled out Inclusive Hiring and Decision-Making training modules	52.6% of manager positions were filled by women in 2025, compared to 45% in 2021. - In 2025, 38% of level D and E roles were held by women, compared to 36% in 2021. - The STEMM pay gap was 4.3% in 2025, compared to 9% in 2021. - The resignation rate of managers that were women was 42.9% in 2025, compared to 59.1% in 2021. - Four STEMM Schools have achieved an overall 40:40:20 gender distribution of academic staff. - STEM College female staff reported a strong culture of women supporting each other, female mentorship and safe spaces for people to try new things. - Staff have reflected that School monitoring of gender balance has created a conscious awareness of the need for equitable recruitment.
Cygnets 2: Participation and career fulfilment for parents and carers	
Continued Slowdown weeks in the annual University calendar Communicated about the Employee Assistance Program 'Converge' Campaign Delivered internal awareness campaign about transition to extended leave (including parental leave) Implemented feedback process as part of transition to and from parental leave programs Piloted staff peer-to-peer support program for mental and psychosocial wellbeing Reviewed Parent and Carer policy and resources for inclusive language Reviewed Return-to-Work Bonus and Keep-in-Touch options for staff Promoted support/flexibility for prenatal, IVF and fertility treatment Continued to mature formal and informal flexible working options Continued to deliver Career Reignite and broadened impact through partnership approaches with Colleges and line manager education	- The rate of return from parental leave improved from 93.3% in 2020, to 98.6% in 2023, to 100% in 2025, surpassing the target rate of 95%. - Success rates for academic promotion of applicants who identify as parents/carers are on par with the rates of non-carers—in 2023, 86% of applicants with carer responsibilities and 85% of applicants with dependent children were successful when applying from promotion (both higher than the overall success rate of 79%). - Access to partner leave by women has improved—of those taking partner leave, 3.3% were women in 2024-25, compared to 1.5% in 2023-24. - Responses to questions about support for parents were answered relatively favourably in the 2025 Staff Survey, indicating the initiatives put in place to support those returning from parental leave are working well for some employees.

Cygnets 3: Supporting LGBTIQ+ staff and students

Hosted LGBTIQ+ inclusion events (e.g. Midsumma March, Pride Week, IDAHOBIT, Wear it Purple Day, Minus 18 fundraiser)

Participated in Pride in Sport Index and Pride events (e.g. UniSport Nationals, 10 Pride Rounds)

Enhanced LGBTIQ+ infrastructure (e.g. Queer Lounges, all-gender bathrooms, RMIT Medical Clinic services)

Founding of the LGBTIQ+ Research Network

Continued RMIT Ally Network and launched in-person ally workshops

Endorsed employer on LGBTIjobs.com.au; updated recruitment systems for inclusive gender/pronoun options; applied Special Measures for diverse hiring

Delivered LGBTIQ+ inclusion training to Talent Acquisition and selection panel staff

Introduced trans/gender diverse gender and sexual orientation options in workforce data management system Workday

Enabled preferred names for students and free replacement testamurs

Introduced up to 30 days Gender Affirmation Leave

Updated Parental Leave policy for inclusivity across gender, sexuality, and family structures

- RMIT has achieved Platinum Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) accreditation—the highest level—making us a leading employer for LGBTIQ+ inclusion.
- LGBTIQ+ respondents rated their degree of being “out” around 78%—this compares to the 62% who were “completely out” in 2019, and 53% in 2018 and
- 85% agree or strongly agree that “I feel fully supported by my team in terms of my diverse sexuality”.
- The AWEI Survey showed RMIT’s efforts towards a visible commitment of support for their LGBTIQ+ community was well received by staff, with one stating: *‘This is the first organisation I’ve worked where I can be me. There is no need for me to hide myself... If I turned up tomorrow in full makeup and wig, no one would bat an eyelid... There would be excitement’.*

Cygnets 4: Enabling accessibility: Supporting staff and students with disability and neurodivergence

Participated in the Australian Disability Network’s Access and Inclusion Index (2019-2021)—top five performer in 2021

Improved accessibility on campus including Equitable Learning Assistance consulting suites, car parks, sensory-friendly library spaces, a new sensory lounge, and a Disability Discrimination Act-compliant lift at Storey Hall

Improved digital accessibility via design system requirements, branded resources, training, a Digital Accessibility Framework and an updated Accessibility Statement

Partnered with external bodies including the Australian Disability Network, Job Access and PACE

Established the RMIT Disability and Neurodiversity Staff Network, who presented a report to the University Executive

Delivered awareness campaigns, including on Global Accessibility Awareness Day and the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower program

Reviewed workplace adjustment procedures and appointed a dedicated Workplace Adjustment Officer

- RMIT received multiple awards for disability inclusion, including recognition from the Australian Disability Clearinghouse, top five in the Access and Inclusion Index and #1 globally for ‘Reduced Inequalities’ by Times Higher Education.
- Enrolments of undergraduate domestic student with disability more than doubled from 2,598 in 2019 to 5,790 in 2024), increasing their share of the student population from 6.7% to 15.4%. Pass rates for this cohort also rose from 84.9% to 87.1%.
- Staff have praised the Disability and Neurodiversity Staff Network: *‘My experience joining RMIT would have been completely different without it... deeply appreciated’.* Staff have had positive experiences of workplace accommodations: *‘My*

Delivered thousands of Equitable Learning Plans, trailed Participation Assistants, expanded career advice and wellbeing programs and launched creative inclusion initiatives

manager...instantly suggested Dragon voice-to-text software... It was incredibly empowering to have my manager say yes instantly and take action'.

Cygnets 5: Respectful cultures and behaviours

Establishment of the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Group on Addressing Gender-Based Violence (2021)

Establishment of Safer Community team and expansion of the team's remit to include staff (2021-22)

Development of sexual harm risk assessment and management tool for use by Safer Community staff (2021-22)

Implementation of the Salesforce Case Management system for use by the Safer Community staff (2024)

Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response Policy Suite developed, covering both RMIT Australia and Vietnam (2024-25)

Coordinated institutional response to the National Code (2025)

Communications and awareness campaigns, including Be the Change, Respect at Uni (2023-25) and Domestic and Family Violence Prevention Month (2025)

Development and roll-out of a range of staff learning and development gender-based violence' training for student leaders

Development of the *Respect Capability Framework* (2021-22)

Development of *Planning for Change: Learning and Development Plan* (2023)

Working Together with Men innovation project (2024-)

The Adventures of Soy Boy and Friends comic strip (2024-)

- Ongoing management and resolution of complaints and workplace incidents.
- In 2024, 97% of staff completed the *Preventing Sexual Harassment* module and 93% completed the *Sexual Harm and Responding to Disclosures* module.
- 96.3% of higher education students and 23.4% of vocational students completed the *Sex and Consent* module.
- Of 725 students who attended a consent stall, 600 completed a survey—91% reported increased awareness of RMIT Safer Community.
- 15 executive leaders attended Our Watch training, with 78% reporting increased skill and 56% reporting increased confidence.
- The *Working Together with Men* pilot engaged 28 senior male research leaders— all reported improved confidence in promoting gender equality.
- Over 90% of participants in the *Respectful Research Training* program were satisfied or very satisfied.

Section 1 – Leadership and accountability

Since achieving Athena Swan Bronze accreditation in 2019, RMIT has had considerable success in promoting gender, equity, diversity and inclusion (GEDI). Below, we reflect on how the SAGE Athena Swan Principles have been embedded within the University's key strategies and plans, our GEDI governance arrangements and our achievements, challenges and learnings throughout our "Bronze to Silver" journey. We also provide "enabling actions" to promote stronger leadership and accountability, through the next phase.

Athena Swan Principles and University strategies

RMIT's *Knowledge with Action* Strategy aligns closely with the SAGE Athena Swan Principles, embedding GEDI into the University's core mission. This is particularly apparent in the Strategy's 'Adaptive Priorities' 1 and 2 – '*Foster a collaborative, caring, inclusive and innovative culture*' and '*Support a resilient workforce with fulfilling career pathways*'. The Strategy also emphasises governance and accountability, calling for senior leadership to visibly champion inclusion, consistent with Athena Swan's call for leadership-led cultural change (Principle 10). RMIT's commitment to Indigenous engagement, intersectional approaches and recognition of all genders further mirrors Athena Swan's Principles (Principles 5–7).

RMIT's vision and resources function to make inclusion a lived reality (Principle 1). For example, RMIT's focus on safe, respectful environments—particularly through its *Gender-Based Violence Strategic Action Plan 2023–27 (GBV Strategic Action Plan)*—supports Athena Swan's Principle of preventing harassment and discrimination (Principle 9). Through RMIT's *Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (IDEA) Framework*, RMIT commits to engaging with those most impacted by inequity to redesign systems and culture according to a "Universal Design" approach (Principle 8). RMIT's *Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP) 2022–25* sets out an approach to evidence-based action, using staff and student data to identify barriers outcomes—directly reflecting Athena Swan's focus on rigorous self-assessment and transparent reporting (Principles 2–4).

Governance and accountability

The Athena Swan program of work is overseen by the Athena Swan Steering Group (ASSG or Steering Group)⁴—a governance group of senior academic and professional staff and students at various stages of their careers. The ASSG meets five times a year to provide strategic oversight and is chaired by an academic lead—the Associate Deputy Vice-Chancellor (ADVC) Gender Equity.⁵ The Athena Swan Implementation Group (ASIG or Implementation Group) supports delivery of actions. Further to these bodies, the Diversity and Inclusion Advocates' Group (DIAG), formed in 2021, provides academic and discipline-based insights and has representation from RMIT's four Colleges and RMIT Vietnam.

In 2024, a gap in strategic GEDI work at the College-level was identified. To address this, Equity and Inclusion Advisory Groups were established in each of the four Colleges in 2025. These Groups help to progress College-specific intersectional GEDI work, alongside the College-level "*Ngulus*" that progress RMIT's commitment to its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students and community. In addition, some Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) Schools also have School-based GEDI Committees.

⁴ The ASSG is a refined assembly of its precursor, the Athena Swan Working Party (ASWP), established in 2016 to inform and govern the University's Athena Swan Bronze Award application.

⁵ The Chair of the ASSG is a member of both IDEAC and the Vice Chancellor's Advisory Group for the Prevention of GBV, ensuring the connectedness of Athena Swan work to broader University strategy.

The University's broader program of gender, equity, diversity and inclusion work is overseen by the Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access Committee (IDEAC)⁶—an advisory body to the Vice-Chancellor and University Executive Committee (UEC). The role of the Committee is to encourage action on student and staff equity, diversity and inclusion at RMIT.

Finally, RMIT's work to promote respectful cultures and behaviours and prevent gender-based violence is overseen by the Vice Chancellor's Advisory Group for the Prevention of GBV.⁷ These governance and working groups, as well as the action plans and reporting requirements they deliver on, are represented in Figure 1.

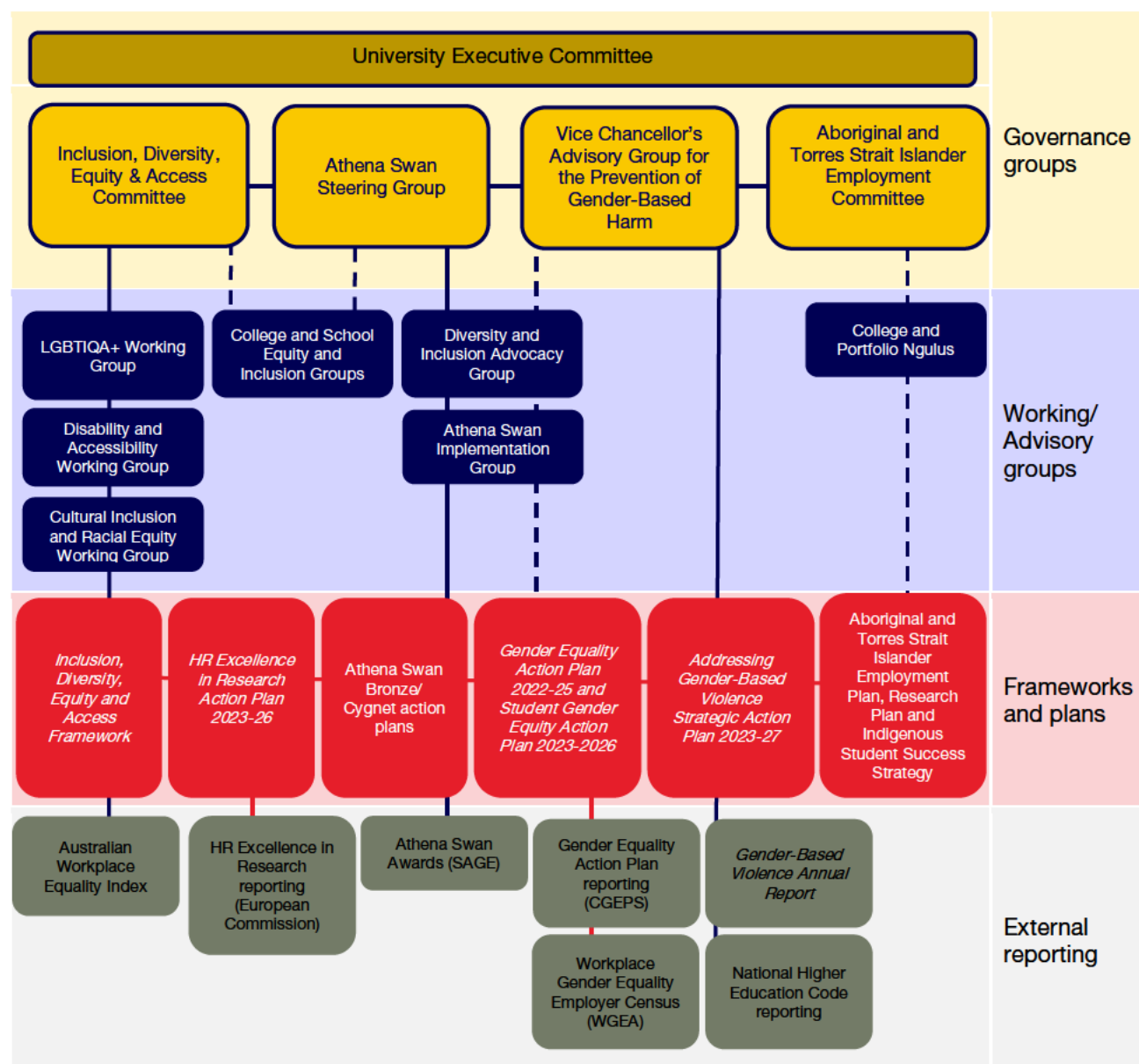


Figure 1: Equity, diversity and inclusions governance at RMIT

⁶ This group is co-chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Innovation (who is also the Executive Sponsor of the Athena Swan program of work), and the Vice-President, People and Culture.

⁷ This group leads the implementation of RMIT's *GBV Strategic Action Plan* and provides advice to the Vice-Chancellor, as required by the *National Higher Education Code to Prevent Gender-based Violence* (2025). The Advisory Group reports to University Council, UEC, Academic Board and others.

Achievements, challenges and learnings

RMIT's achievements, challenges and learnings throughout our "Bronze to Silver" journey are set out in Table 4.

Table 4: RMIT's GEDI achievements, challenges and learnings

Area	Achievements, challenges and learnings
Strategy, governance and accountability	
Strategic integration and accountability mechanisms	- The University developed three inter-linked strategic frameworks (<i>Gender Equality Action Plan 2022–25</i>; <i>Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access Framework 2022–25</i>; and <i>Addressing Gender-Based Violence Strategic Action Plan 2023–27</i>) that include actions aimed at systemic barriers (e.g. embedding intersectional approaches). - These strategies include SMART actions aligned to key barriers, such as exclusionary organisational cultures, inequitable access to leadership opportunities and insufficient intersectional awareness.
Embedding leadership accountability	- Leadership accountability is operationalised through regular reports (<i>Gender-Based Violence Annual Report</i>; annual <i>Gender Equality Workforce Report</i>), which track progress against gender equity indicators and identify where action is required. - Reporting is provided to University Council and University Executive Committee to ensure leaders at all levels are accountable for progress.
Challenges, reflection and enabling actions	Our 2024 AWEI Survey identified gaps in visible allyship on LGBTIQ+ inclusion, indicating a persistent barrier in leadership engagement. In response, we aim to embed GEDI responsibilities into leadership roles, performance expectations and development programs. "Enabling action" 2 responds to the need to embed GEDI responsibilities into leadership roles, performance expectations and development programs.
Resourcing, recognition and reward	
Resourcing targeted at systemic barriers	We have transitioned from short-term funding to more strategic resourcing of GEDI work, including reinstating a dedicated Athena Swan funding pool for 2026 to address the identified barrier of inconsistent, short-term resourcing that limits sustained interventions. This provides predictable resourcing for multi-year initiatives designed to tackle cultural and structural barriers. "Enabling action" 3 responds to resourcing requirements.
Recognition and reward	- The Vice-Chancellor's Awards for Excellence have been updated to include GEDI-focused award categories that explicitly reward contributions that actively address institutional barriers such as inclusivity, collaboration and leadership in reducing systemic inequities. - External recognition—such as RMIT Emeritus Professor Denise Cuthbert's SAGE Lifetime Achievement Award—have promoted legitimacy for ongoing GEDI investment.

Communication and engagement	
Two-way communication and engagement	- RMIT's GEDI communications are designed to both raise awareness of systemic barriers and invite staff participation in shaping actions to reduce them. - For example, the 2025 International Women's Day event explicitly shifted from celebration toward barrier-discussion and solution co-design, ensuring communications are linked to action rather than passive awareness. - Through development of this application, we identified gaps in information-sharing between School executive decision-making and GEDI implementation. In response, RMIT will further embed College-based Equity and Inclusion Groups by strengthening representation across all Schools and establishing information-sharing mechanisms. "Enabling item" 1 addresses the need for better connectivity between gender equity work throughout the University and School executive decision-making.
Inclusivity and representation	- Student engagement has focused on co-designing prevention and response initiatives with student leaders and peers. In 2025, three co-design workshops informed RMIT's first face-to-face GBV prevention training for student leaders, ensuring content reflected student experiences and addressed barriers such as low confidence in bystander action and unclear reporting pathways. Further consultation with student leaders is informing future training, while nine students directly shaped the redevelopment of the 'Sex and Consent' eLearn to ensure content is contemporary, practical and student-centred. - Staff engagement has similarly embedded co-design to address capability and behavioural barriers. Pilot face-to-face GBV training (May 2025) was used to refine content through participant feedback, directly informing delivery to 106 staff later in 2025.
Data governance, collection and analysis	
Strengthening data governance and transparency	- Introduction of the Salesforce Case Management system for gender-based violence data and the forthcoming Human Resources Insights Hub represent targeted actions to overcome the barrier of fragmented or inaccessible data systems, which has hindered evidence-based decision-making. - These data platforms are designed to provide timely, disaggregated data that inform actions to reduce inequities in recruitment, retention and progression.
Addressing known data collection barriers	- Persistent low disclosure rates in WorkDay demographic data (e.g. disability, sexuality, cultural background) have been identified as a barrier to intersectional analysis. In response, we have implemented targeted campaigns to encourage profile completion and increase intersectional data capacity. This enables more precise identification of barriers and monitoring of action effectiveness. - In addition to HR data, RMIT takes an intersectional approach by drawing on anonymised staff and student survey data, aggregated insights from staff and student working groups and qualitative feedback from co-design and consultation activities, enabling reflection on differential experiences and informing actions to address barriers, while maintaining psychological safety and confidentiality.

	“Enabling action” 4 addresses the need for targeted campaigns to encourage profile completion and increase intersectional data capacity.
Action implementation, monitoring and evaluation	
Structured implementation	• RMIT has applied consistent project management discipline across its Cygnet Action Plans, with biannual progress reporting from the Implementation Group to the Steering Group. This has supported systematic implementation of actions designed to address identified barriers and enabled leaders to monitor delivery against agreed milestones. • While this governance structure supported accountability for implementation, we also learned that early action planning tended to prioritise activity delivery over clearly articulated outcome measures. In several Cygnets, desired impacts were refined iteratively as actions progressed, rather than being fully defined at the outset.
Monitoring and evaluation to assess effectiveness	• Early Cygnets relied primarily on participation data and qualitative feedback, which limited our ability to consistently assess impact on barriers. • More recent initiatives have incorporated clearer evaluation design, including pre- and post-training measures of knowledge, confidence and competence, behavioural intention data, and independent evaluation for selected programs (e.g. GBV training). This has strengthened our capacity to assess whether actions are contributing to increased capability and behaviour change aligned to barrier reduction. • Challenges remain in capturing longer-term outcomes, due to time lags, data availability and reliance on voluntary demographic disclosure. These limitations have reinforced the importance of triangulating multiple data sources.

Enabling actions

Ref	Rationale/Evidence	Actions & Outputs	Timeframe (start & end)	Person/Group responsible for implementing action	Senior Leader accountable
1	Staff reported that better connectivity between School executives and broader University GEDI work would be welcomed.	Further embed College-based Equity and Inclusion Groups—ensuring representation from across Schools and information-sharing mechanisms between these and School-based groups.	2026-2028	Athena Swan team	ADVC Gender Equity
2	Through developing this application and previous Cygnet Award applications, a need for greater leadership support and allyship for GEDI was highlighted.	Strengthen senior leadership accountability and visible allyship for GEDI by embedding GEDI responsibilities into leadership roles, performance expectations and development programs, and by equipping leaders with practical tools to actively champion gender equality and inclusion.	2026-2028	Capability, Inclusion and Leadership Athena Swan team	Vice President, People and Culture ADVC Gender Equity
3	Through developing this application, it was acknowledged that GEDI resourcing had fluctuated in mode and amount and not traditionally been long-term. As such, funding certainty, beyond budget cycles, is required.	Establish a sustainable, multi-year GEDI resourcing model, including recurrent funding commitments beyond annual budget cycles, to ensure continuity, impact and long-term delivery of gender equality initiatives.	2026-2028	Policy, Strategy and Impact	UEC, Chief Finance Officer
4	Through developing this application and previous Cygnet Award applications, it was acknowledged that intersectional staff data was incomplete and unreliable, highlighting the need for continued campaigns to encourage staff to update their WorkDay profiles.	Implement ongoing, targeted campaigns to increase staff self-identification and data accuracy in Workday, supported by clear communication about data use, privacy and impact, to strengthen intersectional analysis and evidence-based decision-making.	2026-2028	Talent Acquisition, Communications	Vice President, People and Culture, Executive Director, Communications

Section 2 – Key barriers to attraction, retention and/or progression

Key barrier 1: Supporting career progression for women/gender-diverse academics and balancing gender composition at all levels

1. Understanding this barrier

Since 2019, following the related Cygnet Award, RMIT has had increased recruitment of women and gender-diverse people into STEMM roles.

By 2021, 36% of senior academic roles (levels D and E) were held by women. In 2025, it was 38%, despite 45% of all academics being women. This marginal (2%) increase highlights how progress in *promoting* women and gender-diverse people into senior positions is not keeping pace with overall workforce participation, despite *recruitment* successes.

The gender distribution of the academic workforce ($n=1,867$) in December 2025, by sex/gender identity⁸ and level, is shown in Figure 2.

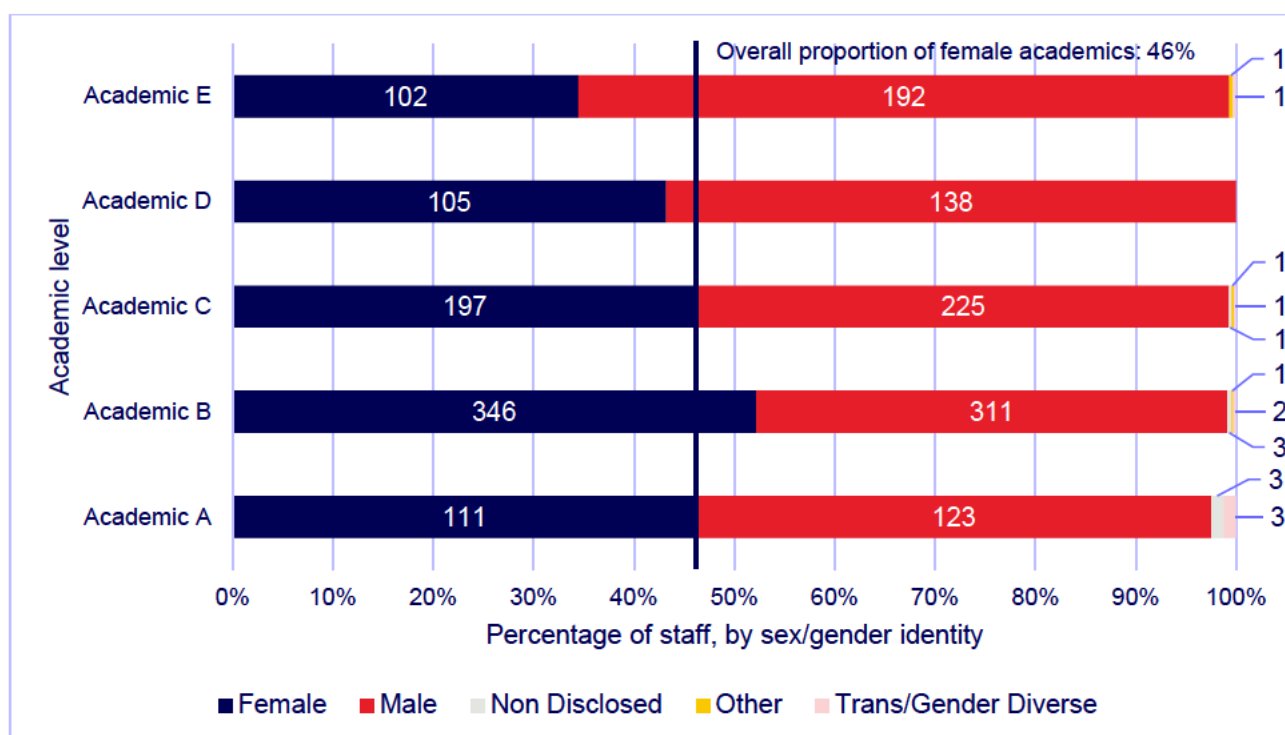


Figure 2: All academic staff headcount, by sex/gender identity and level (December 2025)

The slow rate of change suggests that, while “pipeline” issues may exist in some areas, structural barriers may also be slowing advancement. Without meaningful interventions, the gender gap in

⁸ As noted in the Data Explainer, this data source mixes sex and gender-identity categories, using the terms ‘female’, ‘male’, ‘other’ and ‘trans/gender diverse’, in contrast to other data sources, such as the Staff Survey. It does not provide a ‘prefer not to say’ option, though, staff can choose not to disclose. As such, these terms have been adopted throughout this chapter.

leadership will persist, limiting diversity and equity at the highest levels of academia. Supporting women and gender-diverse academics' career progression—and balancing gender composition at all levels—is, therefore, a key barrier for RMIT to address.

2. Evidence of barrier

2.1. Women and gender-diverse academics—levels D and E

Science, Technology Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine (STEMM) Schools⁹

STEMM academics make up 65% of the academic workforce. STEMM Schools have less females at the highest academic levels than the University, as-a-whole. Only 32% of D and E positions—and 29% of level E—are held by females, despite them accounting for 42% of the STEMM academic workforce (504 of 1,214) (Figure 3). In addition, very few positions are held by trans- and gender-diverse staff.

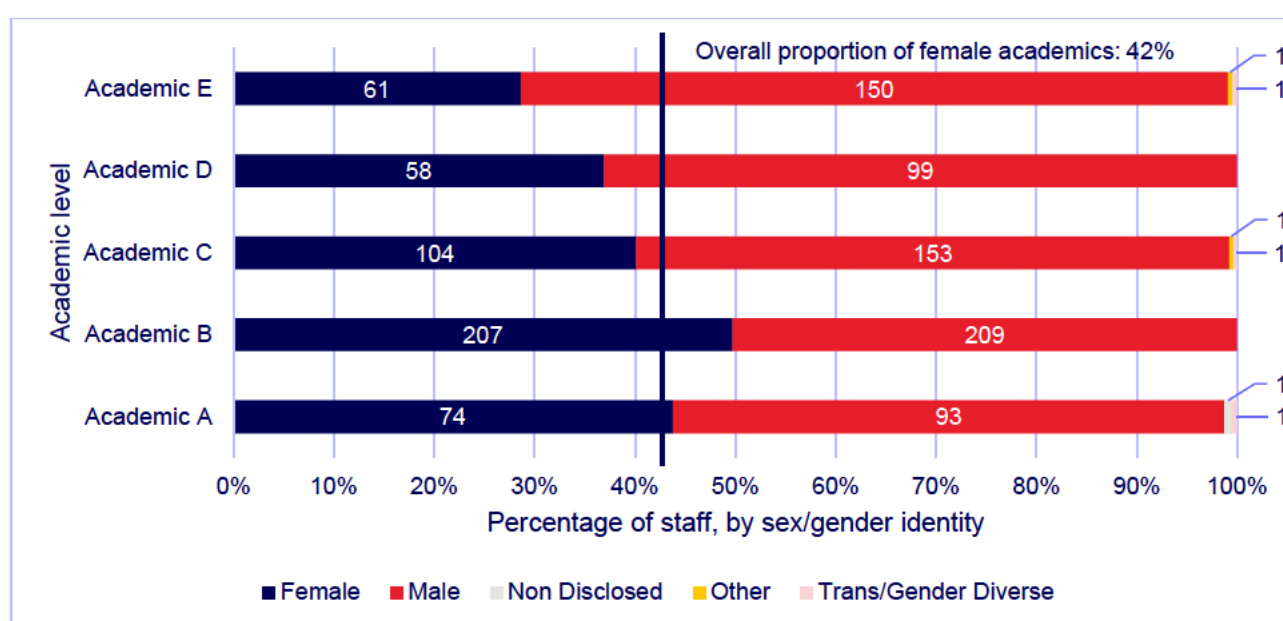


Figure 3: STEMM academic staff, by sex/gender identity and level (December 2025)

Some STEMM Schools have achieved an overall 40:40:20 gender distribution of academic staff (PCPM, AISSC, SHBS and SSCI). But only two (PCPM and SHBS) have achieved a proportional (or greater) representation of females at level E.

Of STEMM Schools, SENG has the greatest deficit of female staff at level E, with 15 of 73 positions held by women (21%) (Figure 4).¹⁰

⁹ STEMM Schools include:

- Engineering (SENG)
- Health and Biomedical Sciences (SHBS)
- Science (SSCI)
- Computing Technologies (SCT)
- Fashion and Textiles (F&T)
- Architecture and Urban Design (AUD)
- Property, Construction and Project Management (PCPM)
- Accounting, Information Systems & Supply Chain (AISSC)

¹⁰ The School has no 'non disclosed' staff.

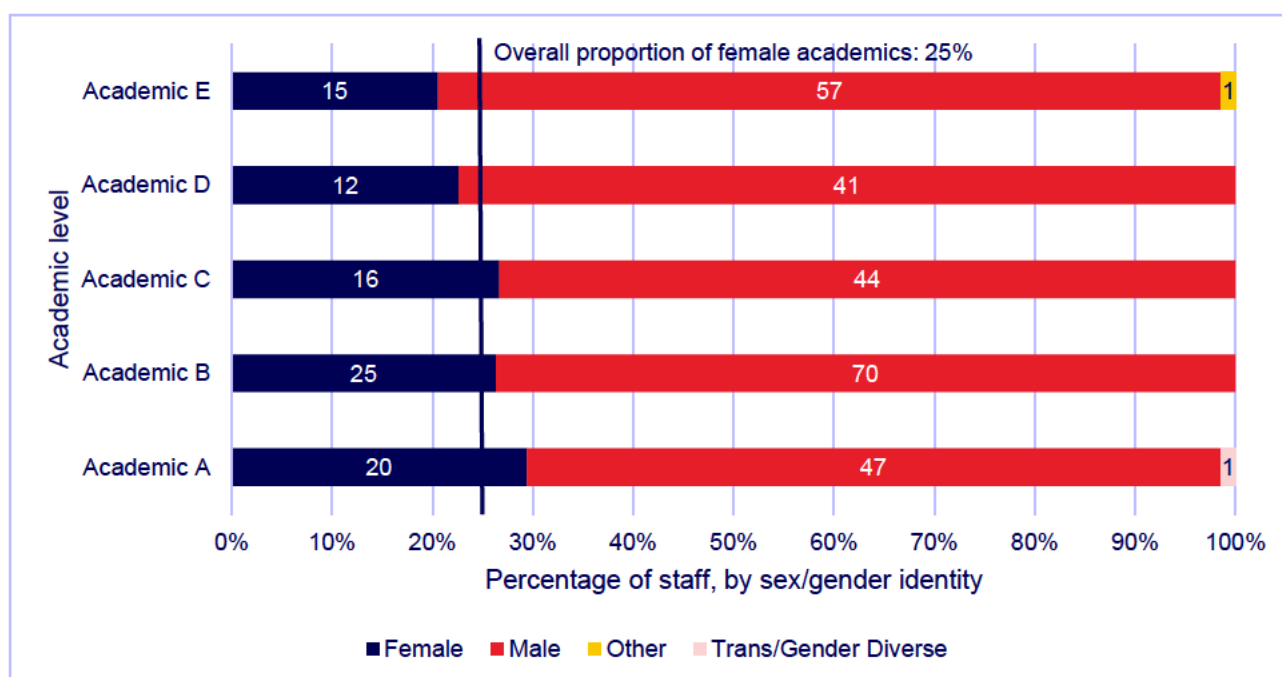


Figure 4: Engineering academic staff, by sex/gender identity and level (December 2025)

However, this is reflective of the low numbers of females overall (88 of 349, or 25%). Therefore, though low, the number of females at E is roughly proportional to the number of females, overall—which is not true of other Schools. The challenge in this School remains one of recruitment, rather than of promotion, only.

In contrast, women hold 43% (115 of 269) of academic positions in SSCI, but only 30% of level E positions (Figure 5).¹¹

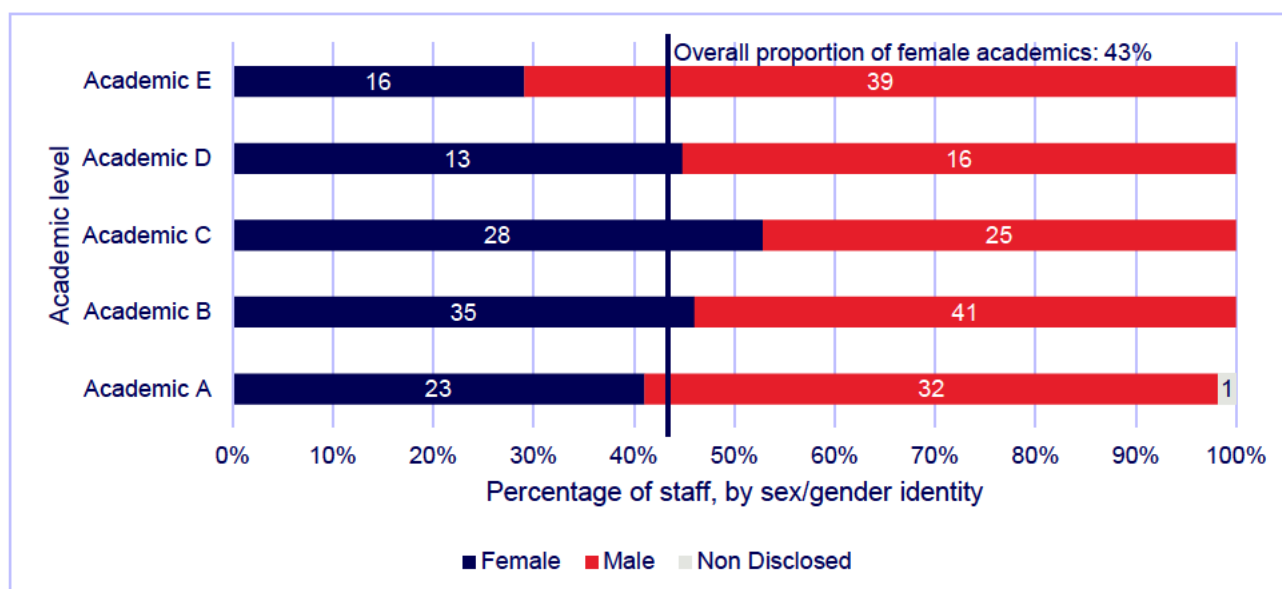


Figure 5: Science academic staff, by sex/gender identity and level (December 2025)

¹¹ The School has no staff who report being 'other', 'trans-' or 'gender-diverse'.

Similarly, females in AUD hold 43% (27 of 63) of positions, but only 22% at level E (Figure 6),¹² and those in SCT hold 33% (33 of 100) of positions, but only 17% at level E (Figure 7).¹³

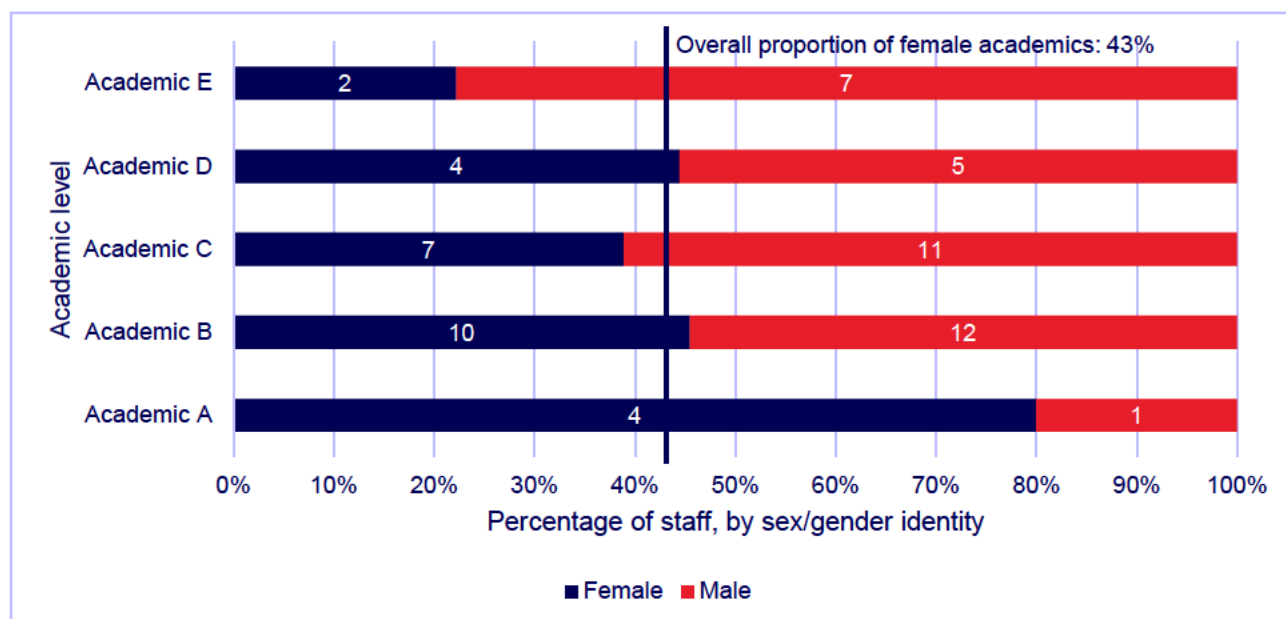


Figure 6: Architecture and Urban Design academic staff, by sex/gender identity and level (December 2025)

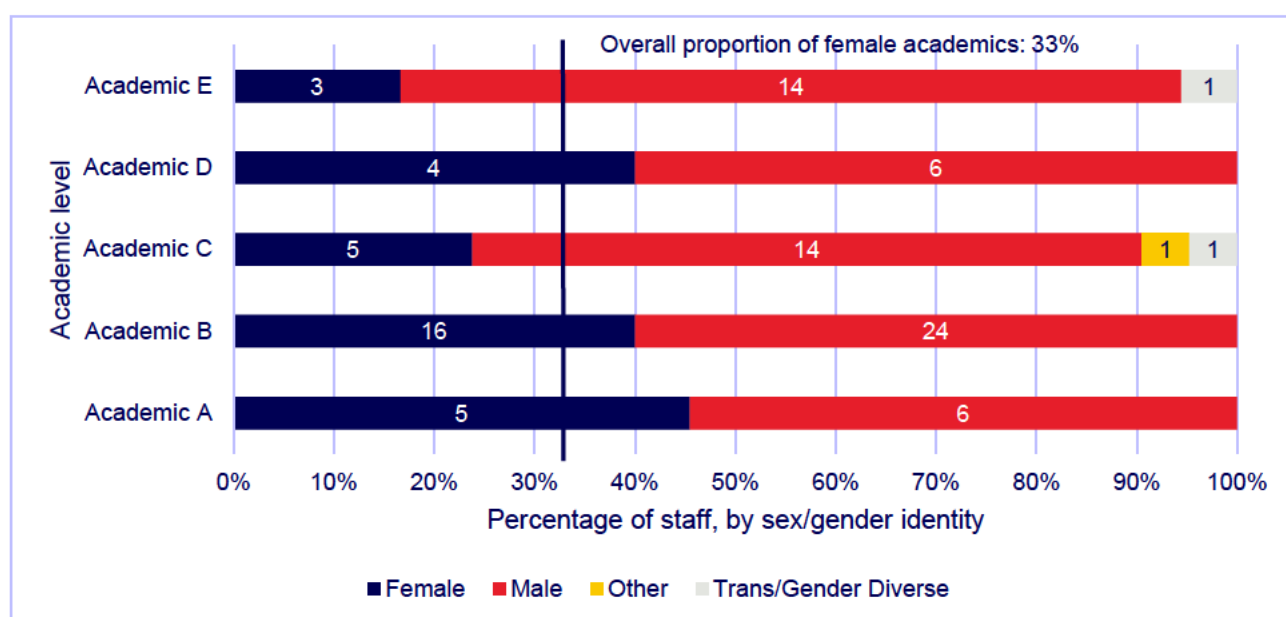


Figure 7: Computing Technology academic staff, by sex/gender identity and level (December 2025)

Unlike SENG, in SSCI, SCT and AUD, promotion appears a greater issue than recruitment—there are females “in the pipeline” but they do not seem to progress to the higher levels in proportional numbers.

¹² The School has no staff who report being ‘other’, ‘trans/gender diverse’, nor any ‘non-disclosed’.

¹³ The School has no ‘non disclosed’ staff.

Perhaps most problematically, F&T and AISSC have large numbers of females at lower academic levels and none, or almost none, at level E. In F&T, 73% (40 of 55) of academic staff are female, but there are no females at academic level E,¹⁴ (Figure 8).¹⁵

Similarly, in AISSC, 41% (34 of 83) of academic staff are female, but only two of 13 (15%) of level E positions are held by females. Twenty-three of the 34 positions held by females (68%) are at the lowest academic level in the School—level B (Figure 9).¹⁶

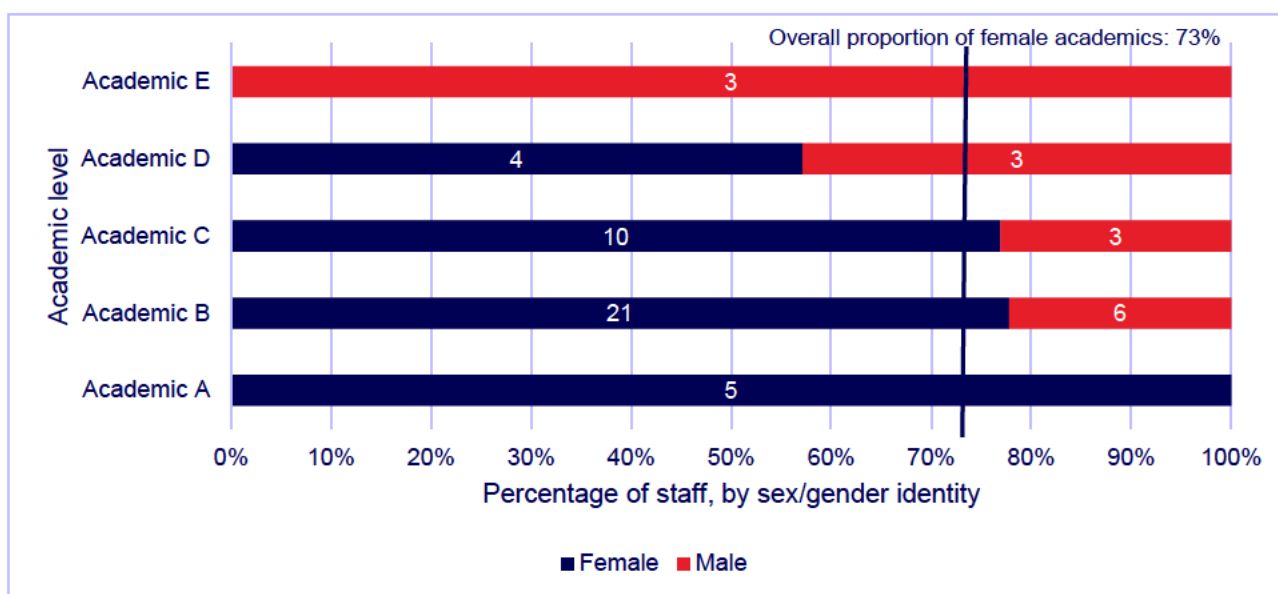


Figure 8: Fashion and Textiles academic staff, by sex/gender identity and level (December 2025)

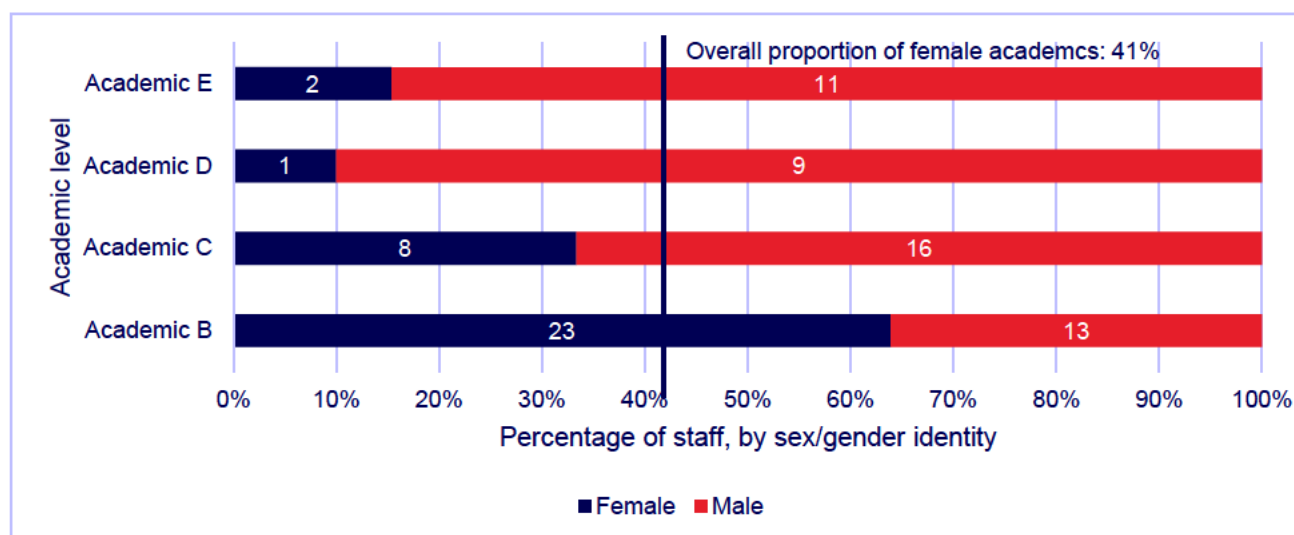


Figure 9: Accounting, Information Systems & Supply Chain academic staff, by sex/gender identity and level (December 2025)

¹⁴ There is one woman at level E who is currently seconded to an executive role in the College of Design and Social Context and, as such, is not included in these figures. She came to RMIT as an external appointment at level E, rather than being promoted from D to E through RMIT's processes.

¹⁵ The School has no staff who report being 'other' or 'trans/gender diverse', nor any 'non disclosed'.

¹⁶ The School has no staff who report being 'other' or 'trans/gender diverse', nor any 'non disclosed'.

This analysis highlights persistent gender imbalances at senior academic levels in STEMM. While some Schools have achieved proportional representation at level E, most exhibit significant gaps. These findings underscore the need for targeted strategies addressing promotion pathways to ensure equitable representation of women and gender-diverse staff at the highest levels of academia.

Action

Item 1.3. goes some way to addressing these issues in STEMM.

Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) Schools¹⁷

HASS Schools have a slightly higher proportion of female academics, overall (397 of 708, or 56%) and similar numbers of females and males at most academic levels. Though, females continue to cluster at the lower levels and are underrepresented at level E (Figure 10).

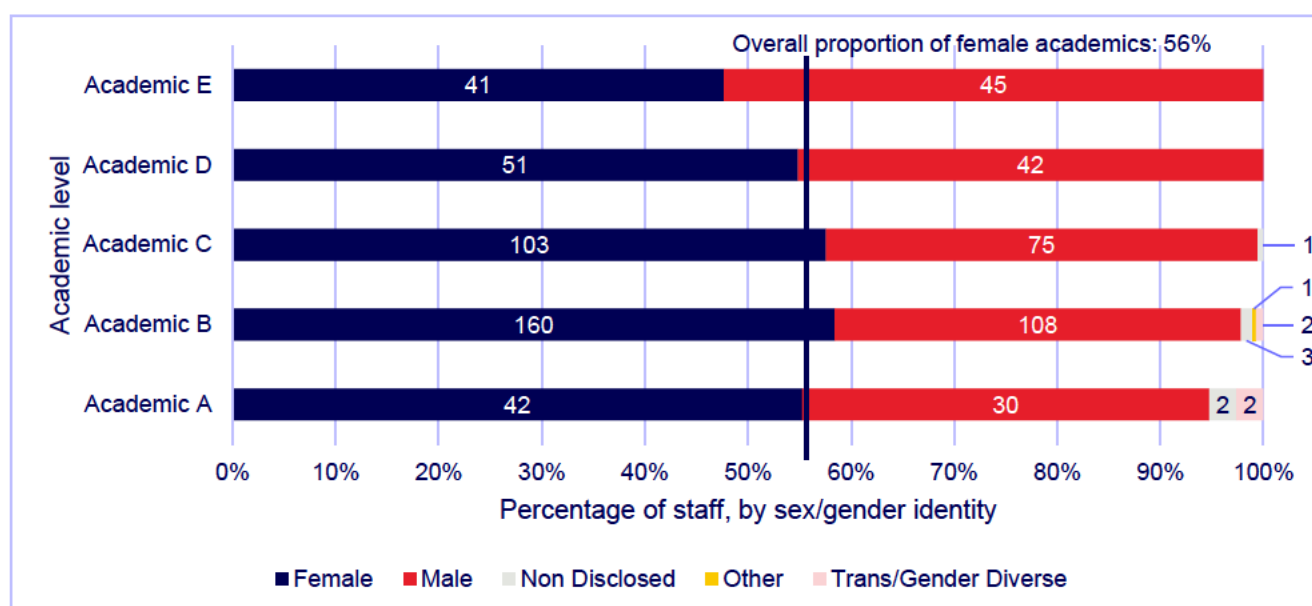


Figure 10: HASS academic staff, by sex/gender identity and level (December 2025)

GUSS has more females than males, overall (66% female, 32% males, 1% trans/gender-diverse or non-disclosed), and 62% females at level E (13 of 21), bucking the trend for the rest of the University. Law also has more females, overall (60%), and more females at level E (three of four). The GSBL, along with Design and Art, have the same (or similar) numbers of females and males at level E.

In contrast, EFM and Management have similar gender distributions to the STEMM Schools. In EFM, females hold 29% of level E positions, despite holding 53% of academic positions (Figure 11).¹⁸

¹⁷ HASS Schools include:

- Economics, Finance and Marketing (EFM)
- Graduate School of Business and Law (GSBL)
- Management
- Media and Communication (M&C)
- Design
- Art
- Global, Urban and Social Studies (GUSS)
- Law

¹⁸ The School has no staff who report being 'other' or 'trans/gender diverse', nor any 'non disclosed'.

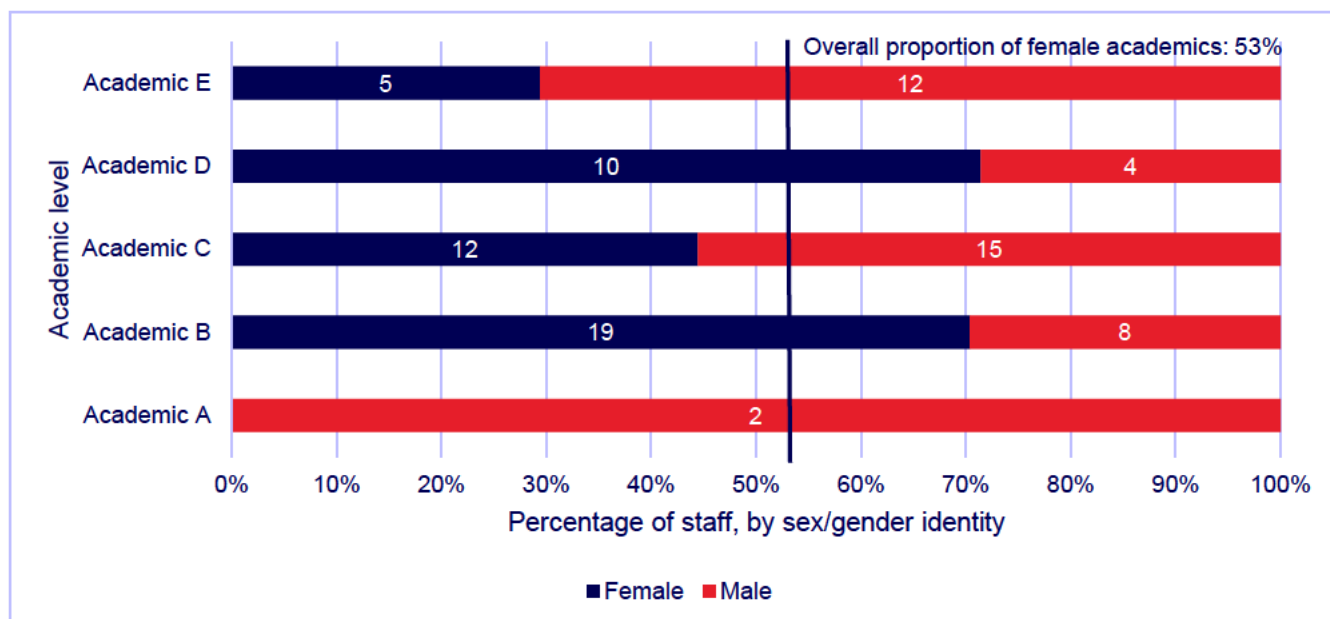


Figure 11: Economics, Finance and Marketing academic staff, by sex/gender identity and level (December 2025)

Similarly, in Management, females hold 25% of level E positions, despite holding 50% of academic positions (Figure 12).¹⁹

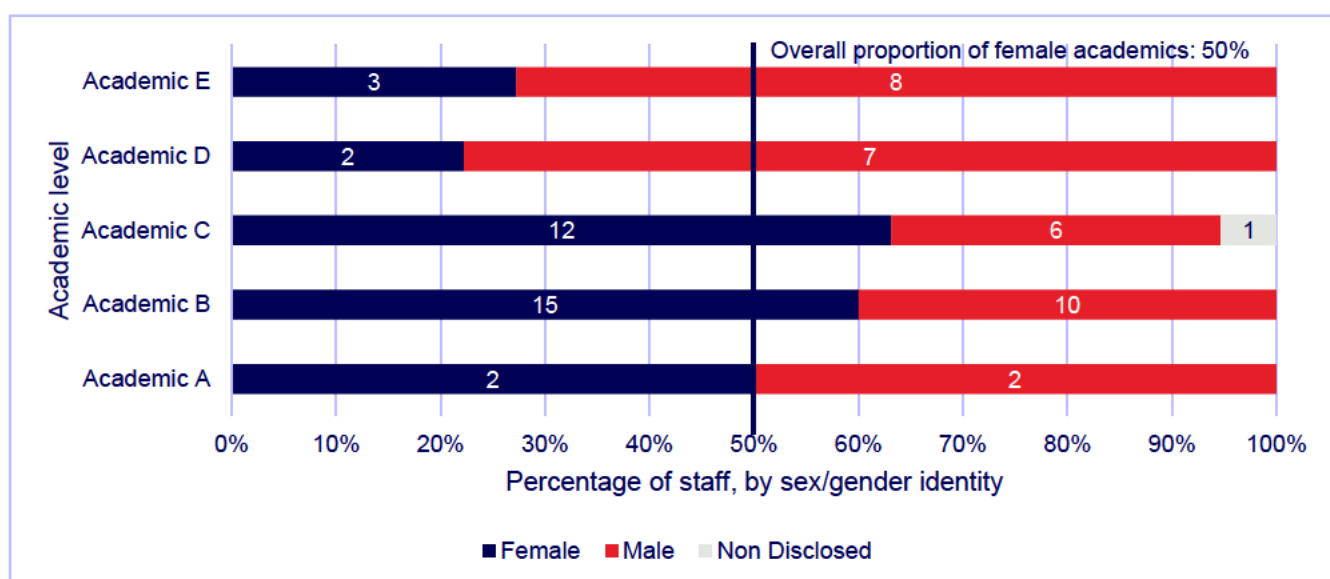


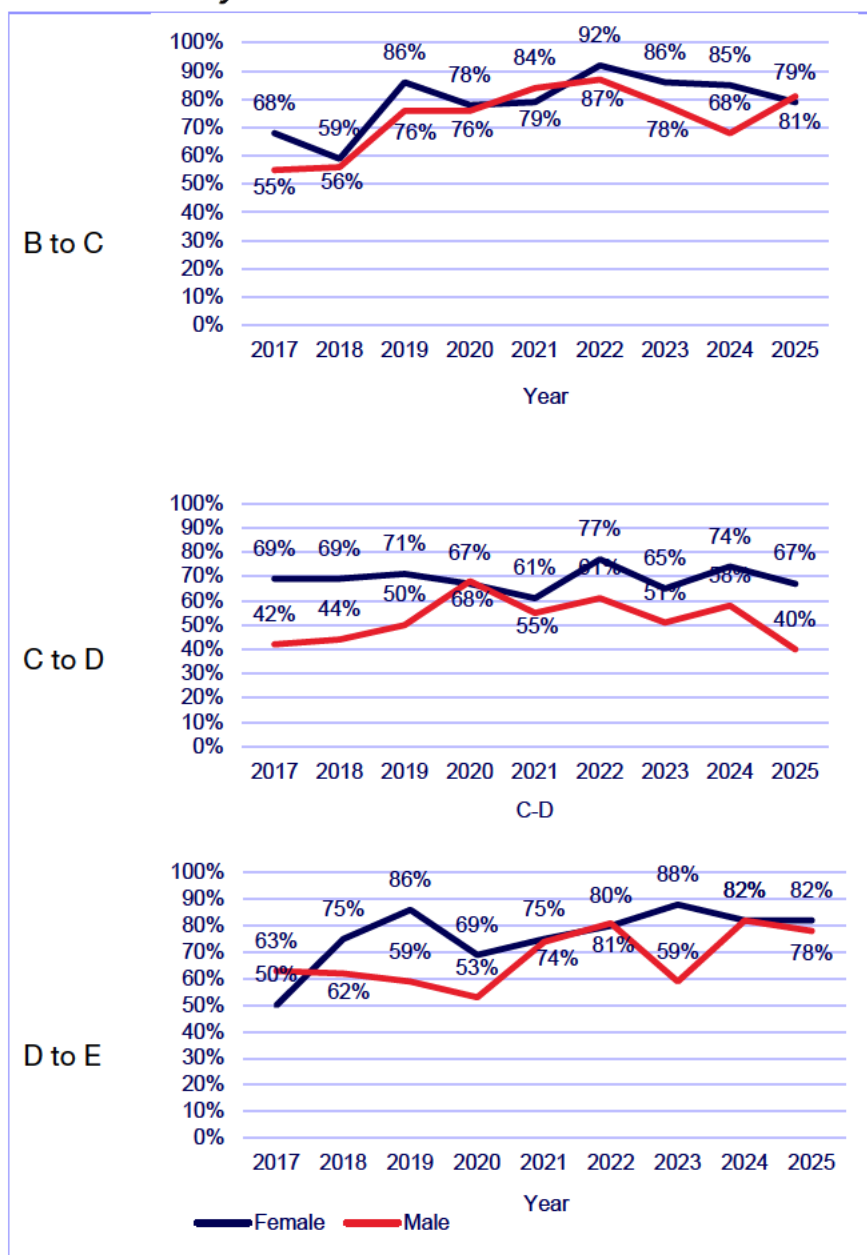
Figure 12: Management academic staff, by sex/gender identity and level (December 2025)

Compared with STEMM, HASS demonstrates stronger overall gender balance, with females making up the majority of academic staff and achieving parity at level E in several Schools. But similar patterns of underrepresentation persist at level E in some HASS disciplines, indicating that the advancement of females to the highest academic ranks is a challenge not confined to STEMM. This suggests that systemic factors influencing career progression affect the University, broadly, requiring institution-wide strategies.

¹⁹ The School has no staff who report being 'other' or 'trans/gender diverse'.

2.2. Academic promotion

Gender identity

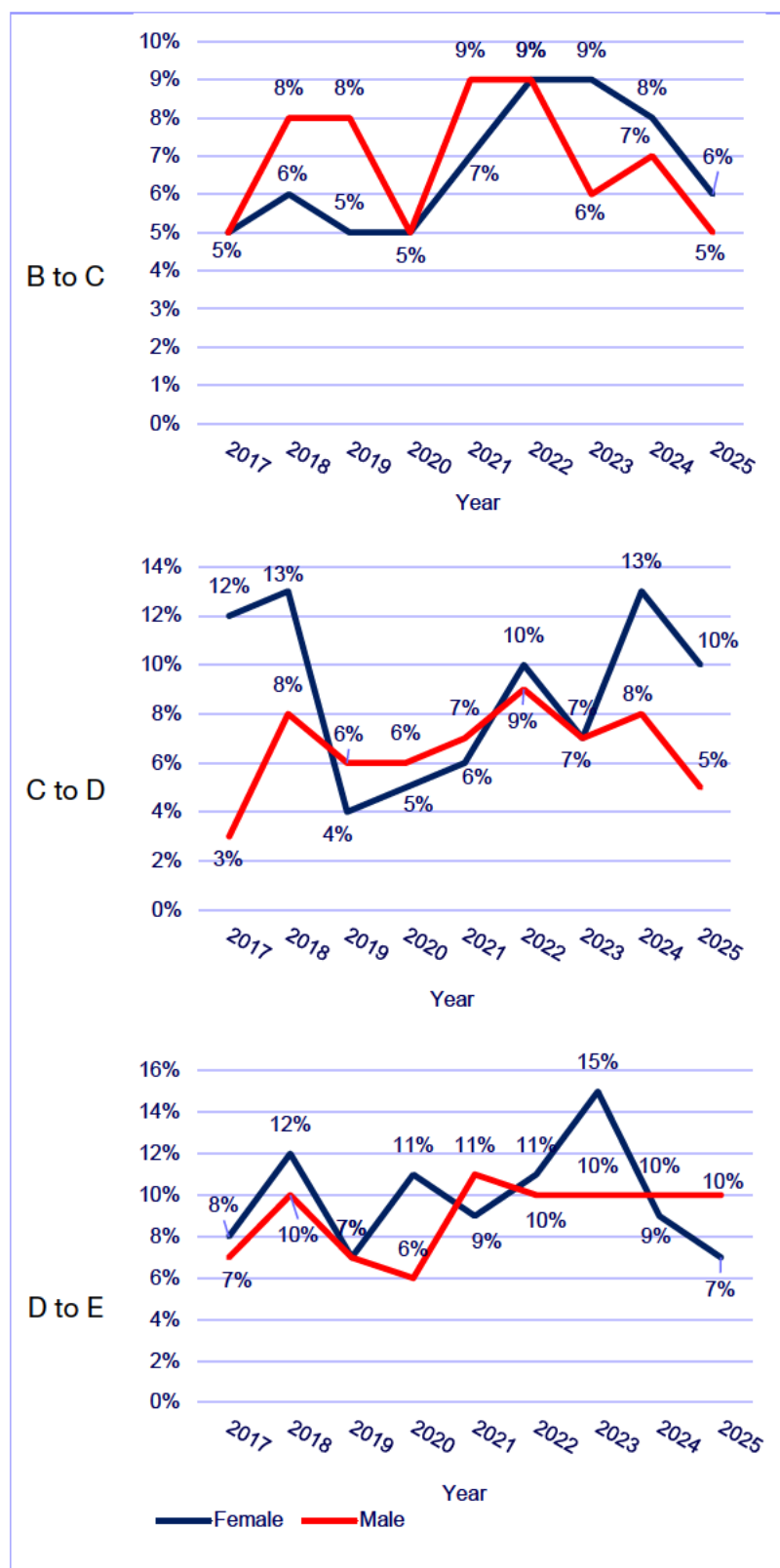


Females' academic promotion success rates²⁰ have generally been higher than males', over time, particularly when applying from levels C (Figure 13).²¹

Figure 13: Academic promotion success rates (relative to applications), by sex, by level (2017-2025)

²⁰ It should be noted that the average success rate for promotion from levels C to D (53%, 2017-2025) has been significantly lower than that for B to C (80%) and D to E (80%) over the same period, for all genders, for some time. Promotion from C to D requires demonstration of national, and emerging international impact. This is a recognised "hurdle" in the careers of academics. Nonetheless, it highlights the need for targeted support for this transition.

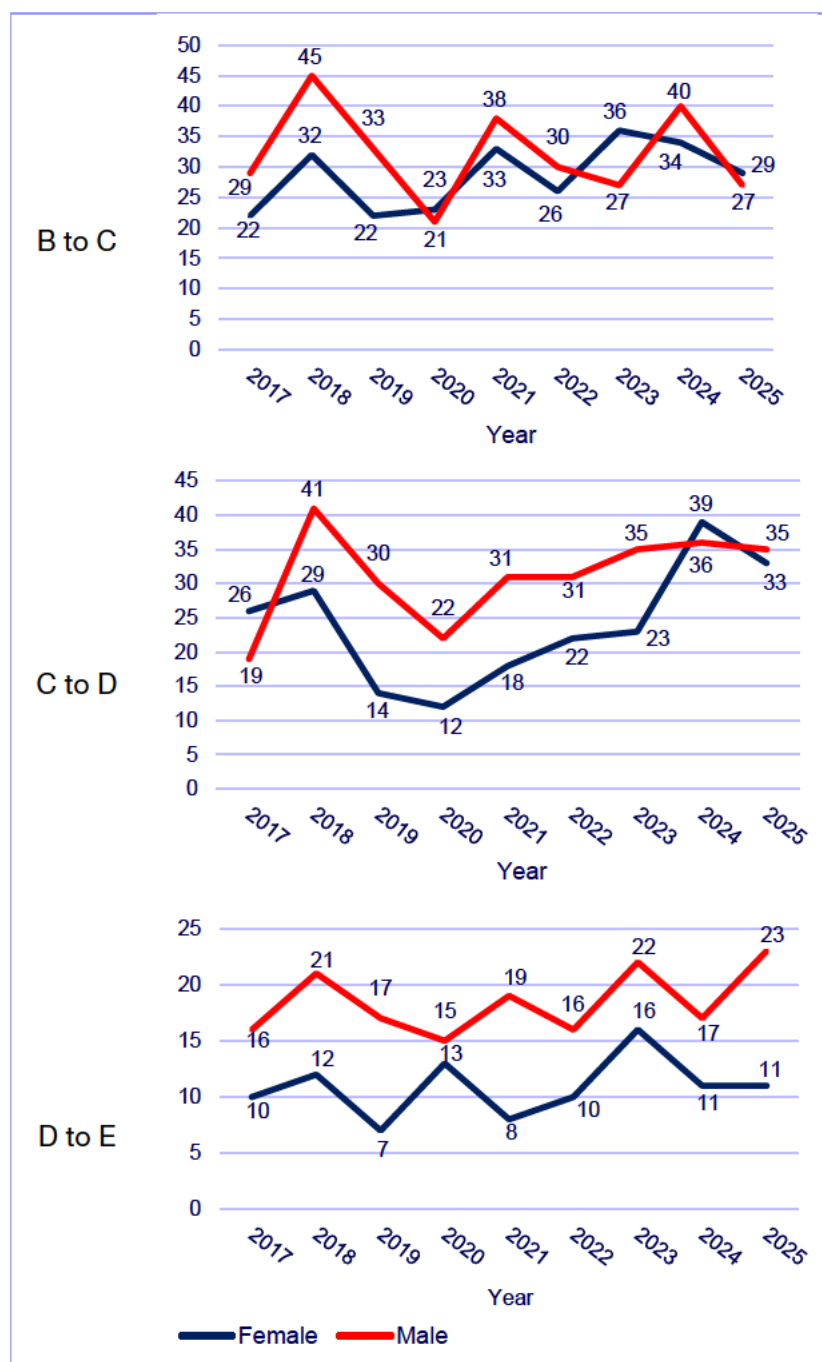
²¹ Although options for broader gender identity disclosure were available to applicants, only very low numbers of applicants identified outside of the binary. As such, data relating to staff of diverse genders has been excluded, for clarity.



When looking at promotion success rates as a proportion of the total academic population (Figure 14), the same trend remains—except for in promotion to level E over the last two years, in particular.

The most significant issue for female staff appears to lie in the numbers who are choosing to *apply*—particularly to level E—relative to male staff.

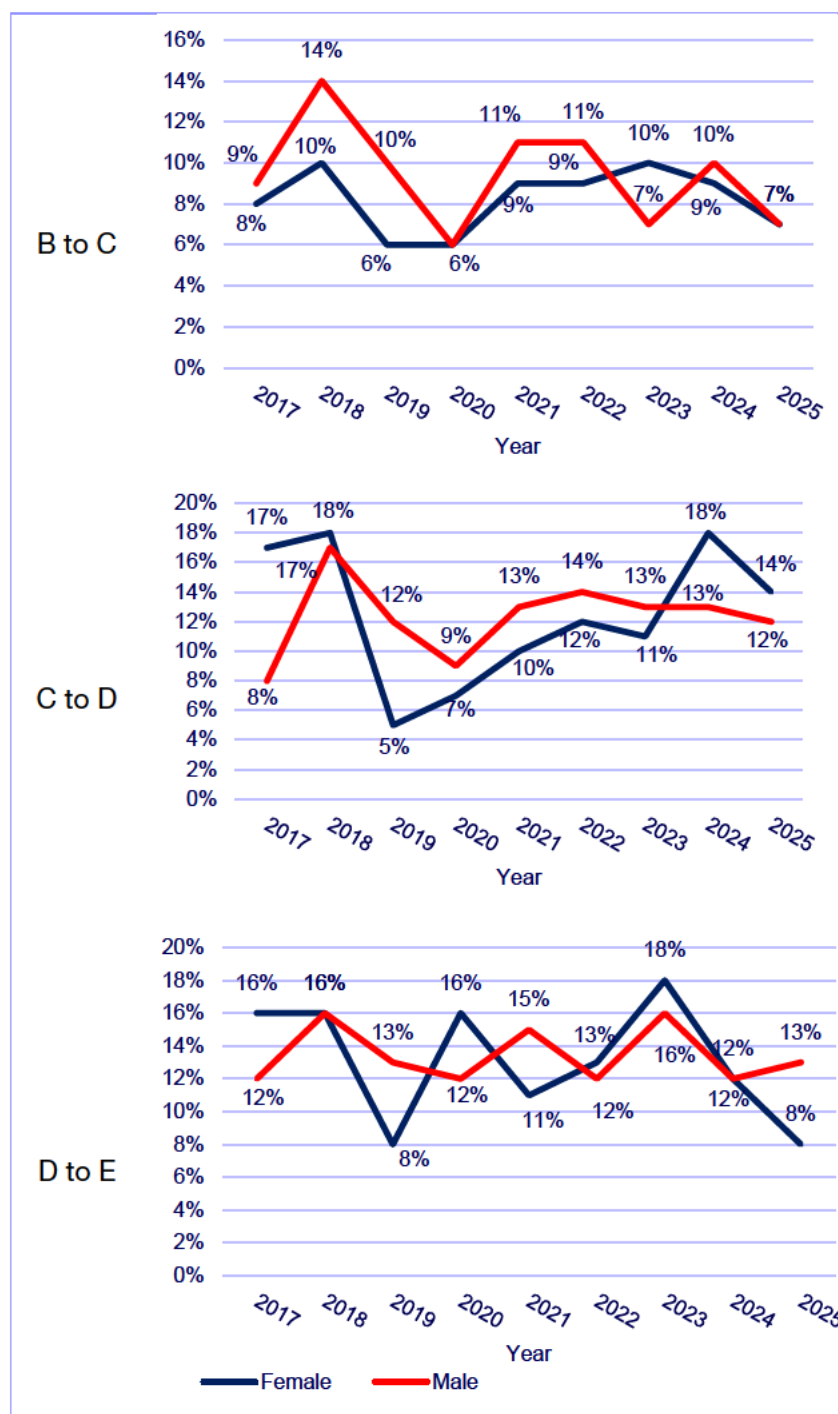
Figure 14: Academic promotion success rates (relative to total academic population at level), by sex, by level (2017-2025)



On average, for 2017–2025, females applied for promotion from B to C and C to D in slightly smaller numbers than males (47.2% and 48.6% of applications, respectively)—but have kept pace with males applying from/to these academic levels in the last few years (Figure 15).

But much smaller numbers of females than males have traditionally applied, and continue to apply, for promotion from level D to E—in 2025, for example, only 32% of applications were from females.

Figure 15: Academic promotion applications, by sex, by level (2017–2025)



When looking at promotion application rates as a proportion of the total academic population (Figure 16),²² again, it can be seen that females apply at similar rates for promotion to level C, but often at lower rates for promotion to D and E.²³

While promotion success rates for females are high, the persistent gap in the number of applications for promotion to the Level E from females signals a critical barrier to gender equity.

Structural or cultural factors may discourage female staff from seeking advancement to the highest academic ranks. The fact that joining the Professoriate is a significant career achievement, and women tend to wait longer for promotion, in general (Khan 2021), may be a contributor, here.

Addressing these barriers is essential to achieving sustained gender balance in leadership.

Figure 16: Academic promotion application rates (relative to total academic population at level), by sex, by level (2017-2025)

²² In relation to this graph, it should be noted that the applications are shown as a proportion of the total academic population at the relevant level for the previous year—they are *not* shown as a proportion of the academics shown to be at the relevant level in Figure 2.

²³ One exception can be seen in 2020, when females applied at higher rates, relative to the level D population, for promotion to level E, suggesting something about the COVID-19 pandemic potentially made this possible.

Intersectional insights

Figure 17 shows that the success rates for CALD and non-CALD²⁴ academics have varied relative to one another, year-on-year, but their average success rates for 2018–2025 are identical (70%).

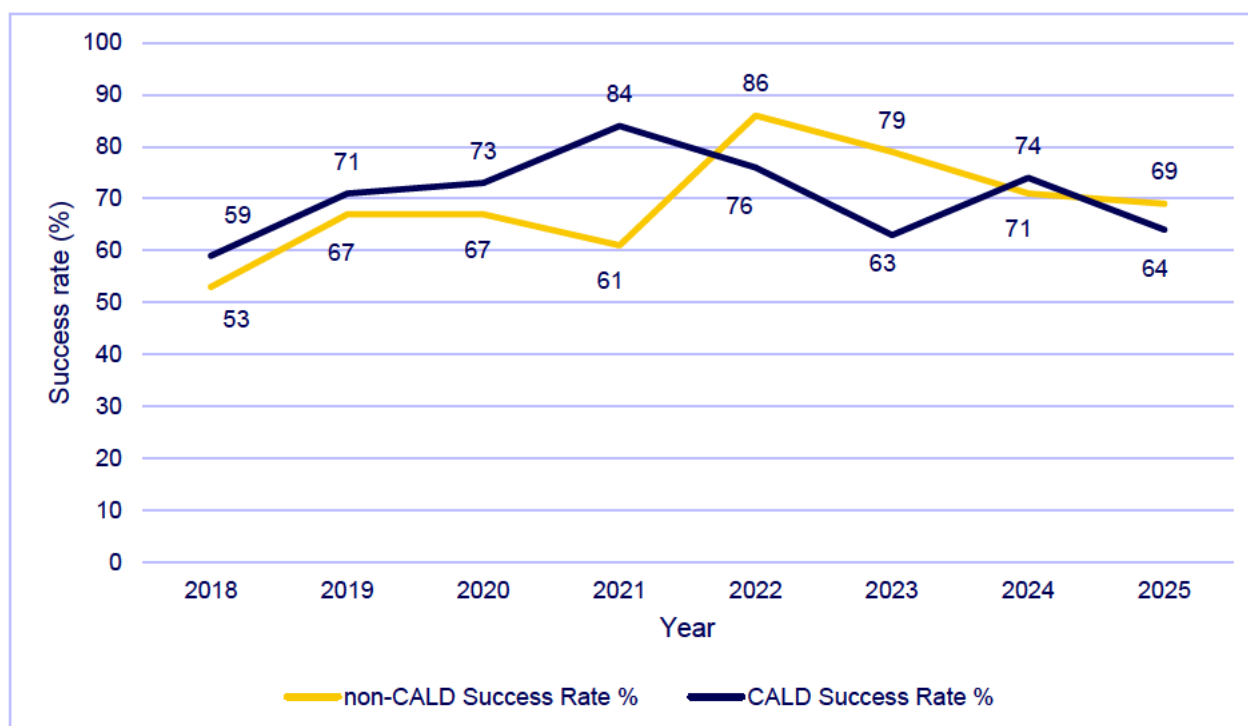


Figure 17: CALD/non-CALD academic promotion success rates (relative to applications), all sexes/gender identities and levels (2019–2025)

Since 2021, CALD staff have submitted more applications than non-CALD (Table 5), perhaps reflecting the increasing cultural diversity within RMIT's academic community.

Table 5: CALD/non-CALD academic promotion applicants, successful applicants and success rates (relative to applications), all sexes/gender identities and levels (2019–2025)

Year	non-CALD			CALD		
	Applicants (#)	Successful (#)	Success rate (%)	Applicants (#)	Successful (#)	Success rate (%)
2018	94	50	53	81	48	59
2019	63	42	67	56	40	71
2020	64	43	67	45	33	73
2021	74	45	61	73	62	84
2022	62	56	86	74	56	76
2023	84	66	79	78	49	63
2024	78	55	71	103	76	74
2025	72	50	69	89	57	64

²⁴ Per the Data Explainer, CALD-identifying applicants are those who reported not being born in Australia and who indicated that they spoke a language other than English at home.

However, CALD females submitted the lowest number of applications across 2019-2025, and CALD males submitted the highest (see Table 6).²⁵

Table 6: CALD/non-CALD academic promotion applicants and success rates (relative to applications), by sex (2019–2025)

Year	non-CALD				CALD			
	Applicants (#)		Success rate (%)		Applicants (#)		Success rate (%)	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
2019	29	34	76	59	13	43	92	65
2020	31	30	71	63	17	28	76	67
2021	31	43	61	60	28	44	86	84
2022	30	28	83	82	74	76	76	
2023	84		79		78		63	
2024	78		71		103		74	
2025	72		69		34	55	70	60

Despite this, CALD females have enjoyed the highest success rates of all applicants, peaking at 92% in 2019, while non-CALD males experienced the lowest (Figure 18)²⁶.

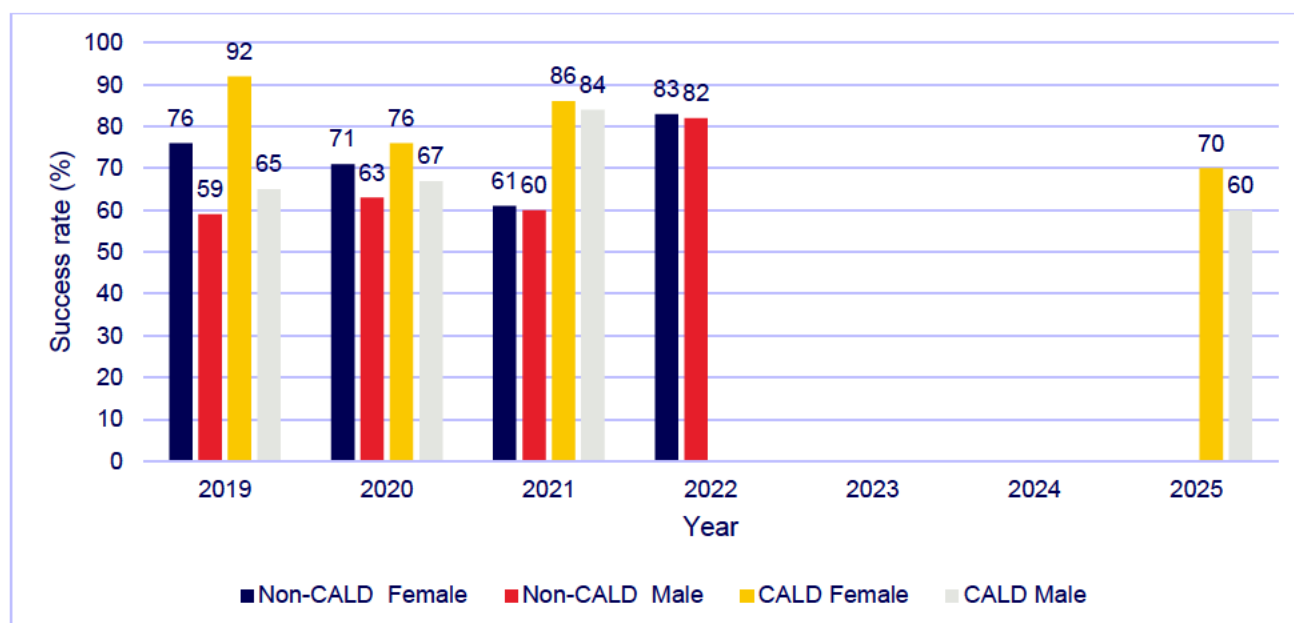


Figure 18: CALD/non-CALD academic promotion success rates (relative to applications), by sex (2019–2025)

²⁵ Data relating to gender identity and cultural diversity were not reported consistently in the source report (Academic promotion reports to the University Academic Promotions Committee) across the full reporting period—no gender data is available from 2022, onwards, except in the case of non-CALD staff in 2022 and CALD staff in 2025. Accordingly, only available data are reported. Year-on-year comparisons should be interpreted cautiously due to changes in data availability and categorisation over time.

²⁶ As above.

There are no data available for CALD staff by sex/gender identity and level. Data by level for all sexes/gender identities, CALD/non-CALD, is available for 2021 and 2024 (Figure 19 and Table 7). Comparing years, the total number of applications (both CALD/non-CALD) were higher in 2024. For both years, applications from CALD staff exceeded those of non-CALD, except at E in 2021. The success rates for CALD/non-CALD staff were generally higher at all levels in 2021 than 2024. CALD staff were more successful than non-CALD at C and E in both years, and in D in 2021.

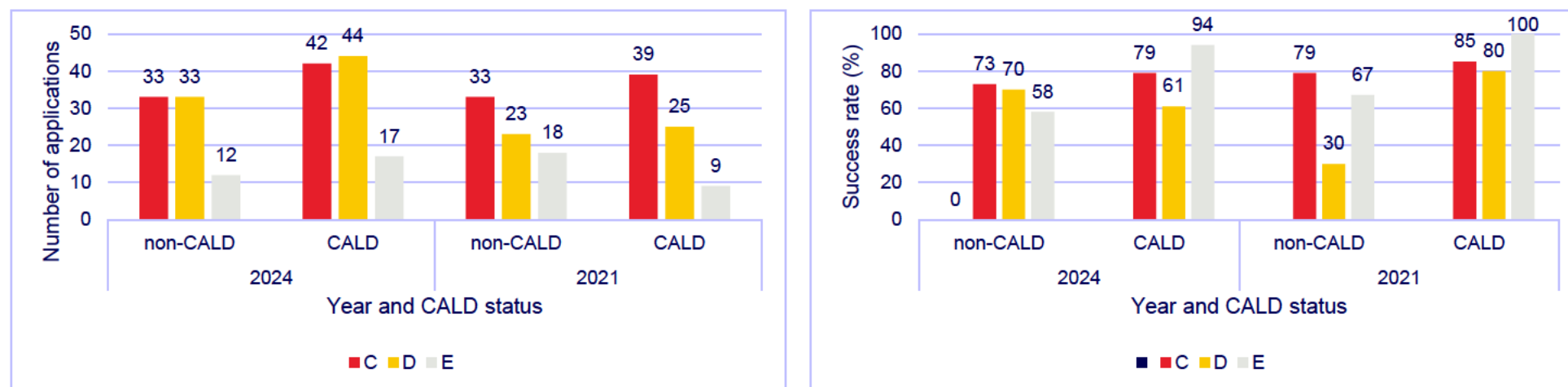


Figure 19: CALD/non-CALD academic promotion applications and success rates (relative to applications), all sexes/gender identities, by level (2021/2024)

Table 7: CALD/non-CALD academic promotion applicants, successful applicants and success rates (relative to applications), all sexes/gender identities, by level (2021/2024)

Level	2024		2021		2024		2021		2024		2021	
	non-CALD	CALD	non-CALD	CALD	non-CALD	CALD	non-CALD	CALD	non-CALD	CALD	non-CALD	CALD
	Applicants (#)				Successful applicants (#)				Success rate (%)			
C	33	42	33	39	24	33	26	33	73	79	79	85
D	33	44	23	25	23	27	7	20	70	61	30	80
E	12	17	18	9	7	16	12	9	58	94	67	100
All levels	78	103	74	73	54	76	45	62	69	74	61	85

In order to put these data in context, we would wish to determine the cultural profile of our cohort of academic senior leaders—but, due to data limitations, this is not possible.

Action

Item 1.8. reflects our push to strengthen the collection, analysis and reporting of comprehensive diversity data in relation to promotions.

Notwithstanding this, local knowledge provides some indication of the overall staff cultural profile. This, together with the limited promotion data for CALD/non-CALD staff by level (Table 7, Figure 19), indicates a greater number of CALD staff have been promoted to D and E in recent years—suggesting that there is positive movement, and that the pipeline of CALD academic staff for future executive opportunities is increasing.

However, this movement appears to be localised to the more culturally-diverse Schools in the University (mostly STEMM Schools) and happening faster for male staff than female. This could be because the areas of change are both male-dominated and culturally-diverse. Alternatively, it could be due to CALD people's lower representation, in general—which results in fewer senior role models, less access to influential networks and mentors and a limited voice in decision-making. Indeed, the University community has acknowledged the progress made in the percentage of women in senior leadership positions, but noted that the leadership still does not reflect the diversity in that community:

'The leaders we have are great, but there needs to be more diversity. The lack of people of colour in leadership rings very strong—we are an Australian university with international perspectives, we need more voices to be part of shaping and understanding student culture on campus.'

- Staff Survey 2025 respondent²⁷

Further to this, as shown in Figure 20, academics of colour²⁸, both male and female, are less likely than their peers to agree that they have 'equitable opportunities to succeed at RMIT'.

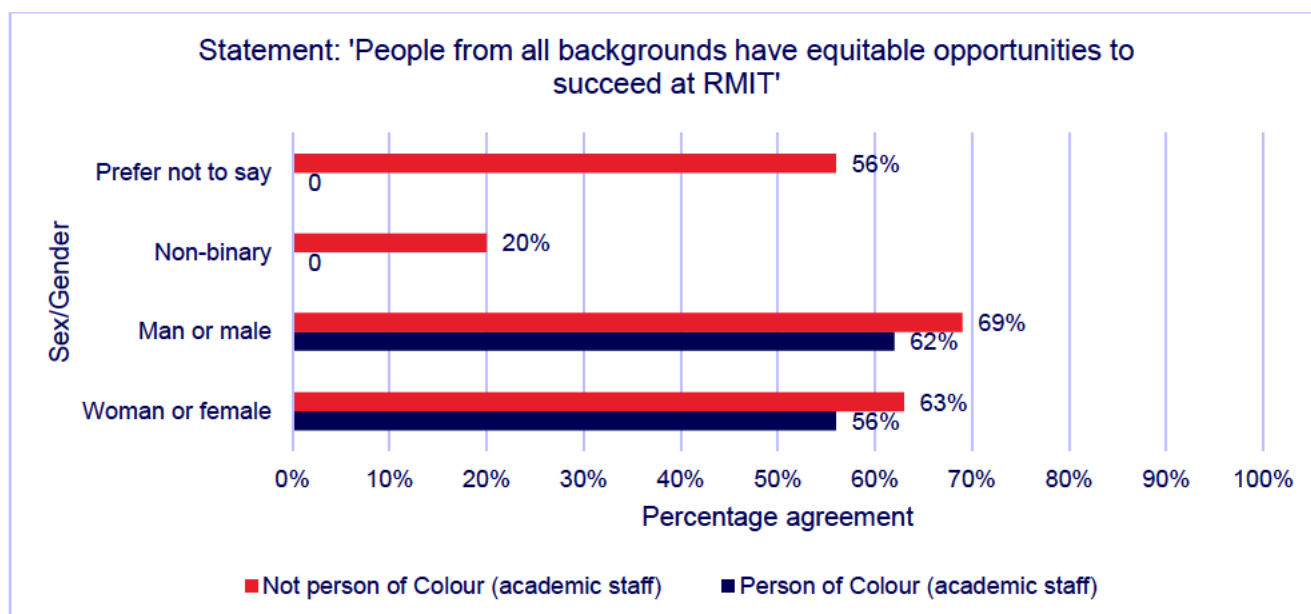


Figure 20: Staff Survey 2025 responses (academic staff) - experiences of inclusion, by gender and racial identity

²⁷ No demographic data is available for free-text responses to the Staff Survey as these responses are provided in a randomised format, to protect confidentiality.

²⁸ It is recognised that CALD identification in promotion data (based on indicators such as country of birth and language spoken at home) is not equivalent to self-identification as 'person of colour' in the Staff Survey. These measures are therefore used in a complementary way to provide a broader, albeit imperfect, picture of diversity.

These issues compound for CALD females. Where data are available, the same trends are seen for CALD females as non-CALD. They have applied in lower numbers than males for senior levels, yet more females have been successful than males across all levels.²⁹ To summarise:

- Success rate: CALD females > non-CALD females > CALD males > non-CALD males
- Number of applications: CALD males > non-CALD males > non-CALD females > CALD females

It is possible that CALD females are waiting even longer than non-CALD females to apply, and are even more “over-ready” (Kahn, 2021)—this may be because they perceive senior positions are even less available to them (given the lack of role models) and, hence, lack the inspiration and confidence to apply. They may also be contending with the challenges of relocation to Australia which, while broad and individual, can include: having a limited understanding of the higher education sector in Australia, having a limited/no support system to help care for children and the stresses of trying to “fit in”. These barriers may reduce the time and opportunity CALD females have to apply for promotion, delaying the progress of their careers, and having the knock-on effects of reduced salary and lower superannuation on retirement. Perversely, waiting longer to apply may enhance their chances of success over other cohorts.

Action

Item 1.7. addresses challenges related to timely promotion applications for women—and CALD women, in particular.

2.3. Staff experiences of career progression for women

A series of listening sessions and a workshop were held with academics and other key stakeholders to understand experiences of career progression for women and gender-diverse people—particularly those looking to move from levels C to D and D to E—as discussed in the Data Explainer. The sessions included participants with diverse backgrounds and lived experiences, including experiences of cultural/racial marginalisation and neurodivergence. These fora surfaced the below issues.

Career pathways and career development support

Workshop participants noted that many women academics come through casual teaching or fixed-term contracts (e.g. Academic Career Development Fellows, level A) before securing ongoing positions, creating disadvantages in research track record compared to men-dominated, traditional academic pathways from PhD, onwards. Participants highlighted that women and gender-diverse academics often faced significant barriers to career progression—including where career disruptions (due to parental leave, caring responsibilities and health issues) create gaps in publication records that are difficult to overcome when promotion criteria emphasise sustained, high-volume research output.

These barriers are compounded by systemic gaps in support—a recurring theme, particularly from level C-D academics, was the lack of guidance and support (career conversations, mentoring, sponsorship, encouragement, etc.) to position themselves for advancement opportunities. One workshop participant further noted that:

‘If you’re a woman with a disability and neurodiverse, career progression barriers feel insurmountable.’³⁰

- woman academic, level D

For those who were successful in advancing to level E, the C to D transition was seen as a key barrier that, once overcome, made the final step a possibility. One participant said:

²⁹ Unfortunately, as the representation of CALD females in the academic workforce is unknown due to limited data, it is not possible to know whether CALD females are applying for promotion in numbers representative of their proportion in the overall population or not.

³⁰ Experiences of career progression for staff with disability and neurodivergence are further analysed in Key Barrier 4.

'C to D was another thing. That took time. You need to do the work. To be honest, I really didn't think becoming a Professor was a reality for me, before I reached level D.'

- woman academic, level E

Action

Items 1.1. and 1.3. address challenges related to career pathways and development support.

Stereotypes and feminised work

Listening group and workshop participants (academics A-E) repeatedly expressed a sense that they were shouldering non-promotable tasks disproportionately, compared to their male colleagues, with one workshop participant saying:

'Women and gender diverse academics often take on more teaching, pastoral care and committee work—tasks that are less valued for promotion compared to research outputs.'

- woman academic, level C

Participants described voluntarily providing additional emotional support to students and colleagues, and being asked to serve on diversity committees or represent identity groups, limiting time for promotable tasks, like research (further discussed in Key barrier 3).

Promotion criteria were also seen by workshop participants as relying on narrow definitions of research and overlooking non-traditional pathways more typical for women, such as transitioning from professional practice into academia. One workshop participant noted:

'research criteria—understanding of "what is research"—is too narrow, and does not support non-traditional pathways, research commercialisation or professional practice.'

- women academic, level C

These structural factors intersect with persistent stereotypes about leadership and competence, creating barriers to recognition and advancement.

Action

Item 1.1. addresses challenges related to stereotypes and feminised work.

Achievement Relative to Opportunity (ARtO)—application and review process

Workshop discussions highlighted that applicants were often unclear about the circumstances in which they should apply for ARtO provisions, and how ARtO is considered during the promotion process. Staff also raised concerns about promotion panels lacking relevant representation and the ability to understand nuanced contributions—such as work undertaken On Country—resulting in achievements being overlooked, misunderstood, or undervalued.

Action

Item 1.2. addresses challenges related to the ARtO application and review process.

Discouraging cultures and environments

Workshop participants noted that certain cultures and environments undermine belonging and reduce women and gender-diverse academics' confidence, such that the possibility of promotion seems beyond reach. Experiences of microaggressions, harassment and exclusion were reported as significant barriers to career progression, that may also lead to attrition.

"Horror stories" of unsuccessful promotion attempts were described as creating reluctance to apply, further perpetuating inequity. One senior academic said:

'It's been a problem for years. It puts people off applying. These great people go up who everyone thought were a shoe-in and they don't get up, so they think: "why would I get up?" There's been some really good people who didn't get up who should have.'

- woman academic, level E

A lack of women, including women of colour, in senior roles was also described as reinforcing perceptions of limited opportunities and reducing access to role models to inspire and guide.

Action

Items 1.4. and 1.6. (as well as Key barrier 5 actions) address challenges related to discouraging cultures and environments.

Flexible work

Finally, the listening sessions and workshop highlighted that a lack of workplace flexibility can constrain career progression. Participants noted that women and gender-diverse academics often lacked adequate support for family and caring responsibilities when required to travel overseas to build research profiles, making such opportunities inaccessible. One workshop participant further noted:

'Unequal access to travel can limit career progression for employees with disabilities, who may face extra costs for accessible or more comfortable flights, raising concerns about... whether equal opportunity truly exists.'

- woman academic, level C

Compounding these challenges, limited availability of flexible work arrangements—such as job sharing—and managers' reluctance to embrace them were described as restricting academics' ability to balance professional and personal responsibilities while advancing their careers.

Flexible work, including intersectional analysis, is covered further in Key Barrier 2.

Action

Items 1.4. and 1.5. address challenges related to flexible work, including manager capability.

Summary

Despite sustained success in recruiting women and gender-diverse academics, RMIT continues to face systemic barriers to equitable progression to the most senior academic levels. University-wide data show persistent underrepresentation of women at level E, particularly where women experience multiple forms of marginalisation on the basis of factors such as race, disability, or neurodivergence. This contributes to the gender pay gap and limits diversity in academic leadership. This pattern is particularly evident in many STEMM Schools, but is also present across several HASS disciplines, indicating an institution-wide challenge. Promotion data suggest the key barrier is not success rates, which are high for women, but lower application rates to level E, pointing to structural, cultural and confidence-related deterrents. Qualitative evidence from workshops demonstrate gaps/challenges in mentoring and career development, leadership encouragement, distribution of undervalued work, processes, promotion criteria, cultures and environments and access to flexible work and mobility opportunities, particularly for level C and D academics. This evidence highlights the need for targeted, systemic and sustained interventions to support equitable progression to senior academic roles.

References

Khan, T. (2021). *Barriers to Career Progression in the Higher Education Sector: Perceptions of Australian Academics*. *Sustainability*, 13(11), 6255. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13116255>

Key barrier 1: Action Plan

Ref	Rationale/Evidence	Actions & Outputs	Timeframe (start & end)	Person/Group responsible for implementing action	Senior Leader accountable	Desired Outcomes and Impact
1.1	Staff reported that women and gender-diverse academics often shoulder disproportionate teaching, pastoral care and committee responsibilities—work that is less valued in promotion processes compared to research outputs. Research criteria were seen as too narrow in definition and relying too much on traditional metrics, overlooking non-traditional pathways more typical of women, those transitioning from industry, professional practice, and/or the creative fields, into academia.	Expand promotion criteria: Collaborate across Research, Education, and Colleges to broaden promotion criteria to value teaching and pastoral care, capture the full breadth of research outcomes and impact across the University, reduce reliance on sustained, high-volume research output (further emphasis on quality of outputs and impact), and explicitly account for career disruptions (parental leave, caring, health issues). Develop a mechanism to monitor the impact of broadened promotion criteria on actual promotion outcomes over time.	2026-Q1 2027 (Criteria re-design) Q2 2027- end 2027 (Implementation – Pilot, Review) Q2 2028 – (BAU)	Research and Innovation/Athena Swan team People & Culture Education Portfolio Colleges	ADVC, Gender Equity, DVC, Research and Innovation Vice President, People and Culture DVC Education College DVCs	Fairer recognition of contributions beyond traditional research outputs and pathways. Targets: Increased success rates for all genders C-D (success rates at all levels equal); increased applications and promotion of staff with non-traditional backgrounds/research outcomes/impacts, and in education/scholarship fields, at all levels; successful candidates having a more even distribution across disciplines and professions.
1.2	Staff reported that promotion applicants were unclear on the circumstances they should apply for an Achievement Relative to Opportunity (ARtO), and also how ARtO it is considered during the review process, leaving applicants uncertain about expectations and requirements.	Simplify and support processes: Provide clear ARtO guidelines and/or workshops and offer professional staff “consultation hours” to assist applicants. Seek stakeholder feedback (panel members, moderators, etc.) about how ARtO has been considered in relation to research, teaching, engagement/leadership /service in past	2026-2027	IDEA team Colleges and Schools Employee Experience and Capability	Vice President, People and Culture College DVCs	Increased confidence in the use of ARtO in the application process, and for panels and line managers on how it should be interpreted across the domains. Targets: Success rates are the same between those using ARtO or not.

		promotion rounds— how was it weighted and/or assessed? Use to identify if/where "feminised" work was considered, and adjust assessment guidelines accordingly.				
1.3	Staff reported that there is a lack of guidance (career conversations, mentoring, etc.) to assist academic staff to develop and navigate their careers to position themselves for promotion and advancement opportunities.	Mentoring/sponsorship and career-planning: - Continue early/mid-career research programs in CoBL. - Evaluate pilot STEM Academic Career Development program. - With learnings from the CoBL and STEM programs, establish a University-wide Academic Career Development Program, with discipline-specific support and early career planning (including mentorship and sponsorship approaches). Include intersectional considerations (e.g., cultural background, disability). - Deliver training for line managers on how to be an effective mentor/coach, provide career advice to their academic staff and ensure they have the time to do so.	2026-2028	Colleges/Schools (including line managers) Employee Experience and Capability Research and Innovation Capability	College DVCs Vice President, People and Culture DVCs, Research and Innovation and Education	Sustained, effective and equitable career development pathways, delivered by highly competent senior leaders. Staff feel more prepared and competent to navigate their careers and to apply for advancement opportunities at the right time – they know when they are ready. Target: improved all Staff Survey outcomes re support to undertake learning and/or career development opportunities, particularly for intersectional staff. An increased number and diversity of academic staff are successful in promotion at all levels, especially senior – they apply at the right time and have a much clearer understanding of expectations at each level.
1.4	Staff reported that promotion panels may lack the ability to understand nuanced contributions, resulting in achievements being overlooked, misunderstood or undervalued.	Deliver targeted training for line managers and panel members on inclusive practices, ARtO policies and recognition of diverse contributions.	2026-2027	IDEA team Academic Promotion team	Vice President, People and Culture	Ensure fair, informed decisions and stronger leadership accountability. Target: Increased use of ARtO in decision-making across the

				Employee Experience and Capability		employee lifecycle. A greater diversity of staff in senior and leadership positions and recognised through reward and career advancement opportunity.
1.5	Staff reported that structural barriers relating to workplace flexibility can constrain career progression. Women and gender-diverse academics often lack adequate support for family and caring responsibilities when required to travel overseas to build research profiles, making such opportunities inaccessible. Employees with disabilities face additional barriers, such as the extra costs of accessible or more comfortable travel.	Support for caring and accessibility needs: Explore innovative support/funding options for caring and disability-related travel and other needs associated with conferences and promoting research profile, in an equitable manner. Prioritise disciplines where conference and/or creative expositions are the primary vehicle for outputs/impact.	2026-2028	Finance R&I/Athena Swan team Colleges/Schools	Chief Financial Officer ADVC, Gender Equity College DVCs	Remove barriers to conference attendance and career progression for staff with caring responsibilities or disabilities. Target: improved all Staff Survey outcomes re support to undertake learning and/or career development opportunities, particularly for intersectional staff, and those with caring responsibilities. Increased number and diversity of academic staff are successful in promotion at all levels, especially senior, regardless of their carer and/or parental responsibilities.
1.6	Staff reported that a lack of women being represented in senior roles reinforces perceptions of limited opportunities and reduces access to role models who can inspire and guide. "Horror stories" of unsuccessful promotion attempts also create reluctance to apply, further perpetuating inequity.	Communications and role models: Profile successful promotion stories and share clear expectations, countering discouraging narratives. Ensure success stories include diverse representation (gender-diverse, disability, cultural diversity).	Q4 2026	Talent Acquisition University Communications	Vice President, People and Culture Executive Director, Communications	Build trust and confidence in future applicants. Target: More applications from underrepresented groups, and which are successful. A greater number and diversity of staff in leadership positions.
1.7	While promotion success rates for females are high, the persistent gap	Develop innovative approaches to promote timely applications: In	2027-2028	R&I/Athena Swan team	ADVC, Gender Equity	Ensuring success rates are not impacted, women and

	in the number of applications for promotion to Level E from females signals a critical barrier to gender equity. These issues compound for CALD females. It is possible that CALD females are waiting even longer than non-CALD females to apply, and are even more “over-ready”. Structural or cultural factors may discourage female staff from seeking advancement to the highest academic ranks. The fact that joining the Professoriate is a significant career achievement, and women tend to wait longer for promotion, in general (Khan 2021), may be a contributor, here.	partnership with the community, develop an innovative approach(es) to ensuring women and gender-diverse academics— particularly those who are culturally and racially marginalised—are supported and encouraged to apply for promotion in a timely manner once they meet the relevant criteria.				gender-diverse academics, including those who are culturally and racially marginalised, submit promotion applications in a timely way once eligible. Target: Reduction in the average time between eligibility and submission of a promotion application, alongside an increase in the proportion of eligible women and gender-diverse academics who apply for promotion within a defined timeframe (e.g., two years of meeting criteria).
1.8.	Through development of this application, it was found that diversity data in relation to academic promotion was not adequately collected or reported upon to allow for granular intersectional analysis.	Enhance data: Strengthen the collection, analysis and reporting of comprehensive diversity data at each stage of the academic promotion process to identify and address inequities, consistently year-on-year	2027-2028	R&I/Athena Swan team Talent Acquisition	ADVC Gender Equity Vice President, People and Culture	Promotion processes are informed by high-quality, intersectional diversity data that enables identification of inequities and targeted action. Target: Annual, consistent intersectional reporting of promotion outcomes, relative to the demographics of the community, is completed and reviewed, with actions identified to address any inequities.

Key barrier 2: Supporting parents and carers

1. Understanding this barrier

RMIT's second Cygnet Award application (2023) examined career fulfillment for parents and carers. Several key challenges were identified, including a lack of: flexibility, recognition of diverse experiences/non-linear trajectories and support for career development/managing career interruptions. In addition, differences in access to and use of leave entitlements were highlighted as contributing to inequity and uncertainty for parents and carers.

Since then, RMIT has met a range of *Gender Equality Action Plan 2022-25* targets in relation to support for parents, including those shown in Table 8.

Table 8: *GEAP 2022-25 targets and outcomes in relation to support for parents*

Target	Outcome
Maintaining the rate of return from parental leave	Improved from 93.3% in 2020 to 100% in 2025, surpassing the target rate of 95%.
Maintaining success rates for academic promotion of applicants who identify as parents/carers on par with the rates of non-carers	There were 68 academics who applied for promotion with carer responsibilities in 2025. They had a success rate of 68%—on par with the overall RMIT success rate of 68%.
Access to partner leave by women	Of those taking partner leave, 3.3% were women in 2024-25, compared to 1.5% in 2023-24.

However, there is one relevant *GEAP 2022-25* target where we have gone backwards: access to Primary Carer Leave by men. Relatedly, while the uptake of formal flexible work arrangements by women in management roles has remained steady, men continue to use flexible work options, including part-time arrangements, at comparatively low levels.

Consultations with staff also highlighted the need to strengthen support for carers other than parents, indicating that current policies and practices may not fully address the challenges faced by this group.

Addressing these gaps is essential to promoting an equitable and inclusive workplace where men, women and gender-diverse people can participate fully in work and caring.

2. Evidence of barrier

For context, a summary of parental leave types and entitlements is provided in Table 9.

Table 9: RMIT parental leave entitlements and amounts

Leave Type	Paid/Unpaid	Entitlement	Notes
Paid Parental (Primary Carer) Leave	Paid	Up to 24 weeks (based on years of service)	Less than 1-year continuous service: 18 weeks 1–3 years continuous: 18–24 weeks (pro rata) 3+ years continuous: 24 weeks
Unpaid Parental (Primary Carer) Leave	Unpaid	Up to 52 weeks total, plus up to 12 months extra (subject to approval)	RMIT provides unpaid leave following paid leave and may approve extended leave.
Paid Partner Leave	Paid	20 days (or equivalent at half pay for longer duration)	For partners (non-primary carer), to be taken within 12 months of birth/placement.
Keeping in Touch Days	Paid	Up to 10 days per 12 months of parental leave	Paid days for work-related activities during parental leave.
Foster Carer Leave	Paid	6 weeks (child <5) or 3 weeks (child 5–<16)	For continuing/fixed-term employees with foster placement ≥6 months.
Special Paid Leave (e.g., miscarriage/stillbirth)	Paid	Equivalent to primary carer entitlement	Where a pregnancy terminates by miscarriage, or results in still-birth, within 20 weeks of the expected date of birth.

2.1. Men's use of parental/partner leave

In 2021, 7.2% of Parental (Primary Carer) Leave was taken by men—only 5.1% was taken by men in 2024-25. The target for 2025 was 12%. The national average is 20%, and the average among other large (5000+ employee), higher education providers is currently 14% (WGEA 2025)—meaning RMIT is behind our peers.

A strongly gendered pattern is seen in uptake of employer-funded paid and unpaid Parental/Partner Leave in 2025. Women account for most of the extended parental leave taken, particularly in the 22–45 week range (Figure 21). In contrast, men's Parental and/or Partner Leave is concentrated at the shorter end, most commonly 0–4 weeks, with very limited uptake beyond this. Only a small number of men take longer periods of leave (5+ weeks), and men are almost entirely absent from the longest leave categories (22+ weeks).³¹

³¹ Those who self-describe their gender are also represented in very small numbers across all leave durations.

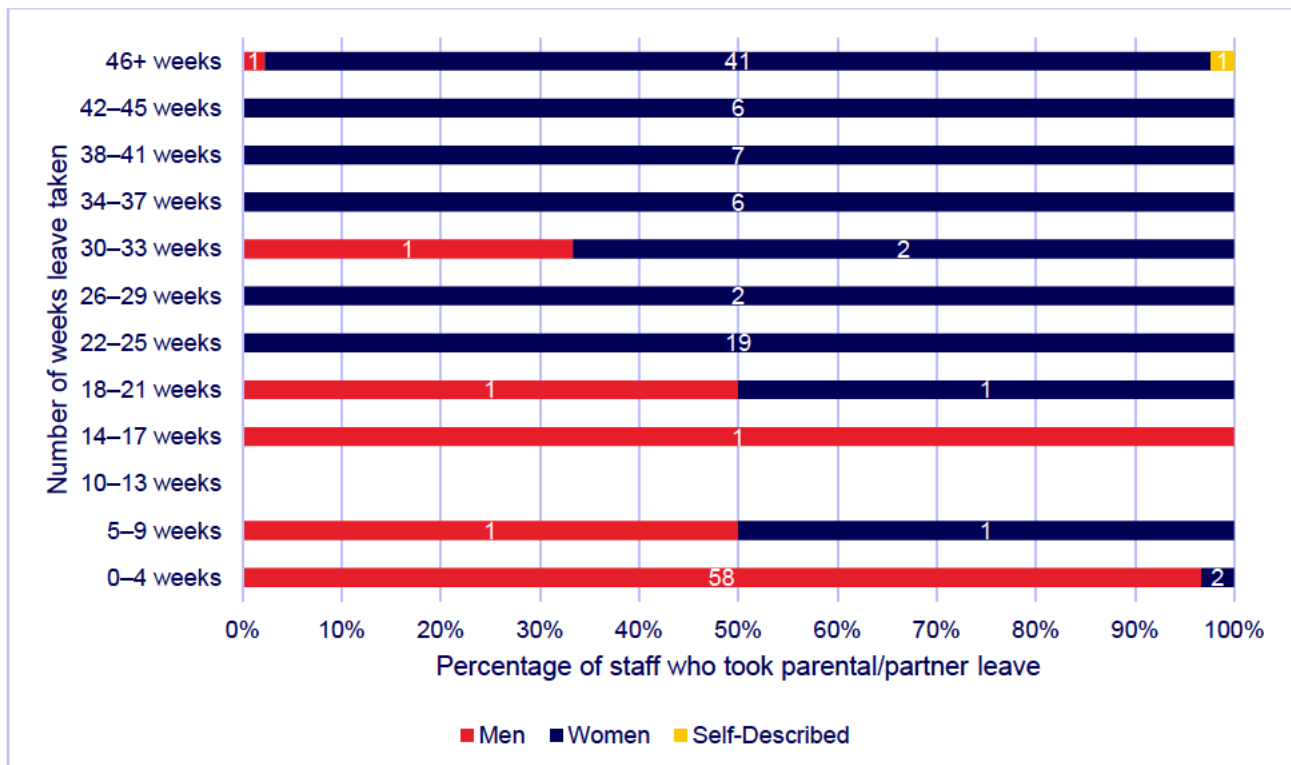


Figure 21: Weeks of employer-funded parental/partner leave (paid and unpaid) taken, by gender-identity, 2025

As shown in Figure 22, professional staff were much more likely than academic staff to take longer parental leave. Thirty-four of the total 40 women who took 46+ weeks of leave were professional staff. See 'Academic-specific challenges', below, for a further discussion of these issues. There is no related pattern amongst male staff—male professional and academic staff were almost exactly as likely to take parental/partner leave.

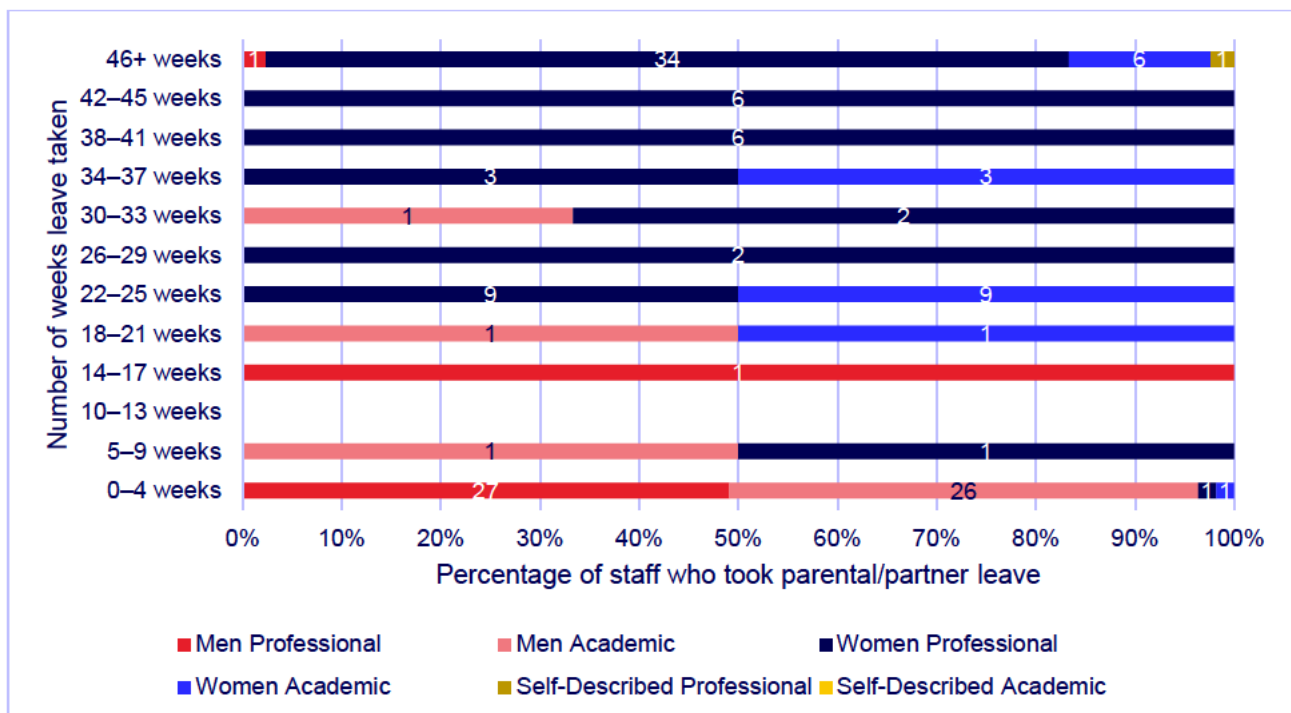


Figure 22: Weeks of employer-funded parental/partner leave (paid and unpaid) taken, by gender-identity and job classification (2025)

Men did not take any unpaid Parental/Partner Leave in 2025—women (and one person who self-described their gender) took all instances of unpaid leave (Figure 23).

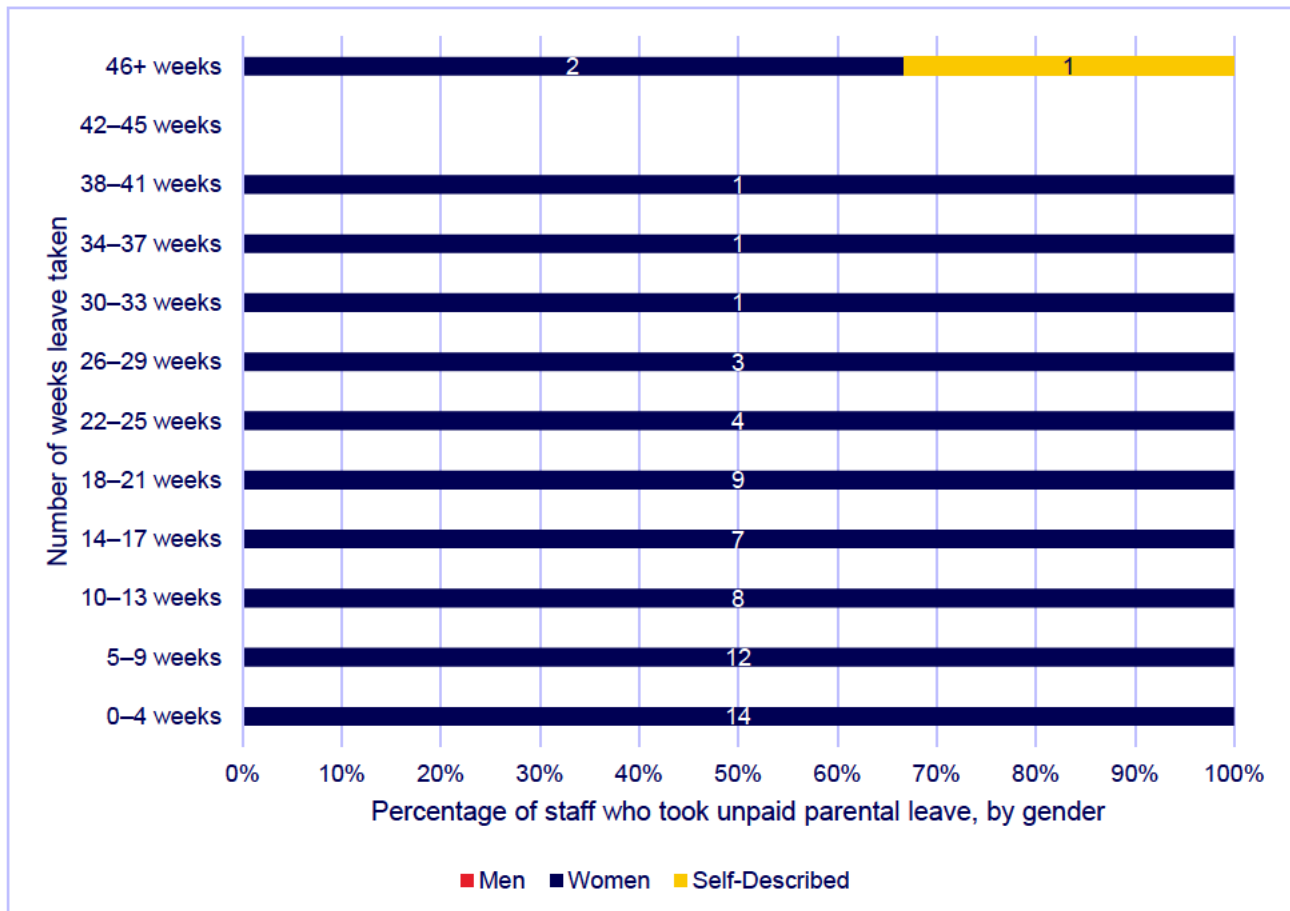


Figure 23: Weeks of Parental/Partner leave (unpaid) taken, by gender-identity (2025)

Overall, the data highlight the continued unequal distribution of caring responsibilities, with women more likely to take extended Parental Leave and men likely to take minimal leave, reinforcing gendered norms around caregiving and workforce participation.

2.2. Flexible working arrangements and part-time work

Patterns in flexible work can also provide insight into how caregiving responsibilities are shared across genders (WGEA 2024). In 2023, 74% of employees with caring responsibilities reported using flexible work options, compared with 58% of employees without caring responsibilities, reflecting broader trends in how caregiving influences flexible work uptake (Diversity Council of Australia 2024). At RMIT, data disaggregated by both caring responsibilities and gender is not currently available—instead, in this section, patterns of flexible and part-time work are used as a proxy to indicate how caregiving responsibilities may be distributed across staff, acknowledging this limitation.

Formal flexible working arrangements

Formal flexible arrangements across the University reduced slightly in 2025 for both women and men.³² Table 10 shows the percentage uptake of formal flexible work arrangements, by gender identity.

³² No one who self-described/preferred not to say their gender used formal flexible work arrangements in 2025.

Table 10: Percentage of staff with formal flexible work arrangements (reduced time fraction, purchased leave and working more hours over fewer days/“compressed hours”), by gender identity, 2022-25

Year	Men	Women	All staff
2022-23	14.7%	24.7%	20.4%
2023-24	13.9%	25.4%	20.5%
2024-25	13.5%	24.9%	19.9%

Across the “purchased leave”, “study leave” and “working more hours over fewer days” arrangement types, women are more likely than men to access formal flexible work, with women who work full-time having a particularly high uptake of these arrangements (Figure 24).

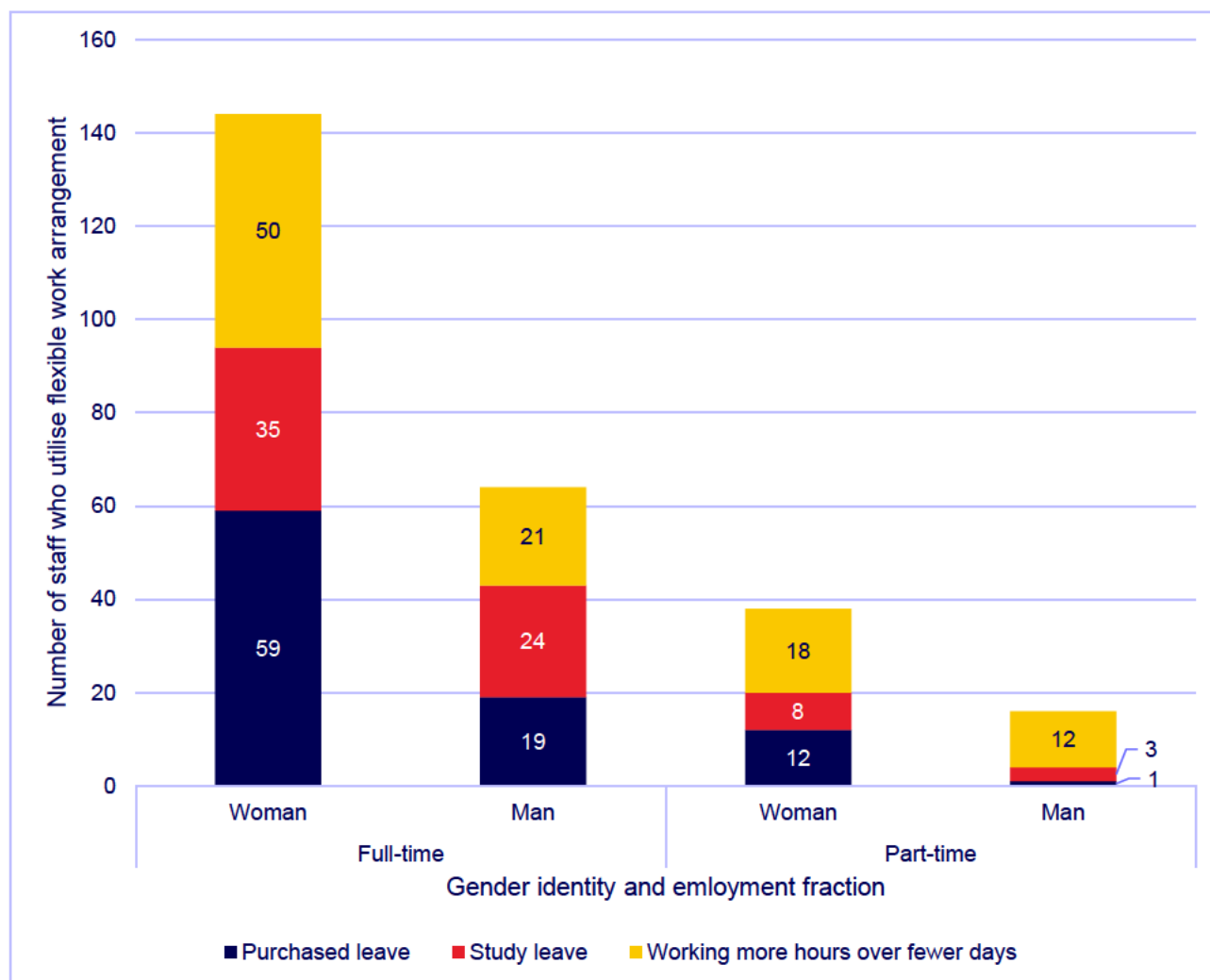


Figure 24: Number of staff by formal flexible work arrangement, by gender identity and employment fraction (2025)

However, when we look at these numbers as a proportion of staff, we see that part-time men are as likely as part-time and full-time women to utilise a formal flexible work arrangement (Table 11).

Table 11: Proportion of staff with a flexible work arrangement, by gender identity and employment fraction (2025)

Gender identity	Number of full-time staff	Proportion with a formal flexible work arrangement	Number of part-time staff	Proportion with a formal flexible work arrangement
Woman	2,446	6%	635	6%
Man	2,150	3%	268	6%

As shown in Figure 25 (full-time staff) and Figure 26 (part-time staff), professional staff were much more likely than academic staff to have formal flexible work arrangements—this is particularly true of professional women. No academic staff members work more hours over fewer days, while working full-time—though, some part-time male academics use this arrangement (Figure 26).³³

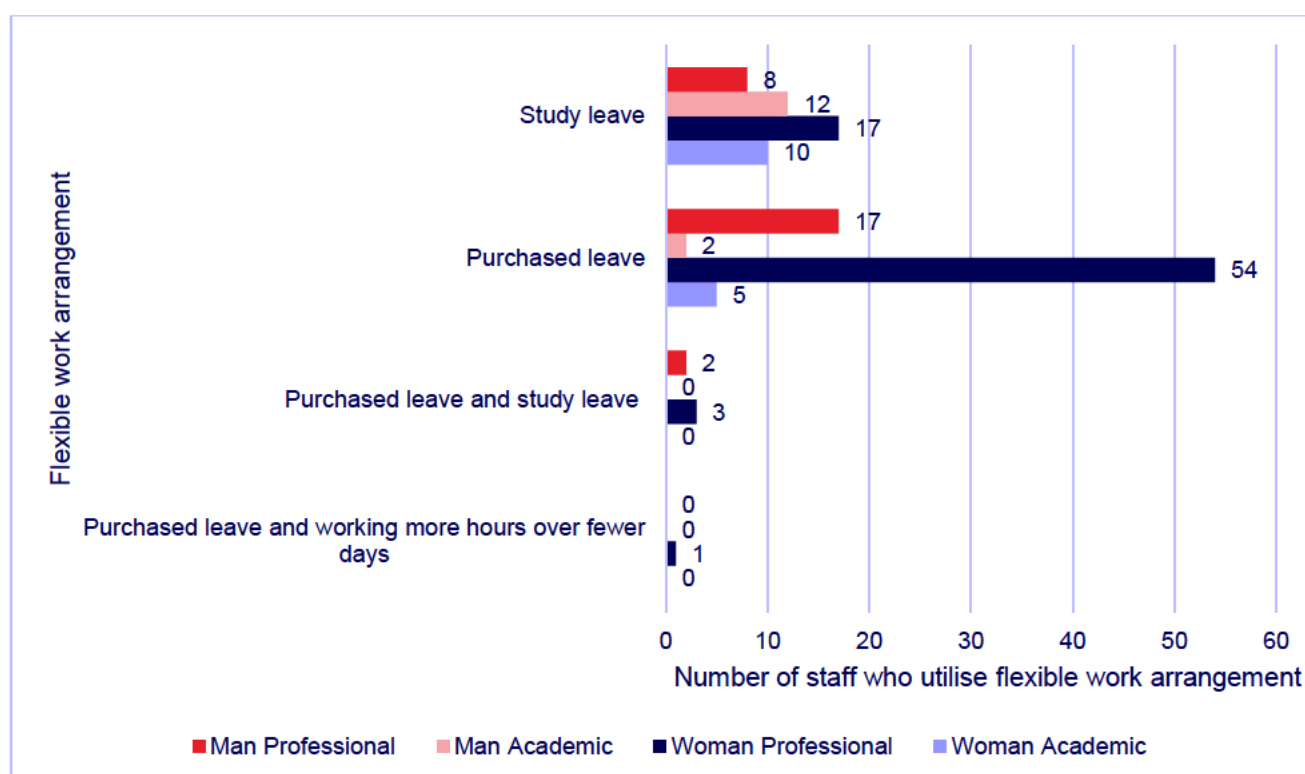


Figure 25: Number of full-time staff by formal flexible work arrangement, by gender identity and employment classification (2025)

³³ Working part-time does not prevent an employee from utilising compressed hours (working more hours over fewer days). A part-time employee can work compressed hours by, for example, working longer days over two or three days, while still maintaining a reduced overall workload.

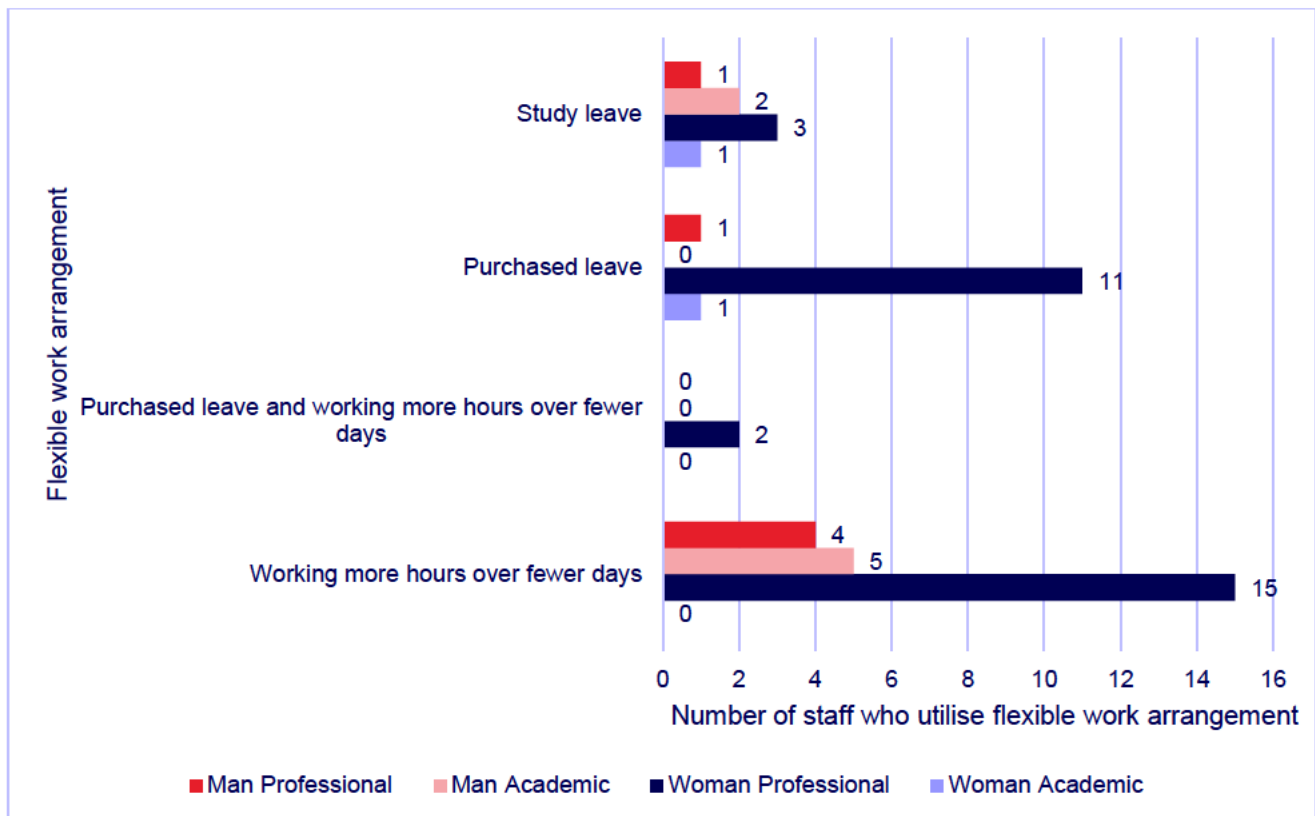


Figure 26: Number of part-time staff by formal flexible work arrangement, by gender identity and employment classification (2025)

The data indicate that formal flexible work is taken up disproportionately by women and a small number of part-time men, suggesting that flexibility is still closely associated with managing lifestyle demands that fall unevenly by gender—as already noted, these demands are very likely to include caring.

Part-time work

Women comprise the majority of part-time staff at every level, and this dominance is particularly pronounced at lower and mid-levels (Figure 27).³⁴ In contrast, part-time work at senior levels is extremely limited for all genders.

³⁴ The “levels” in the figure represent the level removed the Vice Chancellor—e.g. -1 is a direct report to the VC, -2 is a direct report to that direct report, etc.

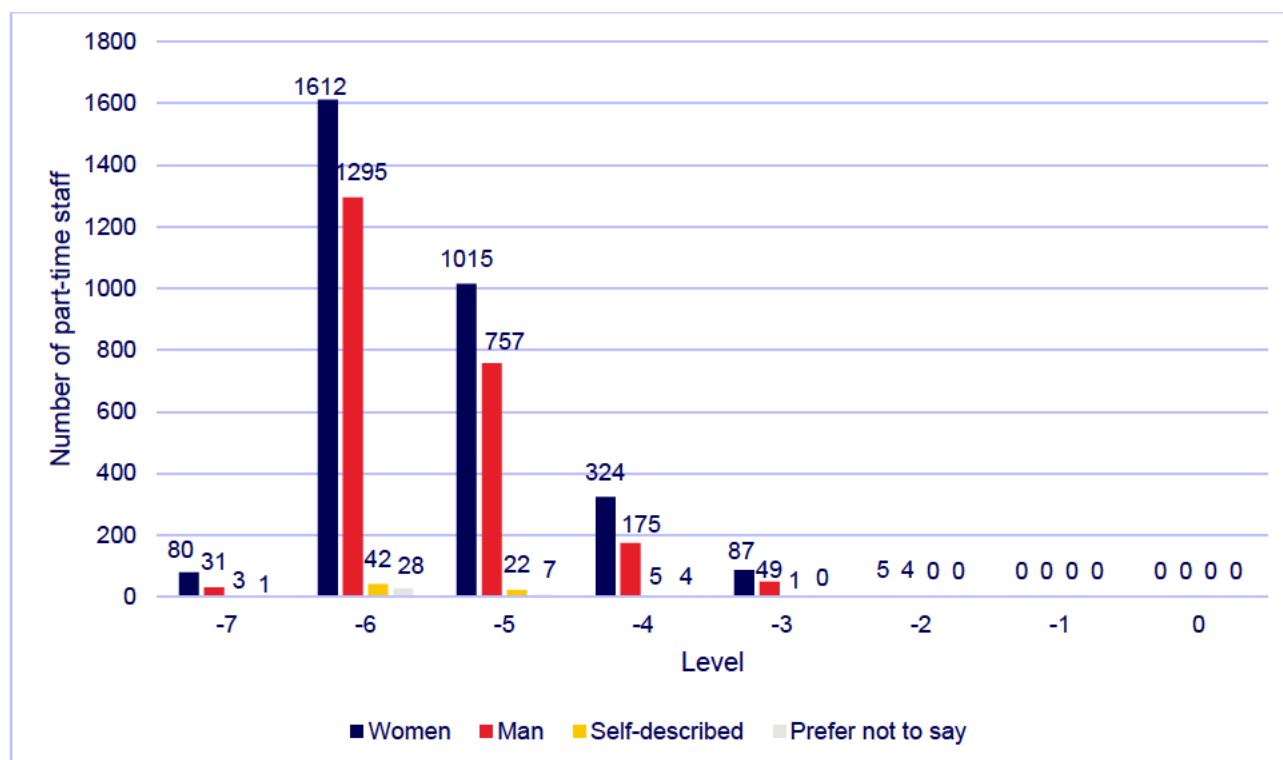


Figure 27: Number of part-time staff, by gender identity, by level (where “level” represents the level removed from the Vice Chancellor (2025))

This pattern may reflect that management/senior roles are not structured to be performed part-time, limiting access to senior positions for staff who work reduced hours, as observed by WGEA (2023). Given that women are more likely than men to work part-time, often due to disproportionate caring responsibilities, the scarcity of part-time arrangements at senior levels represents a structural barrier to women’s progression into senior roles.

2.3. Staff experiences of support for parents and carers

A series of listening sessions and a workshop were held with academics and other key stakeholders to understand experiences of support for parents and carers, as discussed in the Data Explorer. These fora surfaced the below issues.

Confusing parental leave processes

At the workshop, staff reported challenges in understanding and navigating parental leave entitlements. Many expressed uncertainties regarding available leave options, including about types of leave and conditions for access. Processes were described as complex and confusing, and staff described receiving limited education on entitlements, such as *Keeping-in-Touch* days. Additionally, there was confusion regarding *Return-to-Work* (RtW) arrangements, including the process, the RtW bonus and financial implications. Knowledge of these processes was described as concentrated among a few staff, raising concerns about business continuity.

Action

Items 2.1. and 2.2. address challenges related to confusing processes and entitlements

Men's experiences of parental leave

At the workshop, men reported a range of challenges related to accessing Primary Carer Leave. One male employee described a lack of clarity and delays in receiving information about entitlements, which led to feelings of guilt about inadvertently “doing the wrong thing”. One participant said:

‘As a male asking about taking primary carers, it took 5 weeks to get confirmation I could do it.’

- male professional employee

Some found the conditions restrictive, such as the requirement to take leave from the time of birth, which can conflict with the birthing parent’s recovery needs. Cultural pushback was also noted, with some men experiencing surprise or resistance from colleagues/line managers when requesting Primary Carers Leave. Additionally, it was noted that there were few visible role models, as senior male leaders rarely take this leave—reinforcing perceptions that it is neither valued nor expected. These factors contribute collectively to cultural norms that place the majority of parental leave responsibilities on women, deepening gendered expectations and inequities.

Action

Item 2.3. addresses challenges related to men’s experiences of parental leave.

Insufficient childcare and other supports

At the workshop, staff expressed that there were insufficient supports for pregnant people, including for medical appointments, pregnancy complications and late pregnancy (particularly for roles involving standing, travel, or lab work). Post-birth, staff highlighted significant stress associated with accessing quality childcare. As one participant noted:

‘Finding childcare is very stressful, RMIT Childcare Centre is great, but [it] took a long time to be offered a place.’

- female professional employee

Furthermore, some staff returning from parental leave reported negative perceptions from line managers regarding their childcare responsibilities, with one participant noting that they experienced:

‘criticism for needing to always have phone on me as a parent in case childcare called.’

- female professional employee

Lastly, though some parents’ rooms are available, staff reported difficulties with breastfeeding upon returning to work.

Action

Items 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6 address challenges associated with insufficient childcare and other supports.

Carers feeling unsupported

At both the listening sessions and workshop, carers reported feeling overlooked in workplace policies and practices. A key issue raised was the lack of data, with confusion on whether and/or how Carer's Leave is tracked in WorkDay. This makes it difficult for RMIT to understand the degree of demand for Carer's Leave and for staff to view their historic data.

Action

Item 2.7 addresses challenges associated with insufficient data about carers.

Return-to-work and flexible work

Staff raised concerns about returning to work on a part-time basis, at the listening sessions and workshop. Many reported workload pressures, feeling expected to deliver a full-time workload within part-time hours and pay. Some staff reported encountering disapproval or discouragement when requesting flexible arrangements.

Despite this, in the Staff Survey 2025, there were generally favourable responses to the question '*I have the flexibility I need to manage my work and other commitments*' from all genders, besides those who preferred not to disclose their gender identity (Figure 28).

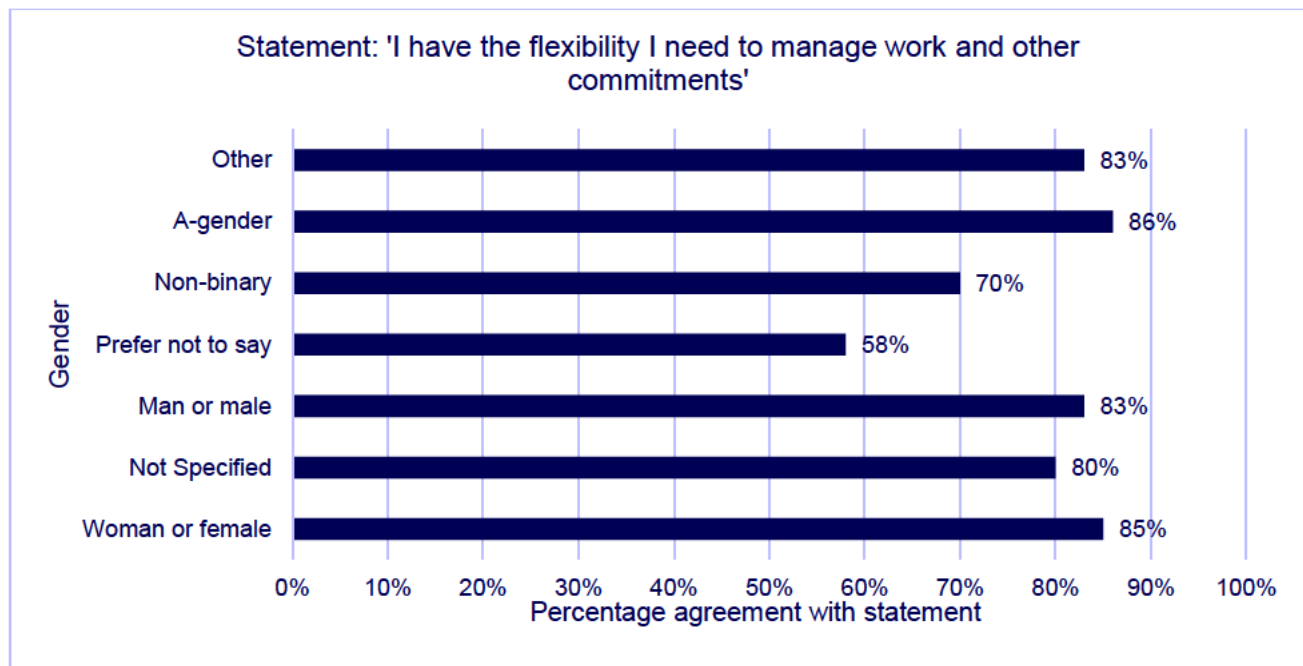


Figure 28: Staff Survey 2025 responses (all staff) - experiences of workplace flexibility, by gender identity

Staff who identified as 'people of colour' had generally favourable responses, albeit recording slightly lower agreement than peers who did not identify as people of colour, across all gender identities (besides people of colour who preferred not to disclose their gender identity) (Figure 29).

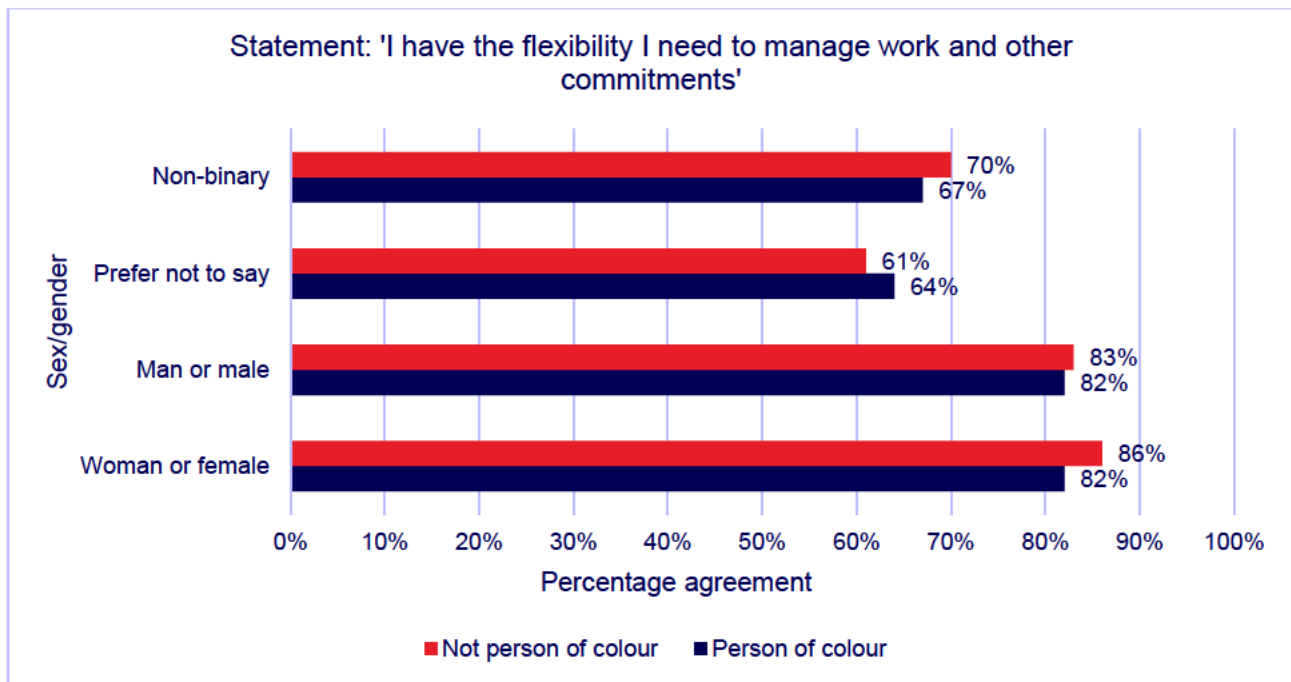


Figure 29: Staff Survey 2025 responses (all staff) - experiences of workplace flexibility, by gender and racial identity

While women and men—and people of colour—have broadly similar experiences of workplace flexibility, staff with disability and neurodivergence generally report poorer experiences. As shown in Figure 30, people with both disability and neurodivergence (and in some cases disability alone in the 'prefer not to say' group) report lower levels of agreement.

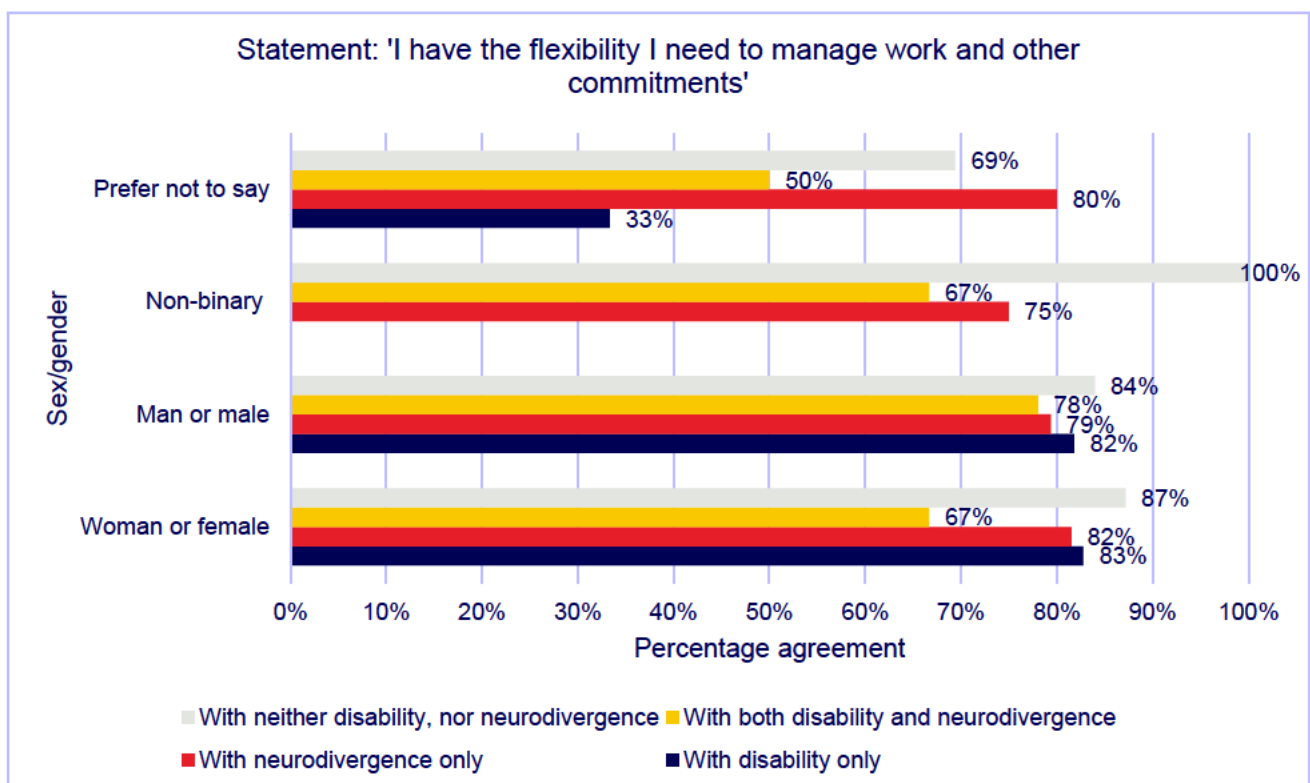


Figure 30: Staff Survey 2025 responses (all staff) - experiences of workplace flexibility, by gender and disability/neurodiversity status

This pattern suggests that flexibility provisions may not be uniformly experienced once accessibility needs become more complex or intersecting. Rather than operating as universally enabling, standard flexibility arrangements appear less effective for staff managing overlapping forms of access need, indicating that current approaches may not sufficiently account for variability in how flexibility is enacted in practice. This is reflected in Staff Survey 2025 qualitative responses, where staff describe a gap between formal policy intent and lived experience:

'While [flexibility and work-life balance] are theoretically available to all staff, it feels like they are not genuinely accessible to women, particularly those of us with caregiving responsibilities... I am often expected to maintain rigid schedules, and when I request adjustments, I am met with resistance.'
 - Staff Survey 2025 respondent³⁵

Action

Items 2.6 and 2.8 address challenges associated with insufficient support for returning-to-work and flexible work. In addition, the action plan for Key Barrier 4 deals directly with workplace adjustments for staff with disability and neurodivergence.

Academic-specific challenges

At the workshop, academic staff highlighted that they faced unique barriers as parents and carers—reflected in the fact that they are much less likely to take up leave and formal flexible work options (though, they may take up informal options). This is born out in the data, as shown in Figure 22. One staff member noted that taking leave results in a loss of momentum and research trajectory, including lower publication rates, slower or paused data collection—particularly where research requires access to large or specialised infrastructure—and difficulty maintaining contact with HDR students and postdoctoral fellows.

Staff also reported missing key career opportunities, like conferences, due to the difficulties of attending while meeting caring responsibilities, and limits to their ability to attend networking events and/or teach evening classes, which tend to occur outside childcare hours.

Action

Item 2.6 goes some way to addressing academic-specific challenges—they are further addressed in the action plan for Key barrier 3.

³⁵ No demographic data is available for free-text responses to the Staff Survey as these responses are provided in a randomised format, to protect confidentiality.

Summary

While RMIT has made progress in supporting parents, significant gendered inequities in caring responsibilities and the subsequent impact on careers persist. Women continue to be more likely to take extended Parental Leave and to work flexibly or part-time, particularly at lower and mid-levels, while men's uptake of Primary Carer Leave remains low, reinforcing traditional caregiving norms.

Flexible and part-time work remain unevenly distributed across the organisation, with limited availability at senior levels and in academic, reflecting broader sector patterns and contributing to ongoing leadership imbalances. Staff report unclear leave processes, inconsistent managerial support and perceived career penalties associated with flexible and part-time work. Men face cultural and structural barriers to accessing Primary Carer Leave, and carers, beyond parents, report feeling overlooked.

Overall, the evidence highlights the need to normalise shared caregiving, strengthen support for diverse caring roles and ensure flexible and part-time work are viable across all organisational levels and job categories to reduce gendered career impacts and support equitable progression.

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Key barrier 2: Action Plan

Ref	Rationale/Evidence	Actions & Outputs	Timeframe (start & end)	Person/Group responsible for implementing action	Senior Leader accountable	Desired Outcomes and Impact
2.1	Staff reported significant confusion and difficulty navigating parental leave policies, including uncertainty about parental vs partner leave, return-to-work arrangements, and financial implications. Men specifically reported delays in accessing information, feelings of fear or guilt about requesting leave, and restrictive conditions that conflict with the birthing parent's recovery. Clear communication can reduce uncertainty, support informed decision-making and normalise leave use for all genders.	Clearly communicate parental leave entitlements: Consider developing, delivering and maintaining/updating the below — • plain-language guides/short explainer videos • manager training on supporting parents/carers • regular information sessions for staff planning parental leave • partnerships with UniSuper/financial counsellors for sessions on financial impacts of parental leave, including superannuation implications, return-to-work bonus optimisation, and long-term planning.	2026-2027	People & Culture, IDEA team University Communications	Vice President, People and Culture Executive Director, Communications	Staff understand parental leave entitlements easily, reducing confusion and stress, and improving engagement with parental leave. Target: at least 4 information sessions delivered annually with minimum 50 participants per year.
2.2	Data show men's uptake of primary carers' leave is very low (5.1% in 2024-25, down from 7.2% in 2021), below both RMIT's target (12%) and national average (17%). Leave is currently heavily gendered: women take the majority of extended leave, men mainly take 0-4 weeks. Policy restrictions (e.g. requiring leave immediately after birth) can conflict with practical	Update policy, making it universal and flexible: Review parental leave policy and consider updating parental leave provisions, including: removing "primary" and "partner" distinctions and introducing "universal leave", allowing leave to be taken in "blocks", extending the timeframe for taking leave (e.g., up to 2-3 years after birth or adoption) and including options for prenatal and family formation leave. Consider	2026-2028	Policy and Workplace Relations (P&C)	Vice President, People and Culture	Increased uptake of leave by men, normalised shared care, and improved gender equity in career progression. Target: uptake of primary carer leave by men increases to >12% (per WGEA target).

	caring needs and discourage men from taking leave. "Universal", flexible leave can address inequities, support non-linear career trajectories and enable both men and women to participate fully in caregiving.	piloting universal parental leave changes in selected cohorts or units to manage implementation risk and build evidence.				
2.3	Few senior male leaders take primary carers' leave, reinforcing perceptions that it is neither valued nor expected. Visible role models can help challenge gendered expectations, encourage men to take leave and foster a more inclusive workplace culture.	Profile male role models: Profile male staff members who take/have taken primary carers' leave and ask senior leaders to publicly signal when they take parental/carers leave.	2026-2027	Talent Acquisition IDEA team Athena Swan team	Vice President, People and Culture	Normalise the taking of primary carers' leave by men. Target: uptake of primary carer leave by men increases to >12% (per WGEA target).
2.4	Staff highlighted challenges accessing breastfeeding facilities and continuing breastfeeding upon return to work. Limited facilities and inconsistent communication about entitlements create stress and barriers for parents returning from leave. Accreditation and improved facilities can signal institutional support, reduce barriers, and improve staff wellbeing and retention.	Short-term audit of facilities and breastfeeding-friendly workplace accreditation: Audit and improve parents' rooms and communicate existing resources. Gain Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA) Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace accreditation and review facilities (parents' rooms, lactation breaks, storage). Communicate with staff about existing entitlements and resources.	Audit – 2026-2027 Accreditation – 2027-2029	Research and Innovation/Athena Swan team People & Culture University Communications	ADVC, Gender Equity, Vice President, People and Culture Executive Director, Communications	Staff returning from parental leave have access to accredited breastfeeding-friendly facilities and practices, reducing barriers and supporting inclusion and gender equity. Target: 100% of campuses audited
2.5	Staff reported stress due to difficulties accessing childcare. School holiday care programs directly support staff with children. Flexible scheduling of meetings ("core hours") ensures staff with caring responsibilities can participate fully in work without penalty, addressing inequities in	Continue to provide school holiday care programs for staff; promote availability widely: continue to progress "core hours" for meetings, i.e. the practice where important meetings/celebrations are scheduled to ensure the majority can attend, at least some of the time, around their caring responsibilities.	2026-2028	People & Culture IDEA team	Vice President, People and Culture	Parents maintain career continuity and workforce participation, reducing gendered impacts of caring responsibilities. Target: participation in school holiday program increases year-on-year until full participation

	career progression and workload management.					
2.6	Staff returning from leave experience workload pressures and perceptions of disadvantage when working part-time. Return-to-Work plans can support career continuity, reduce pressure, and enable carers to re-engage in research, teaching, and professional development effectively.	Re-activate/refresh RtW plans: In addition to Career Reignite, re-activate pre-COVID “Return-to-Work” plans at a School/College level, and provide guidance about workload rebalancing during transitions. RtW plans could include options for reduced teaching fractions, research continuity support (e.g., grant extensions, HDR supervision assistance) and/or support for costs associated with accompanying dependents during conferences/fieldwork, etc. (particularly in disciplines where conference papers are a prime research metric, e.g. computing fields).	2026-2029	Research and Innovation Colleges Finance	DVC, Research and Innovation College DVCs Chief Financial Officer	Carers can participate fully in academic travel and networking, supporting equitable career progression. Target: ≥60% of eligible returning staff have a documented RtW plan
2.7	Carers reported feeling overlooked, with poor visibility and tracking of carers’ leave in WorkDay. Lack of accurate data limits RMIT’s ability to assess and address carers’ needs. Systematic tracking and policy review can inform better support, identify gaps and ensure equitable access to leave for diverse caring roles, including eldercare and caring for family members with disability.	Review and track Carers’ leave: Review leave policy for additional Carers’ leave beyond personal leave provisions; ensure accurate reporting on the use of carers’ leave in WorkDay.	2026-2028	Policy and Workplace Relations (P&C) Workday Platform Ops and Governance	Director, Policy & Workplace Relations Head of Operations Strategy	Carers’ responsibilities are clearly recognised through dedicated leave provisions, with improved visibility and data enabling better support and equitable career progression. Target: annual reporting on carers’ leave usage produced and reviewed by senior leadership.
2.8	Staff reported confusion about flexibility and hybrid working arrangements (that they were unclear, inconsistently applied and	Together at Work program: Co-design a clear and inclusive approach to hybrid working that supports flexibility while	2026-2027	People & Culture	Vice President, People and Culture	RMIT is a thriving campus and workplace where the RMIT community can learn and work in ways that

	shaped by local culture and manager discretion). They are also concerned by workload pressures when working part-time, and cultural resistance—particularly for men and carers with non-traditional caring roles—when requesting flexibility. Academic staff also highlighted that the limited flexibility of leave and RtW arrangements compounds the loss of research momentum and the rate of career advancement. These findings point to the need for a coordinated, consultative approach to defining shared expectations and practices for flexible and hybrid work across RMIT.	strengthening connection and shared outcomes. Through listening sessions, staff surveys, and pilot initiatives, the program will be designed to capture diverse staff experiences and establish shared expectations for flexible work that respond to individual needs and caring responsibilities. This participatory approach will ensure hybrid work practices are informed by staff voice and embedded within a broader culture of respect, inclusion and wellbeing.				support both shared outcomes and individual needs. Target: improvement of ≥ 5 percentage points in survey measures of flexibility and inclusion.
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Key barrier 3: Academic workload activity and management

1. Understanding this barrier

At RMIT, academic workload is distributed across three domains—teaching, research and engagement.³⁶ Academics are required to demonstrate sustained impact across these domains, according to their specialisms (teaching/research, or both), workload distribution and academic level, on application for promotion. Allocation occurs according to each School's Academic Workload Model (AWM). While this decentralised approach allows flexibility, it creates variability across Schools and Colleges—including in how AWMs are implemented. These potential inconsistencies can disproportionately affect some staff, particularly women and gender-diverse academics.

Research (Misra et al. 2022; Järvinen & Mik-Meyer 2024) indicates that workload becomes gendered when:

- low-status or “invisible” tasks (e.g. pastoral care, committee service, administrative duties) are disproportionately shouldered by women, and
- high-status, career-enhancing tasks—particularly research—are dominated by men.

This imbalance is compounded by the fact that research funding remains skewed toward male academics—in large part because they are more likely to apply (Kingsley et al. 2025)—amplifying cumulative advantage for men over time. These patterns reinforce traditional gender norms and create structural barriers to progression, recognition and leadership opportunities for women and gender-diverse academics. The consequences are long-term, including reduced research outputs, slower career advancement and diminished representation in senior academic roles (see Key barrier 1).

At the time of RMIT's Bronze Award application, a study of academic workload across the University revealed that male academics had a slightly higher allocation for HDR supervision and research, and females a slightly higher allocation for “engagement”. Some actions to understand and address this were implemented, but recent consultation and evidence confirm that workload activities and management are still of concern to academic staff. It is, therefore, important to address this barrier as part of RMIT's Athena Swan Silver program of work.

2. Evidence of barrier

2.1. Allocation of teaching, research and engagement

Workload data has traditionally been difficult to collate. In 2025, RMIT revisited this issue—the data, presented here, enables an approximate view of workload allocations across the University and at College-levels. However, this data was self-reported by staff at a point-in-time and may not reflect the true workload apportioned throughout the year.

In 2025, women appear to have a slightly higher teaching-load, and slightly lower research-load, than men (Figure 31). “Engagement” loads are similar for all genders.

³⁶ RMIT's Enterprise Agreement states that Engagement activities (10% of workload, minimum, for teaching and research academics) might include: ‘contributions to academic administration and management; and/or coaching and guidance of other staff; and/or leadership both internal and external to the University; and/or professionally-related engagement within the professions/disciplines and the community, industries, business, cultural and arts organisations; and/or philanthropic, alumni, media and communications activities; and/or professional development activities. This is not intended to be exhaustive but is provided by way of guidance’.

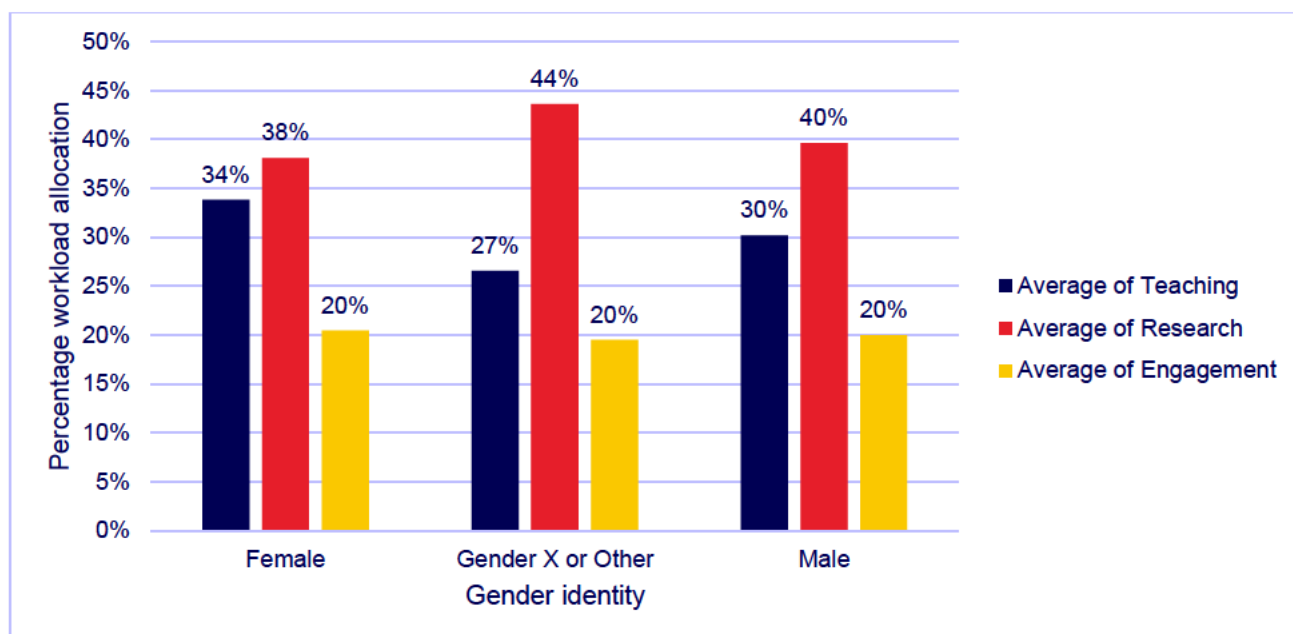


Figure 31: Allocation of teaching, research and engagement 2025, by gender identity

Women in STEM College appear to have a significantly greater teaching-load and lower research-load than other genders (Figure 32). The gender differences are much less pronounced in other Colleges.³⁷

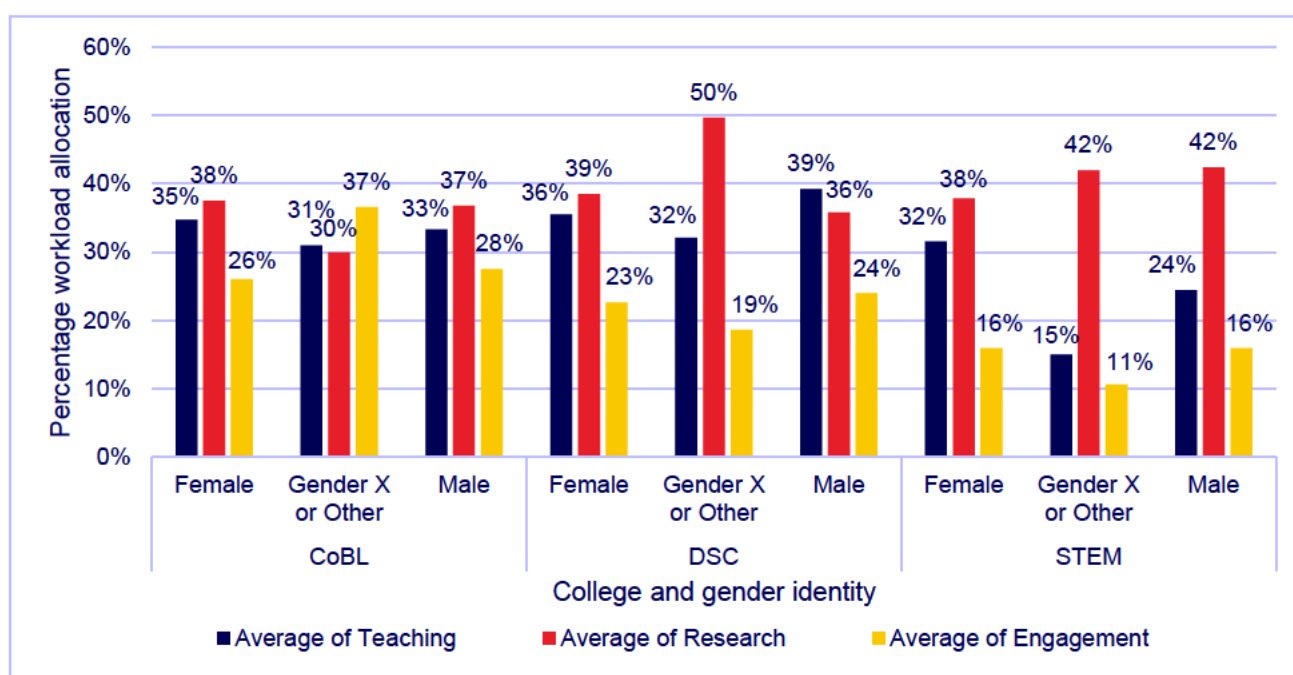


Figure 32: Allocation of teaching, research and engagement 2025, by gender identity and College

For Schools where women are concentrated at levels A-C—levels that traditionally undertake more teaching and administration—School and College-level workload allocations are likely to appear gendered.³⁸

³⁷ It must be acknowledged that the data is incomplete—some allocations add up to more or less than 100%. This is particularly so for STEM.

³⁸ Due to the limited quantitative data available, examination of workload distribution by both gender and academic level was not possible. Quantitative workload data should therefore be interpreted with caution.

This data was self-reported by staff at a point-in-time and may not reflect the true workload apportioned throughout the year. Stakeholders have observed that the allocated workload for teaching varies widely across Schools and Colleges, and often underestimates the time it actually takes. Stakeholders also observed that AWMs do not capture tasks taken on voluntarily, often by women, and, therefore, may not fully represent the gendered-nature of workload.

Action

Items 3.1 and 3.2 address improvements to the capture, monitoring and evaluation of workload data, and establishment of core principles for workload allocation.

2.2. Gender and research/impact

Academic workload can shape access to time and opportunity to undertake research and to apply for funding.

Across the period 2011–2026, Australian Research Council (ARC) data show a persistent gender gap in applications from female and male researchers³⁹ from RMIT, with females consistently a minority amongst applicants. In 2025, females accounted for just 17% of Investigators on ARC Linkage and Discovery grant applications (Figure 33).

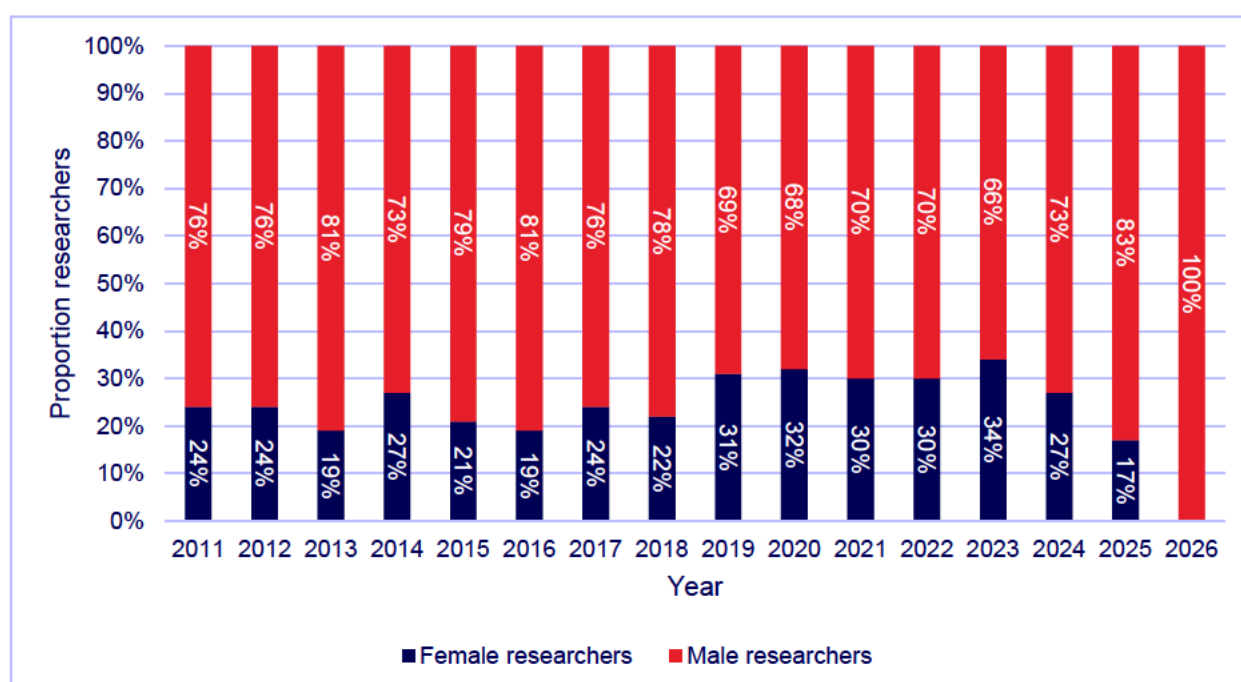


Figure 33: Proportion of female and male investigators on ARC Linkage and Discovery grant applications 2011–2026

When they do apply, however, females have been as successful as males and, in some years (including 2025), more so (Figure 34).

³⁹ As noted in the Data Explainer, this data source uses the binary sex categories 'female' and 'male'. These terms are therefore adopted, here.

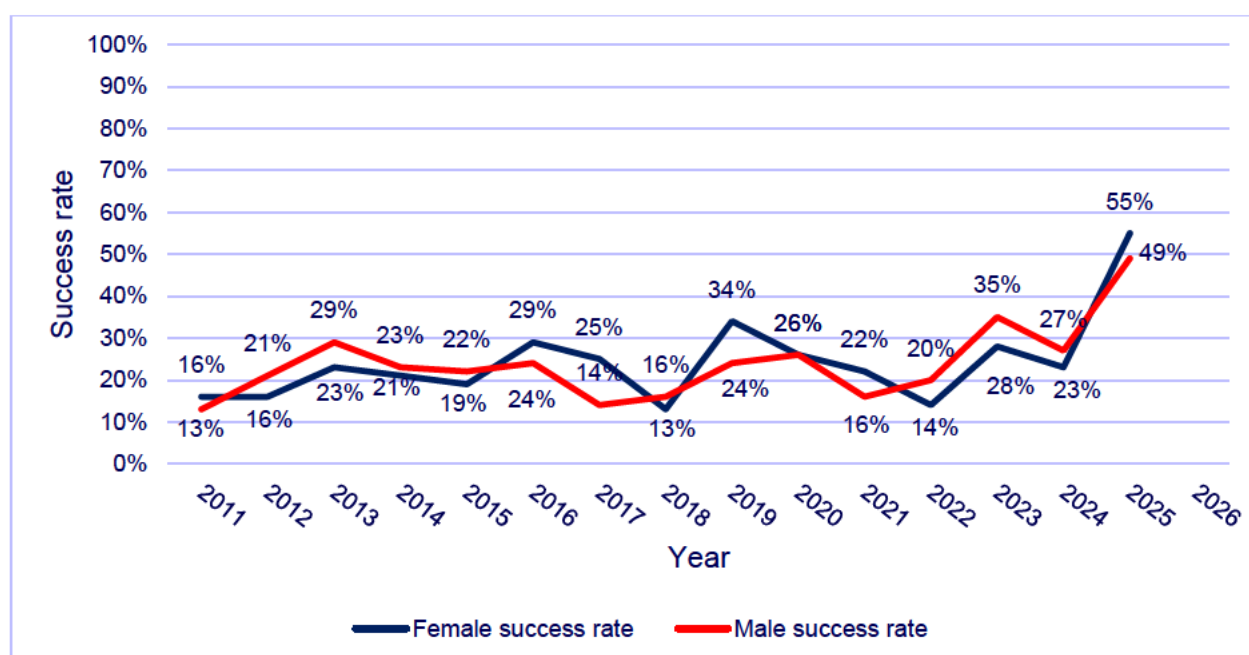


Figure 34: Success rates for female and male investigators on ARC Linkage and Discovery grant applications (2011-2026)

This pattern indicates that, when women submit grant applications, they are as competitive as their male peers, undermining any narrative about differences in research capability or quality of research between genders. Instead, other constraints, such as opportunity, confidence or support to apply—alongside discipline-specific differences (i.e. that men cluster in more grant-heavy disciplines)—may be factors. Over time, this translates into fewer funded projects, reduced research visibility and cumulative disadvantages in career progression, even where women’s success rates demonstrate equivalent research excellence.

Analysis of 2020-2024 Scopus⁴⁰ data revealed that women accounted for 209 of the top 500 researchers at RMIT (42%), while men accounted for 274 (55%).⁴¹ This is roughly proportional to the percentage of women and men academics at RMIT over this period (45% and 54%, respectively). Table 12 compares the total publications, citations, field-weighted citations and h-indices⁴² of the top 500 researchers, by gender identity, for 2020-2024.

Table 12: Publications, citations and h-indexes (total and averages) by gender identity of the top 500 researchers (2020-2024)

Metric	Women (n=209)	Men (n = 274)	Undisclosed (n=17)
Total publications	8,237	12,649	613
Total citations per publication	4,581	6,407	1,060 ⁴³
Total field-weighted citations	331.92	465.82	67.03
Avg. citations per publication	22	23	62 ⁴⁴
Avg. field-weighted citations	1.59	1.70	3.94
Total h-index	6,323	9,281	434
Avg. h-index	30	34	26

⁴⁰ Scopus is a comprehensive, multidisciplinary abstract and citation database that indexes peer-reviewed literature, including journals, books, and conference proceedings, to support research discovery and impact analysis.

⁴¹ Seventeen did not disclose their gender identity.

⁴² The h-index is a metric that measures a researcher’s impact by indicating the number of publications (h) that have each been cited at least h times.

⁴³ Affected by one researcher with 725 citations 2020-2024.

⁴⁴ As above.

The lower publication rate and average h-index for women indicate reduced research volume, over time, rather than differences in research quality or influence. The near-identical average citations per paper appears to support this—women’s research is being recognised and cited at similar rates, once published. As set out in the report prepared for Universities Australia (2022), time constraints may be influencing this gender difference in research quantity, with women struggling to find time for research alongside teaching loads and service duties, many of which are voluntary (discussed in Key barrier 1).

It should be noted that there are reasons, beyond time constraints, for these gendered differences in research metrics. Citation rates and other “hard” metrics like grants, publications and awards do not take into account differences in publication and citation patterns across disciplines. As one senior academic noted, in the humanities, where women tend to cluster, you often see the “lone researcher” and, therefore:

‘Citations are not a good measure— [it’s the] big teams [in the sciences] that tend to get a lot of citations.’

- woman academic, HASS, level E

Further to this, citations do not take account of social or cultural impact—one example provided by a senior academic was that of the “Innocence Project” that worked to exonerate incarcerated people who experienced miscarriages of justice. As another academic noted:

‘Some women have incredible impact but, on paper, look undercooked.’

- woman academic, HASS, level E

Notwithstanding these nuances, it is likely that the gendered nature of academic workload plays at least some role in women’s underrepresentation in research metrics.

Action

Item 3.3 aims to increase research time/resources for women and under-represented academics, as well as improve in-house research data analysis capability.

2.3. Staff experiences of academic workload practices

Listening groups and a workshop were held with academics and other stakeholders to understand staff concerns in relation to workload practices, as discussed in the Data Explorer.

The main frustrations surfaced centred on insufficient time to undertake research, both because of time allocation and take-up of other, voluntary tasks. Specific, workload-related issues felt to be impacting women’s research productivity—the number of papers, grant applications, etc.—generally fell across two categories:

- i) distribution and nature of the work undertaken by women compared to men (discussed below) and
- ii) activities captured/defined by workload models, their implementation and how these aspects vary across the University (see Table 14).

i. Gendered distribution and nature of work

Realities of the contemporary teaching environment

Women academics at levels A to C, who tend to undertake more teaching and teaching administration than their more senior colleagues, discussed being particularly impacted by the fact that teaching is

constrained by yearly schedules, unlike the more flexible demands of research and engagement—this means that teaching responsibilities often encroach upon time for other tasks.

These staff noted that teaching across multiple campuses and “hybrid” delivery (in-person and online) has added complexity and administrative responsibilities to their workload. One participant noted:

‘Hybrid teaching leads to excessively more work—preparing materials for two or three mediums.’
- woman academic, level C

Workshop participants also noted that there has been a surge in student demand for support through Equitable Learning Plans (ELPs) over the past two years, including more students declaring neurodivergence. Academics noted that, while progress towards inclusion is positive, a more diverse student cohort places additional pressure on academics, who must provide emotional support, prepare alternative assessments and manage increasingly complex classroom environments. Workshop participants stated that workload models often do not capture such activities/allow sufficient time for them, leading to further loss of research-time.

Action

Item 3.4 addresses challenges associated with the contemporary teaching environment.

Unrecognised and feminised work

Workshop and listening session participants (women A to E) were concerned about unrecognised and feminised work—highlighting tasks such as pastoral care, serving on panels or committees, Honours and undergraduate research project supervision and marking theses. They noted that these essential tasks are often voluntary and disproportionately carried by women, reinforcing gendered inequities. One participant noted:

‘Female staff members tend to say “yes” for the greater good of the team even if the activity doesn’t directly benefit promotion.’
- woman academic, level C

One participant noted that women and gender diverse academics often face backlash or are perceived negatively when declining additional “service” work, committee roles, or student support requests, saying there is an expectation that women will be more nurturing, collaborative and service-oriented, making it professionally risky to refuse—whereas men are more likely to say no without reputational damage.

One workshop participant further noted:

‘the long-term effects of work planning practices and invisible labour compound over time, particularly in relation to publication outputs and research funding pipelines.’
- woman academic, level D

Action

Items 3.4 and 3.5 address challenges associated with unrecognised and feminised work.

Additional hurdles faced by women and gender-diverse academics experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage

In the Staff Survey 2024,⁴⁵ women, men, and non-binary staff who identified as living with disability, recorded lower levels of agreement with the statement '*I believe my workload is reasonable for my role*' – with non-binary staff reporting the lowest level of agreement at 45% (Figure 35).⁴⁶

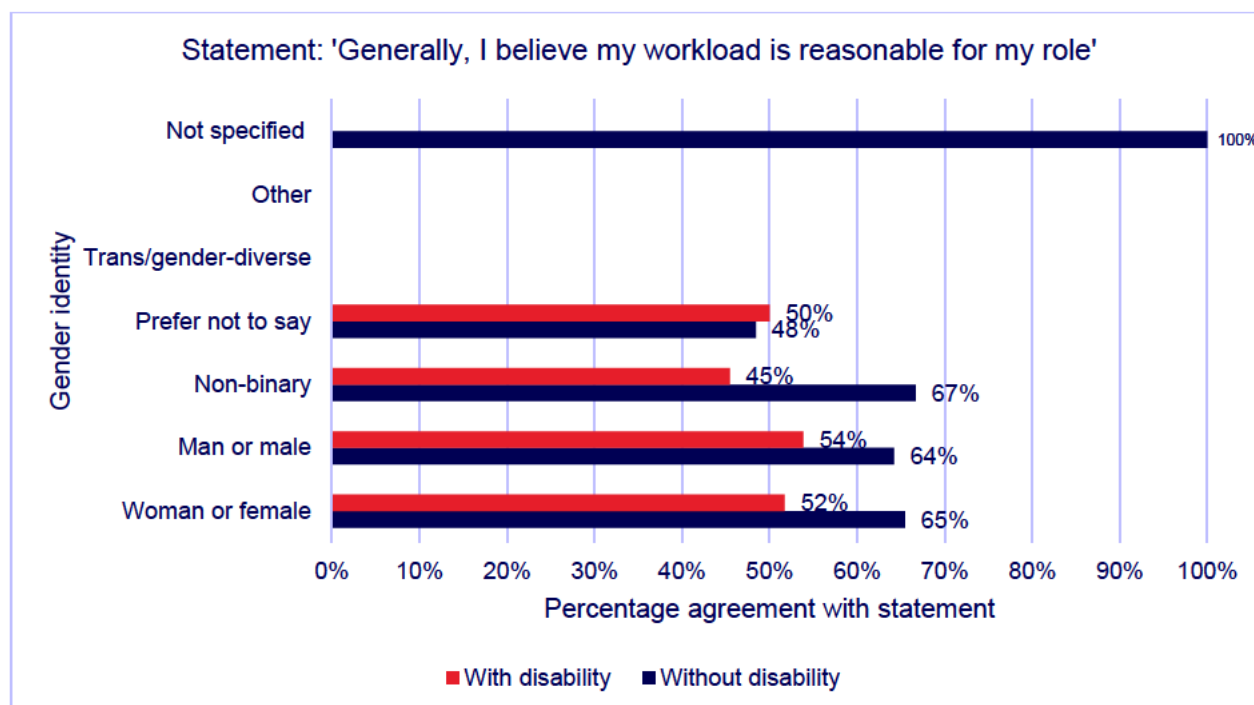


Figure 35: Staff Survey 2024 responses (all staff) - perceptions of workload, by gender identity and disability status

As one staff member noted, this dissatisfaction may be owing to the higher teaching loads attracted by neurodivergent female academics, in some cases:

'Neurodivergent female academics have been affected most as they have a very high teaching loads in my School.'
- woman academic, level C

The reasons for the discrepancy in teaching allocations are likely to be similar to those already discussed (including around unrecognised/feminised work and women tending to dominate the lower academic levels where teaching loads are generally higher, etc.), with apparent compounding impacts for neurodivergent women.

On the other hand, academics who self-identify as people of colour, of all genders, traditionally report similar or higher rates of satisfaction in the Staff Survey than non-people of colour (see Table 13).

⁴⁵ This question was not asked in the Staff Survey 2025 and, therefore more recent data is unavailable.

⁴⁶ Where there were no responses for a particular gender identity category (e.g. 'other', 'trans/gender-diverse'), these categories were left out of the table, for simplicity.

Table 13: Staff Survey 2025 responses (academic staff) – cross-section of responses, by gender and racial identity

Statement	Gender identity					
	Person of colour		Not person of colour			
	Woman or female	Man or male	Woman or female	Man or male	Non-binary	Prefer not to say
<i>I am given enough support to achieve my teaching goals</i>	62%	71%	54%	62%	25%	6%
<i>There is a range of researcher capability development opportunities to help support my career.</i>	54%	71%	54%	50%	38%	18%
<i>I have been supported to undertake learning and/or career development opportunities in the last 12 months.</i>	62%	73%	60%	60%	90%	22%
<i>There are good pathways for career advancement at RMIT.</i>	59%	65%	55%	50%	70%	33%
<i>I have the flexibility I need to manage work and other commitments.</i>	80%	80%	81%	81%	50%	44%
<i>I am satisfied with my hybrid working arrangements.</i>	92%	82%	89%	84%	70%	83%
<i>Using flexible work arrangements is not a barrier to success in my organisation.</i>	91%	86%	81%	79%	50%	78%

However, one workshop participant noted that staff from CALD backgrounds, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, may carry additional loads as cultural brokers, translators, or representatives on diversity initiatives. This additional cultural load intersects with the gendered impacts of workload distribution to compound disadvantage.

Action	Item 3.6 addresses additional hurdles faced by women and gender-diverse academics experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage.
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ii. Workload activity and management

The workshop also uncovered issues relating to workload models and their implementation, presented in Table 14.

Table 14: Issues raised in relation to workload models, their implementation and how these aspects vary across the University

Issue	Detail and actions
Transparency and consistency	Concerns about lack of transparency and consistency in workload-distribution across Schools and Colleges were raised consistently by academics. While the Enterprise Agreement allows workloads to be determined at a School or discipline level, in practice, this has resulted in significant variation, with core activities, such as assessment, marking and HDR supervision, counted differently across the University. In the absence of clear processes, common definitions and alignment with KPIs or annual goals, workload planning was described as fragmented and opaque, contributing to confusion, mistrust and a heightened sense of inequity among academics. As one senior academic noted: <i>'In some Schools this affects dramatically their research allocation, diminishing further opportunities to activate research plans.'</i> - woman academic, level D Actions 3.1, 3.7 and 3.8 address challenges associated with a lack of transparency and consistency in workload allocation.
Workload allocation as "set and forget"	Workshop participants described workload allocation in some areas of the University as a "set and forget" process, where allocations are treated as static annual estimates with little review or adjustment once established. They noted that sudden, last-minute changes to teaching or administrative responsibilities adds significant cognitive load, increasing stress and the risk of burnout. In the absence of regular review and dialogue, workloads were seen to lag behind evolving responsibilities, leaving academics feeling overextended and inadequately supported. Staff suggested that a more dynamic, periodically-reviewed approach to workload allocation could better align assigned workloads with actual responsibilities and sustainable performance. Importantly, participants emphasised the need to balance flexibility with the avoidance of excessive administrative burden or "minute-counting". Reviewing workloads at key points in the academic year—such as census dates when student numbers are confirmed—was identified as a practical and proportionate mechanism to improve accuracy, transparency and staff wellbeing. Action 3.9 addresses this issue.
"Engagement" as a catch-all	Finally, workshop participants described "engagement" as a "catch-all" category for tasks that do not fit neatly into teaching or research. Participants felt that this lack of clarity creates confusion and inequity, as "engagement" allocations are poorly understood and applied inconsistently. The Enterprise Agreement's minimum allocation of 10% to engagement for "Teaching and Research" academics, was also felt to be insufficient to cover the volume of institutional communications and processes, let alone meaningful external or scholarly engagement. Actions 3.1 and 3.2 address challenges associated with the "engagement" domain.

Summary

Consultations and data analysis indicate that the variation in how academic workload activities are captured across domains, and implemented or managed at the local level, may be contributing to inequities for academic staff.

Quantitative data, including ARC/Scopus data, alongside qualitative data discussed here and in Key barrier 1, suggest that women may have constraints on the time and the resources available to them to support research activity, impacting their ability to progress their careers. Women report heavier teaching loads, “invisible” tasks and increasing demands from diverse students—alongside discipline-specific differences, these factors may be contributing to lower publications and citations, despite comparable research quality.

Staff highlighted the need for transparent, consistent and regularly-reviewed workload models that recognise service and “invisible” work, allocate teaching transparently, clarify the “engagement” domain and align with milestones and promotion criteria. Addressing these issues is essential for gender equity and a sustainable, inclusive academic environment.

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Kingsley, I., Johnston, E. L., Slavich, E., Harvey-Smith, L. A., & Williams, L. A. (2025). “Gender differences in Australian research grant awards, applications, amounts, and workforce participation”. *Science and Public Policy*, 52(5), 702–727.

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Key barrier 3: Action Plan

Ref	Rationale/Evidence	Actions & Outputs	Timeframe (start & end)	Person/Group responsible for implementing action	Senior Leader accountable	Desired Outcomes and Impact
3.1	Persistent gendered differences in teaching and research allocation, variability in School-level workload models, and limited University-wide data demonstrate that current workload systems contribute to inequitable access to research time and career progression. Evidence shows women carry slightly higher teaching loads, are underrepresented among research grant applicants despite comparable success rates, and experience reduced research volume linked to time constraints and unrecognised “feminised” service work. Consultation further highlights concerns about inconsistent definitions—particularly within the “engagement” domain—opaque allocation processes, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms.	Develop improved principles, systems and guidance - Through consultation with Schools and Colleges, and allowing for disciplinary differences, establish a more consistent approach to workload allocation (see also: action 3.2). Develop improved systems for recording, monitoring and evaluating workload activities and management, across the University, to support more consistent and equitable practice. Provide clearer guidance on what counts under each domain (particularly, what counts as “engagement”) and limit unrecognised work. Align workload allocation principles with updated promotion criteria (item 1.1. In Key barrier 1).	2026-2029	Schools and Colleges, Workload Committees Organisational Development and Employee Experience	College DVCs Vice President, People and Culture	Alongside the core principles of the EA, additional guidance is provided to Colleges and Schools in the development and implementation of AWMs; improved data management systems ensure equitable recognition of tasks and their expected distribution across domains, especially Engagement. Clearer boundaries/reduced overload. Target: all cohorts 70% satisfaction (Staff Survey) that their workload is reasonable ($\pm 5\%$), and/or they have sufficient support to conduct their research. Improved % success rate in academic promotion for all gender identities C to D.
3.2	While workload practices vary significantly across Schools, consultations indicated that effective approaches are not consistently shared or scaled. A	Complete Good Practice Review to enhance the visibility of practices that are having positive impact across Colleges/Schools. Prioritise and implement the findings of the review and develop a ‘Good Practice Guide’.	2026-2028	Organisational Development and Employee Experience	Vice President, People and Culture	To surface and promote effective practices while illustrating the real impacts of administrative burden on academics, to inform root cause

	Good Practice Review will surface models that promote equity, transparency and sustainability.					analysis and enable targeted improvements. Target: greater % satisfaction for all cohorts re workload (Staff Survey). Research practices and outcomes improve.
3.3	External data indicate that women have comparable grant success rates and citation impact to men when they are able to publish and apply for funding, yet lower overall research volume due in part to constrained time. Heavier teaching and service loads limit opportunities to build sustained research pipelines and leadership profiles. Targeted access to enhanced research time, together with improved internal monitoring/evaluation systems, would address these structural constraints and help disrupt cumulative disadvantage.	Explore opportunities to enhance research time/resources for women and gender-diverse academics, as well as academics experiencing other forms of disadvantage. Improve in-house gender+ research data collection and correlation capabilities, providing visibility of gendered patterns of research productivity, and facilitate timely action. <i>Note: As per the EA, AWM's should enable allocation of teaching and related activities such that research targets can be achieved. Targets should be informed by, for example: research outputs in last three years; the need for early career academics to establish a research track-record; and factors that impede ARtO.</i>	2026-2028	Schools and Colleges Research and Innovation, Athena Swan team	Deans, College DVCs DVC, Research and Innovation ADVC, Gender Equity	Women and gender-diverse academics have protected time for research, resulting in improved research outputs, career progression opportunities, and equitable access to promotion. Target: increase in research productivity for women and gender-diverse academics, as well as academics experiencing other forms of disadvantage. Improved % success rate in academic promotion for all gender identities C to D.
3.4	Contemporary teaching practices—including hybrid delivery, co-teaching and managing ELPs—add substantial, often unrecognised workload. Adjusting workload models to better reflect these realities is necessary to support inclusion and sustainable performance.	Ensure that activities associated with the contemporary teaching environment are captured appropriately and consistently within workload models, and with realistic time allocations. <i>Note: this supports actions 3.1 and 3.2.</i>	2026-2028	Schools and Colleges, Workload Committees	College DVCs	Sustainable workloads, reduced burnout, improved wellbeing and retention. Target: all cohorts to have 70% satisfaction (Staff Survey) that their workload is reasonable ($\pm 5\%$).
3.5	Evidence shows that women and gender-diverse academics	Uplift visibility of unrecognised/ feminised work (e.g., pastoral care, ELPs, mentoring, committees) and	2026-2027	Schools and Colleges, Workload Committees	College DVCs	Women and gender-diverse staff have equitable recognition

	disproportionately undertake essential but undervalued work such as pastoral care, ELP-related support, mentoring and committee service. This “invisible” labour is rarely captured in workload models or promotion processes, reducing time available for research and career progression. Making this work visible in workload planning is critical to addressing structural inequities and recognising the full scope of academic contribution.	ensure this work is reflected in workplan discussions and career conversations. <i>Note: This sits alongside actions 1.1, 1.3, 1.4 and 1.6 in Key barrier 1. These actions: expand promotion criteria, improve the skills of line managers in career coaching, inclusion and application of ARtO and increase the visibility of role models.</i>				and career progression opportunities. Their work is valued and recognized within promotion frameworks. Target: % success rate promotion C to D for all gender identities, are the same as B to C and D to E.
3.6	Staff survey and consultation data show that academics with disability or neurodivergence report lower perceptions of workload reasonableness, reflecting increased cognitive and administrative demands.	The needs of diverse staff (particularly, staff with disability or neurodivergence) are considered while core principles and equitable AWAM models are designed, i.e. Universal Design is applied for actions 3.1. and 3.2. <i>Note: this supports actions 1.1, 1.3-1.5 in Key barrier 1.</i> <i>Note: As per the EA, AWM's should enable allocation of teaching and related activities such that research targets can be achieved. Targets should be informed by, for example: research outputs in last three years; the need for early career academics to establish a research track-record; and factors that impede ARtO—medical conditions, parental/carer responsibilities, etc.</i>	2026-2029	Schools and Colleges, People & Culture	College DVCs Vice President, People and Culture	Sustainable workloads, reduced burnout, improved wellbeing and retention. Target: all cohorts have 70% satisfaction (Staff Survey) that their workload is reasonable ($\pm 5\%$). Increased retention of academic staff. A greater diversity of staff apply and are successful in academic promotion and take up senior positions.
3.7	Consultation highlighted widespread concerns about the opacity and inconsistency of workload allocation across Schools, with staff reporting limited	Publish School-level workload allocations (not individual) and hold AWAM drop-in sessions to explain allocations and reasoning.	2026-ongoing	Schools and Colleges	College DVCs	Improved visibility and understanding of workload allocations; greater trust and clarity.

	understanding of how allocations are determined and applied. Publishing School-level data, alongside facilitated drop-in sessions, responds directly to calls for greater transparency while preserving individual confidentiality.					Target: all cohorts have 70% satisfaction (Staff Survey) that their workload is reasonable ($\pm 5\%$). Increased retention of academic staff.
3.8	Workshop participants reported fragmented and unclear processes for negotiating workloads, with inconsistent alignment between workload models, performance expectations and KPIs. Leaders also vary in their capability to plan and negotiate workloads in ways that account for gendered impacts and evolving responsibilities. Strengthening leadership capability and clarifying escalation pathways will support earlier intervention, reduce the risk of inequitable “set and forget” allocations, and promote fairer outcomes.	Upskill relevant leaders in performance planning and workload negotiation and uplift visibility of the process for raising workload concerns. <i>Note: this supports action 1.3 in Key barrier 1.</i>	2026-2027	Organisational Development and Employee Experience, Schools and Colleges	Vice President, People and Culture College DVCs	Improved staff capability, consistency in workload management, and support for staff to raise concerns. Target: all cohorts have 70% satisfaction (Staff Survey) that their workload is reasonable ($\pm 5\%$). Increased retention of academic staff.
3.9	Staff described workload allocation as overly static, with limited review once annual plans are set, despite significant changes in teaching loads and student numbers. This approach increases stress, cognitive load and the risk of burnout, particularly when responsibilities expand mid-year.	Conduct more regular reviews of workload distribution patterns (e.g. during semester, after the census date), and adjust allocations, as necessary.	2026-ongoing	Schools and Colleges Athena Swan team	College DVCs ADVC, Gender Equity	Dynamic monitoring and adjustment of workloads; reduced inequity over time. Target: all cohorts have 70% satisfaction (Staff Survey) that their workload is reasonable ($\pm 5\%$). Increased retention of academic staff.

Key barrier 4: Enabling accessibility: supporting people with disability and neurodivergence

1. Understanding this barrier

RMIT'S fourth Cygnet Award application (2025) focused on accessibility for staff and students with disability and neurodivergence. Several persistent challenges were identified, including: barriers within the built environment, accessibility of digital tools and systems, experiences of exclusion and inconsistent access to workplace flexibility. While the Cygnet highlighted an increase in individual workplace adjustments and Equitable Learning Plans, it also demonstrated that systemic accessibility issues remain. This was especially pronounced for neurodivergent staff and students, for whom open-plan offices, sensory overload and exclusion from in-person meetings/classes continued to limit participation and wellbeing.

When accessibility relies on individual disclosure and ad-hoc adjustments, women and gender-diverse staff with disability or neurodivergence are more likely to experience cumulative disadvantage through increased emotional labour, stigma and reduced visibility, as well as constrained access to career development opportunities (Sharma et al. 2025). In this context, accessibility is not only a compliance or wellbeing issue, but a foundational enabler of gender equity across recruitment, retention and progression.

Since the award of RMIT's fourth Cygnet, Staff Survey data from 2025 has become available, including a new neurodiversity demographic marker. This has enabled more intersectional analysis of staff experiences. The data presented, alongside qualitative staff and student feedback, provide a deeper understanding of accessibility barriers and inform the next phase of RMIT's work to embed universal design approaches.

2. Evidence of barrier

The total number of respondents to the Staff Survey 2025, by gender identity and disability status, is shown in Table 15.

Table 15: Respondents to Staff Survey 2025 (all staff), by gender identity and disability/neurodiversity status

Disability status	All gender identities	Woman or female	Man or male	Non-binary	A-gender	Other	Prefer not to say	Not specified
With disability only	137	87	44	-	-	-	■	-
With neurodiversity only	315	173	126	8	-	-	■	■
With both disability and neurodiversity	127	54	41	15	■	-	8	-
With neither disability, nor neurodiversity	2,708	1,541	1,099	9	-	-	49	8
Prefer not to say	112	34	24	-	-	-	52	-

2.1. Barriers to access in built environment, digital tools and systems

In 2025, staff with disability and/or neurodivergence reported lower levels of enjoyment of the physical work environment than those without disability or neurodivergence (Figure 36). Women and men with disability reported similar levels of enjoyment (57% agreement with the relevant statement). Women and

men with neurodivergence also recorded similar levels of agreement (58% and 60%, respectively), while non-binary staff with neurodivergence recorded the lowest levels of any cohort (13%).⁴⁷

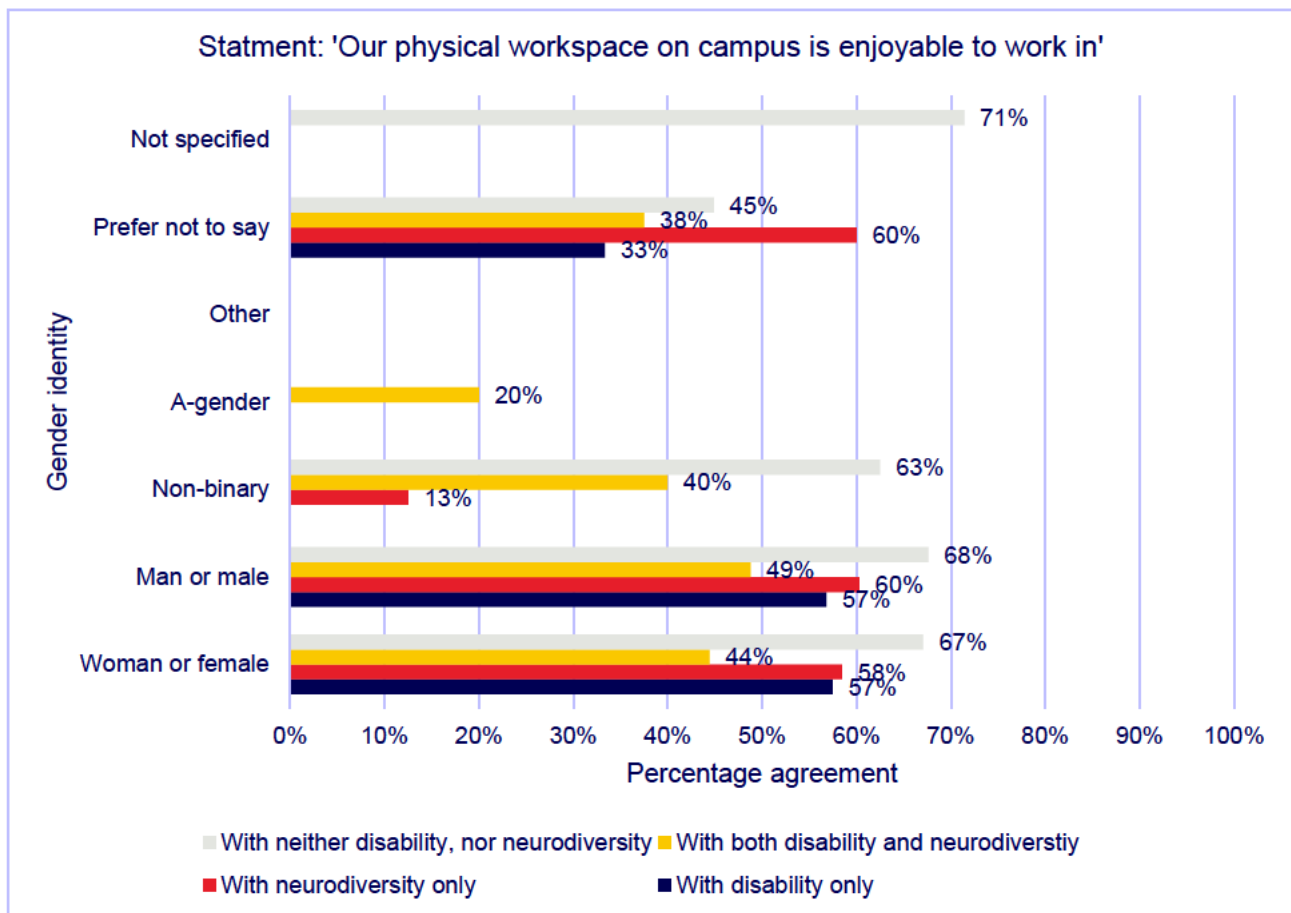


Figure 36: Staff Survey 2025 responses (all staff) - experiences of the built environment

The Staff Survey 2025 found that experiences of digital accessibility had improved, from 2024, for both staff with and without disability, but remained relatively low. Agreement with the statement '*Most of the systems and processes here support us getting our work done effectively*' increased from 21% to 34% for staff with disability, and from 37% to 51% for staff without disability during this period (Figure 37).⁴⁸ Experiences of non-binary people with and without disability were particularly improved from 2024 to 2025. Notwithstanding the persistent low levels of agreement with the relevant statement, this improvement gives credence to the hypothesis that poor experiences of digital enablement were a reflection of the move to new systems in this period, including the self-service human resources management system WorkDay, as well as the post-COVID landscape, which required greater use of remote-working technologies.

Recent data in relation to staff with neurodivergence, however, has revealed that those with neurodivergence, of all gender identities, record much lower agreement with the relevant statement (Figure 37). This demonstrates that timely, focussed and appropriate actions to support neurodiverse staff must be prioritised, to ensure accessibility for all staff.

⁴⁷ Given the low numbers of non-binary staff, these findings may not be generalisable across all contexts.

⁴⁸ Where there were no responses for a particular gender identity category (e.g. 'other', 'trans/gender-diverse'), these categories were left out of the table, for simplicity.

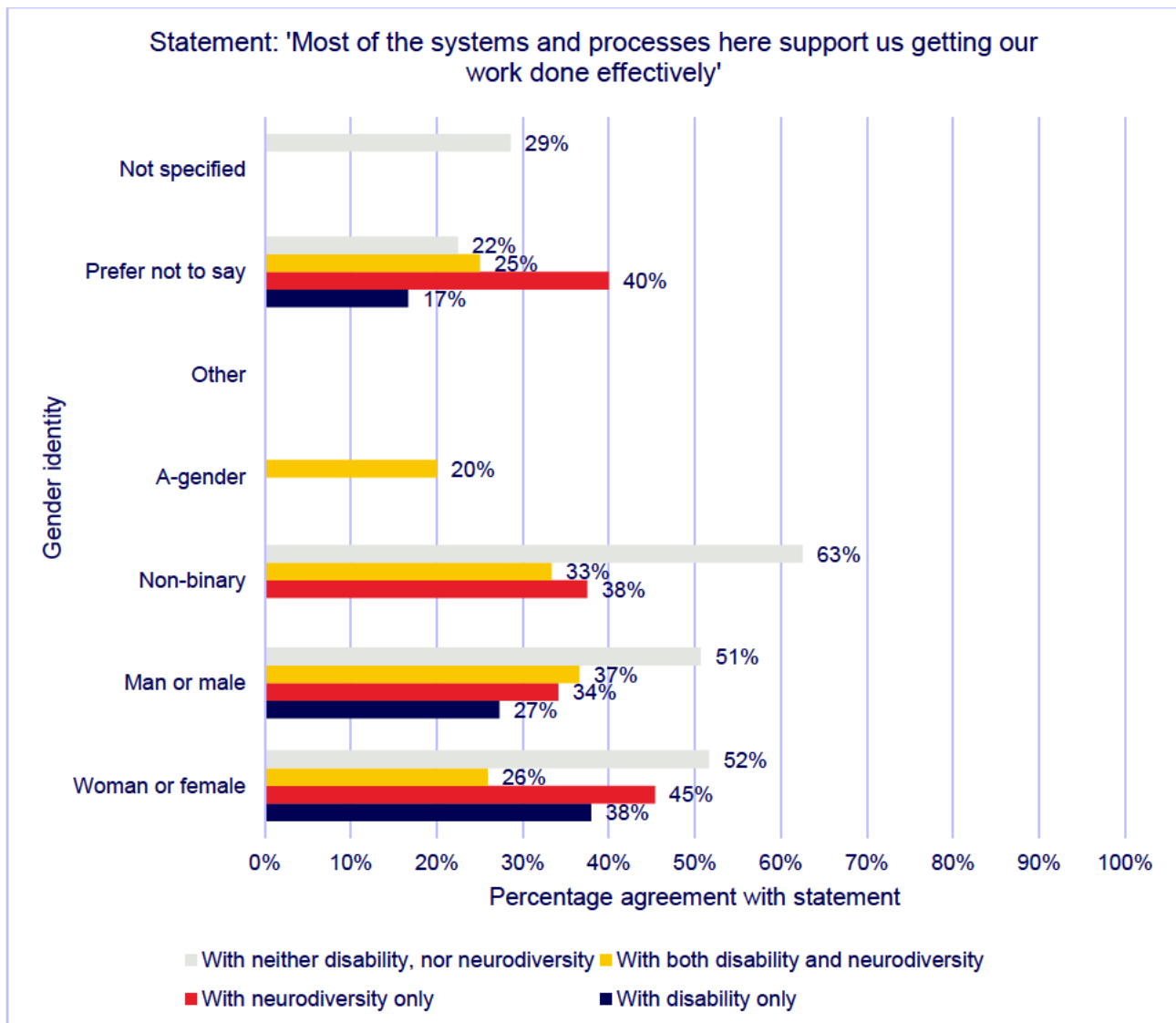


Figure 37: Staff Survey 2025 responses (all staff) - experiences of digital enablement, by gender identity and disability/neurodiversity status

2.2. Exclusion of people with disability and neurodivergence

Staff perceptions of inclusion at RMIT vary notably by both gender identity and disability/neurodiversity status. Agreement with the statement '*people from all backgrounds have equitable opportunities to succeed at RMIT*' is highest among staff with neither disability nor neurodiversity who identify as men (78%) and women (75%), and is consistently lower for staff with disability and/or neurodivergence across all gender identities (Figure 38). Agreement drops to 43% for women and 56% for men who report both disability and neurodivergence, and to 38–40% among non-binary staff.

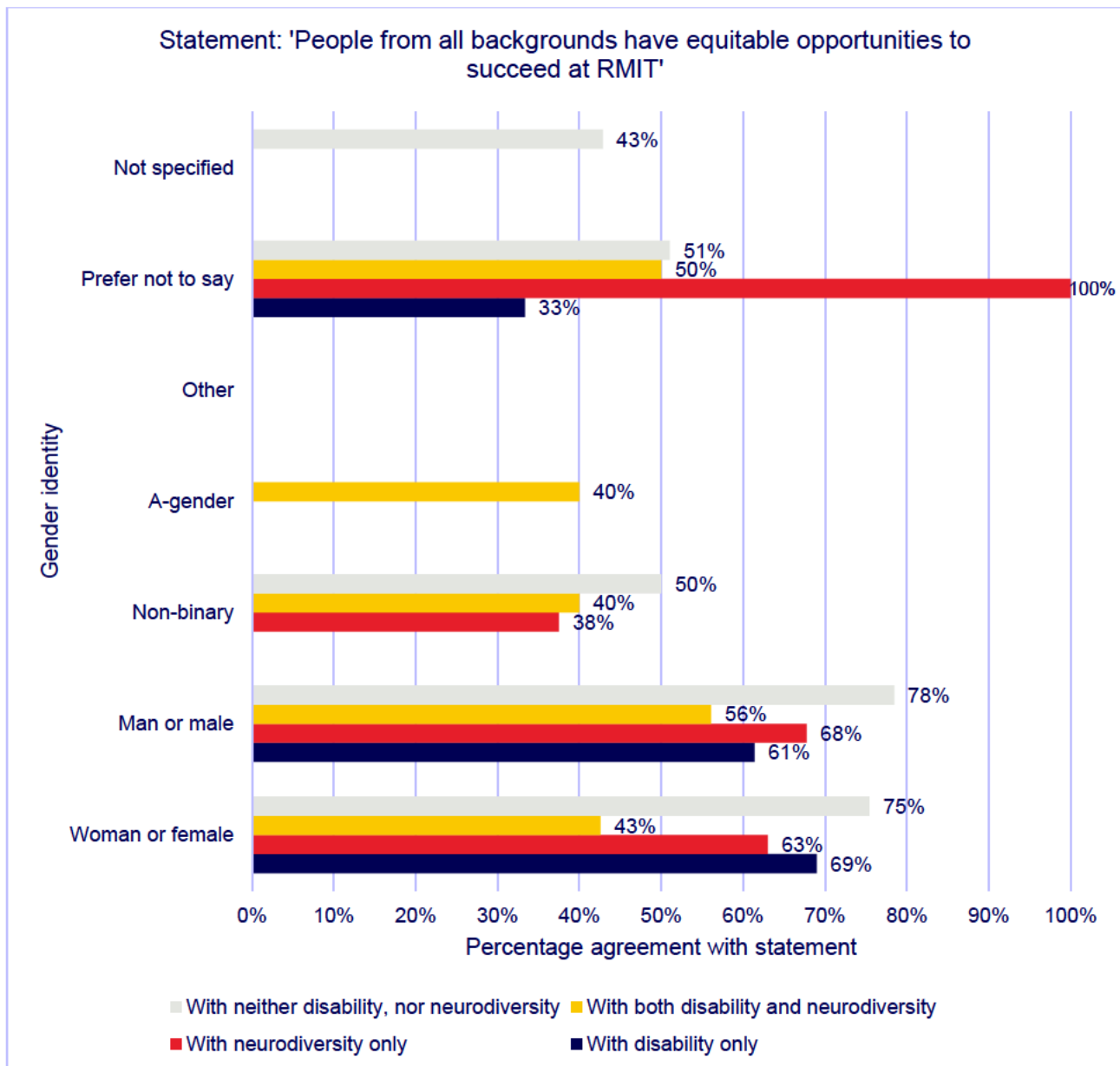


Figure 38: Staff Survey 2025 responses (all staff) - experiences of inclusion, by gender identity and disability/neurodiversity status

These results indicate compounding impacts for staff experiencing multiple forms of discrimination. This underscores the importance of targeted actions to address structural and cultural barriers beyond gender inequity.

Since the beginning of 2024, 240 requests for workplace adjustments⁴⁹ have been supported for people with disability and neurodivergence—this includes an additional 93 requests supported since RMIT's fourth Cygnet Award application in October 2025.

With respect to students, between 2019 and 2024, RMIT experienced a significant increase in the enrolment of domestic undergraduate students with disability, with numbers more than doubling from

⁴⁹ Reasonable adjustments are intended to remove barriers to participation and success for people with disability—examples include assistive technology, modified equipment, changes to lighting, or adjustments to instructions. Flexible or hybrid work can also function as an adjustment, involving changes to work hours, location, or the way work is performed.

2,598 to 5,790. Over this period, the proportion of students with disability within the overall domestic undergraduate population rose from 6.7% to 15.4%. This demographic shift represents a positive development in access and participation, while also signalling the need to ensure that institutional systems, supports and culture evolve at the same pace.

While outcomes for students with disability have improved in several areas, persistent disparities highlight structural challenges. Students with disability are now passing at higher rates (84.9% in 2019 and 87.1% in 2024). Although this demonstrates progress, their success rate remains below that of other domestic students. Retention rates for students with disability have slightly declined, from 79.5% to 78.4%—though, this remains on par with other domestic students. Program attainment for this cohort has increased significantly, from 5.6% in 2019 to 12.6% in 2024. The combination of rising enrolments and only modest gains in some outcome measures points to the need for more coordinated, institution-wide strategies to support progression and completion.

Student experience data further underscores this barrier. Evaluations of the *'Quality of the entire educational experience'* and *'Student support and services'* declined between 2019 and 2024 for students with disability, mirroring broader trends among domestic students (with some recovery in the post-COVID period). Nonetheless, declining satisfaction in core areas of educational experience and support highlights the urgency of strengthening inclusive teaching practices, accessible service delivery and proactive student support mechanisms.

Encouragingly, the overall employment rate of graduates with disability has increased from 77.3% in 2019 (10 percentage points behind other domestic students) to 83% in 2024 (1.4 percentage points behind). While this demonstrates substantial progress in closing employment disparities, the historical gap and the scale of enrolment growth reinforce the importance of sustained, systemic action to ensure equitable graduate outcomes.

2.3. Staff and student experiences of accessibility

Staff feedback was collected through RMIT's Disability and Neurodiversity Staff Network and a further workshop with staff, as set out in the Data Explainer. Student feedback was collected through recent consultations with students and the RMIT University Student Union Disabilities and Careers Officer. Qualitative insights gathered through these mechanisms are discussed, below.

Barriers to access in the built environment

Staff who identified as living with disability reported some positive experiences where physical adjustments were made, such as desk allocations away from high-traffic areas, which reduced anxiety and improved concentration. But many staff described ongoing challenges associated with the built environment, particularly neurodivergent employees. Open-plan office layouts were reported to contribute to sensory overload, resulting in reduced productivity and the need to compensate for lost work time outside standard hours. One staff member noted:

'RMIT moved to open plan office spaces. As someone with ASD, ADHD and dyslexia, I find these spaces virtually impossible to be productive in... The problems include visual and audible noise, harsh lighting, and having to constantly process every personality in the environment (even if they're not there). Every hour spent in one of these spaces is... an hour I must spend at home catching up on work.'

- academic

Staff also identified a lack of dedicated, appropriate spaces to support physical regulation and sensory needs, such as quiet areas or spaces for stretching or movement during breaks. These experiences suggest that, while Disability Discrimination Act compliance has addressed baseline physical access requirements, further work is needed to support staff with disability and neurodivergence through more inclusive design of workspaces.

Action

Items 4.2-4.4 respond to the need for further built environment improvements, including sensory-friendly spaces.

Barriers to access in digital tools and systems

Staff reported inconsistent experiences accessing digital tools and assistive technologies. Several described delays in receiving technical support, which at times prevented them from performing their roles. One staff member noted:

'My assistive tech software had an error. I contacted IT by phone, explained I needed to use this software to do my work... The IT person on the phone logged the job (did not attempt to resolve the problem over the phone) and then I received an email telling me to make an appointment, but no appointments were available that day.'

- professional employee

In contrast, positive experiences were reported where managers facilitated rapid access to assistive technologies, such as voice-to-text software, enabling staff to work safely and productively and avoid injury.

Action

Items 4.1, 4.5 and 4.6 respond to the need for improvement digital accessibility, including more timely support.

Exclusion of people with disability and neurodivergence

Some staff described experiences of exclusion arising from limited understanding of disability and neurodivergence, particularly in performance-related conversations with managers. One staff member noted:

'A manager asked to have a conversation about my performance/attitude/ways of working. The biggest comments were directly related to my neurodiversity... ongoing communication and conversations earlier and more compassion for people having different ways of working [would be better].'

- sessional academic

Action

Item 4.7 responds to the need to improve capability for inclusive communication.

Student consultations have identified ongoing challenges relating to the provision of equitable and inclusive education for students with disability. The model that requires individual disclosure to obtain learning support through an Equitable Learning Plan is insufficient to meet the diverse needs of such a large student body, including social needs. As one student noted:

'I have never been judged for needing extensions on assessments; in fact, they reassured me that taking the extensions was the right thing to do. However, in terms of social life at RMIT, I do feel a bit left out because of my disabilities and location [regional Victoria].'

- student

One senior academic further noted, in relation to ELPs:

'Students are starting to appeal [for grades to be reassessed] on the basis of ELPs not being taken into account. Because of the distributed way learning happens, it's not always as neat and tidy as what's in the plan.'

- woman academic, level E

While continuing to build capacity for individual adjustments, RMIT is integrating inclusive teaching frameworks such as Universal Design for Learning across curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to support a more systemic approach to accessibility.

Action

Item 4.10 responds to the need to improve the provision of individual adjustments and systemic inclusion for students with disability.

Summary

While RMIT has made measurable progress in supporting staff and students with disability and neurodivergence, accessibility barriers persist. Staff Survey and qualitative data highlight ongoing challenges in the built and digital environments, and in relation to inclusion, with impacts most pronounced for neurodivergent staff, particularly those who identify as non-binary. Evidence shows that compliance-based approaches alone are insufficient, with inclusive outcomes dependent upon timely assistive technologies, inclusive communication and manager capability.

Student data similarly show improved participation alongside continued challenges with social inclusion and individualised adjustment models. Future efforts will focus on systemic approaches, including Universal Design, improved accessibility of physical and digital environments and enhanced capability and data to ensure equitable experiences and outcomes.

References

Sharma, R. H., Asselin, R., Stainton, T., & Hole, R. (2025). *Ableism and employment: A scoping review of the literature. Social Sciences*, 14(2), 67.

Key barrier 4: Action Plan

Ref	Rationale/Evidence	Actions & Outputs	Timeframe (start & end)	Person / Group responsible for implementing action	Senior Leader accountable for action delivery	Desired Outcomes and Impact
4.1	Staff feedback demonstrates that delayed or ad hoc access to assistive technology can prevent people from performing core aspects of their roles, while timely provision enables safe and productive work. Current approaches rely heavily on individual disclosure after appointment, contributing to emotional labour and cumulative disadvantage, particularly for women and gender-diverse staff. Embedding accessibility at onboarding shifts adjustments from reactive to proactive, supporting retention and reducing inequities from the outset.	Inclusive design in onboarding —including identifying workplace adjustment requirements during recruitment process and/or when a new staff member is appointed and pre-approve assistive technology.	Q4 2025–ongoing	Talent Acquisition HR Operations	Vice President, People and Culture	Workplace adjustments are identified and arranged early. Target: 100% of disclosed adjustment needs for new starters are reviewed and actioned (or approved) prior to or within the first month of commencement.
4.2	Both survey and qualitative data confirm persistent systemic accessibility issues across built and digital environments, despite improvements in individual adjustments. Neurodivergent staff continue to report low satisfaction with physical spaces and digital enablement, indicating that compliance-based fixes alone are insufficient. Implementing the Accessibility Audit recommendations provides a coordinated, evidence-based pathway to addressing structural barriers.	Action recommendations from the Accessibility Audit 2024.	Ongoing–Oct 2025	Property Services	ED, Property Services Group	Structural accessibility barriers across physical and digital environments are systematically reduced, resulting in more inclusive, functional and usable environments for staff and students with disability and/or neurodivergence. Target: All recommendations actioned.

4.3	Neurodivergent staff consistently report sensory overload from noise, lighting and visual stimuli, alongside a lack of appropriate spaces for regulation, focus and movement. These barriers directly impact participation, productivity and wellbeing, with the lowest enjoyment of physical environments reported by staff with both disability and neurodivergence. Reviewing and expanding low-sensory and focus spaces responds to these identified needs and moves beyond baseline Disability Discrimination Act compliance toward Universal Design.	Complete a review/gap analysis of sensory-friendly spaces across campuses. IDEA and Property Services to partner to assess and implement property and facility-related individual workplace adjustments, such as a low sensory environment and the private use of "focus rooms" (beyond meetings).	Sept 2025–Jan 2026	Property Services IDEA team	ED, Property Services Group Vice President, People and Culture	Low-sensory and focus spaces respond to identified needs and move beyond baseline Disability Discrimination Act compliance toward Universal Design. Target: Gap analysis to inform PAW IDEA prioritisation for 2026 by Q1 2026.
4.4	Staff and students have highlighted ongoing challenges in the built environment and limited visibility of planned improvements. Making the Property Plan publicly available supports transparency, builds trust and enables lived experience to inform future infrastructure decisions.	Make high-level Property Plan available publicly so staff and students can see work being planned and provide feedback.	Jan 2026–Dec 2026	Property Services	ED, Property Services Group	Delivery of spaces to support the RMIT community as prioritised by PSG aligned with audit risks and stakeholder engagement by end 2026. Targets: Published Living Master Plan by Q2 2026. Prioritisation of IDEA Program for Property Annual Works including stakeholder feedback by Q1 2026.
4.5	Although digital accessibility scores improved from 2024 to 2025, agreement remains low—particularly among staff with neurodivergence, who report significantly poorer experiences across systems and processes. Qualitative feedback shows inconsistent access to tools and uneven support as key barriers to effective participation. A coordinated uplift ensures accessibility is embedded across platforms and capability,	Deliver a coordinated digital accessibility uplift by launching self-service training via Workday, improving accessibility across all learning content, and strengthening communications and access to digital tools through a partnership between ITS and the IDEA team.	Sept 2025–Dec 2027	Digital Accessibility Employee Experience and Capability ITS	Director, Digital and Experience Vice President, People and Culture Executive Director, Technology	There are consistent, maintainable sources for staff and students to find out about digital tools. Target: Post-training and post-implementation evaluations demonstrate increased satisfaction with digital accessibility.

	reducing reliance on individual workarounds and improving equity of access.					
4.6	Staff case studies demonstrate that delays in assistive technology provision can halt work entirely, while rapid access enables safe participation and prevents injury. Current experiences are uneven, creating inequity and reinforcing dependence on individual managers rather than consistent systems. Strengthening responsiveness is therefore critical to moving from compliance-driven adjustments to reliable, organisation-wide accessibility.	Review and strengthen timely support for assistive technology users.	May 2025–2026	ITS	Interim Executive Director, Technology	Staff provided with timely assistance, without the need to disclose why they use the tech. Target: Staff using assistive technology report reduced delays and improved consistency of support.
4.7	Some staff reported exclusionary and poorly informed performance conversations, contributing to stress and disengagement. Survey data also show persistent concerns about flexibility and career impact, reflecting the ongoing influence of “ideal worker” norms. Embedding disability and neurodiversity capability in leader programs supports compassionate management, legitimises flexible work as reasonable adjustment, and improves retention and progression outcomes.	Build capability of leaders to support the wellbeing of staff living with disability and/or neurodivergence by embedding this in leader programs, as relevant.	Q2 2026 - ongoing	Employee Experience and Capability	Vice President, People and Culture	Leaders demonstrate inclusive, informed and supportive management practices that positively impact the wellbeing, engagement and retention of staff with disability and/or neurodivergence. Target: Staff engagement feedback results in an improvement in wellbeing year on year.
4.8	RMIT's recorded disability workforce data remains significantly below population benchmarks, limiting the University's ability to undertake robust intersectional analysis and targeted action. Encouraging staff to update information in Workday improves data quality while inclusive storytelling strengthens belonging and visibility. This	Profile diverse employees (including those with disability and/or neurodivergence) and amplify campaigns that encourage staff to update personal information in Workday.	Q2 2026 - ongoing	Communications IDEA team	ED, Communications Vice President, People and Culture	Disability and neurodivergence are more visible and normalised within organisational communications, contributing to improved data quality and a stronger sense of inclusion and belonging.

	also supports framing accessibility as universally beneficial, helping mitigate backlash and reinforcing fairness for all staff.					Target: Improved completeness and quality of disability workforce data over time.
4.9	Since early 2024, workplace adjustment requests have increased substantially, reflecting both growing need and improved awareness—yet staff still report stigma, inconsistency and reliance on individual advocacy. Ongoing refinement focuses on creating a smoother, more dignified user experience while embedding accessibility as a standard organisational practice rather than an exception.	Continuous improvement of workplace adjustment processes to create a better user experience for staff and supervising managers.	Ongoing	IDEA team	Vice President, People and Culture	Workplace adjustments are experienced as fair, timely and straightforward, supporting staff wellbeing and effective management practices. Target: Feedback from staff requesting adjustments show improvement, year-on-year
4.10	While many students with disability reported strong academic support and understanding from teaching staff, they also described gaps in social inclusion, particularly for students studying remotely or living in regional areas. Feedback highlighted limitations in the Equitable Learning Plan model, which relies on individual disclosure and multiple parties coming together to deliver on the plan.	Improve the provision of individual adjustments and systemic inclusion for students with disability , by implementing annual workplans developed under the IDEA Framework and the Education Plan (as set out in the IDEA Annual Workplan and Universal Design for Learning Action Plan).	Ongoing	Student Equity	VC, Education Executive Director, Students	Continued improvement in key metrics (student access, success, completion, evaluations in surveys, graduate outcomes).

Key barrier 5: Respectful cultures and behaviours

1. Understanding the barrier

RMIT's fifth Cygnet Award application (2025) focused on promoting respectful cultures and behaviours—creating an environment where gender-based discrimination, bullying and harassment, as well as sexual assault and sexual harassment,⁵⁰ are actively prevented and responded to appropriately, when they occur.

RMIT continues to face challenges in embedding consistently respectful cultures and ensuring staff and students feel safe to report gender-based harm. While awareness of gender-based violence (GBV), consent and available supports is relatively high across the University, this awareness has not yet translated into consistent reporting behaviours. This gap reflects ongoing concerns about confidentiality, fear of negative academic or career consequences and uncertainty about whether complaints will lead to transparent and fair outcomes. These challenges are further shaped by variable social and cultural norms across Colleges and Schools and the need for sustained, multi-year effort to embed accountability and cultural change.

Since the award of Cygnet 5, new evidence has become available. This includes an audit of RMIT's workforce data, required by CGEPS, and updated GBV reporting data. Together, these data provide a more nuanced current state picture of staff and student experiences, highlighting both areas of progress and persistent barriers. Along with updated actions brought about by the requirements of the *National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence* (the *National Code*), these insights shape the next phase of work to embed consistent, accountable and inclusive cultures of respect.

2. Evidence of barrier

2.1. Staff and student reporting

Engagement data from 2025 indicate high levels of awareness of GBV prevention and support, alongside relatively low rates of formal reporting. During the 2025 '*Respect at Uni*' campaign, 725 students⁵¹ engaged with '*Sex and Consent Snack Cart*' stalls, and over 600 students completed surveys, with 91% reporting increased knowledge of supports. Figure 39 sets out student responses to the question '*Where would you go to get support for gender-based violence?*' and reflects students' awareness of the Safer Community team.⁵²

⁵⁰ These range of behaviours are referred to as 'gender-based violence' or 'gender-based harm' throughout this application, for brevity.

⁵¹ This represents around 2% of RMIT's 45,000 students who study at the Melbourne City Campus.

⁵² Staff and students can report experiences of gender-based violence, or unwanted or threatening behaviour, by phone, email or the anonymous online support form to the Safer Community team. Beyond Safer Community, staff and students can make complaints through student conduct and workplace relations channels, as well as seek support from RMIT Counselling and Psychological Services, the Employee Assistance Program or campus security.

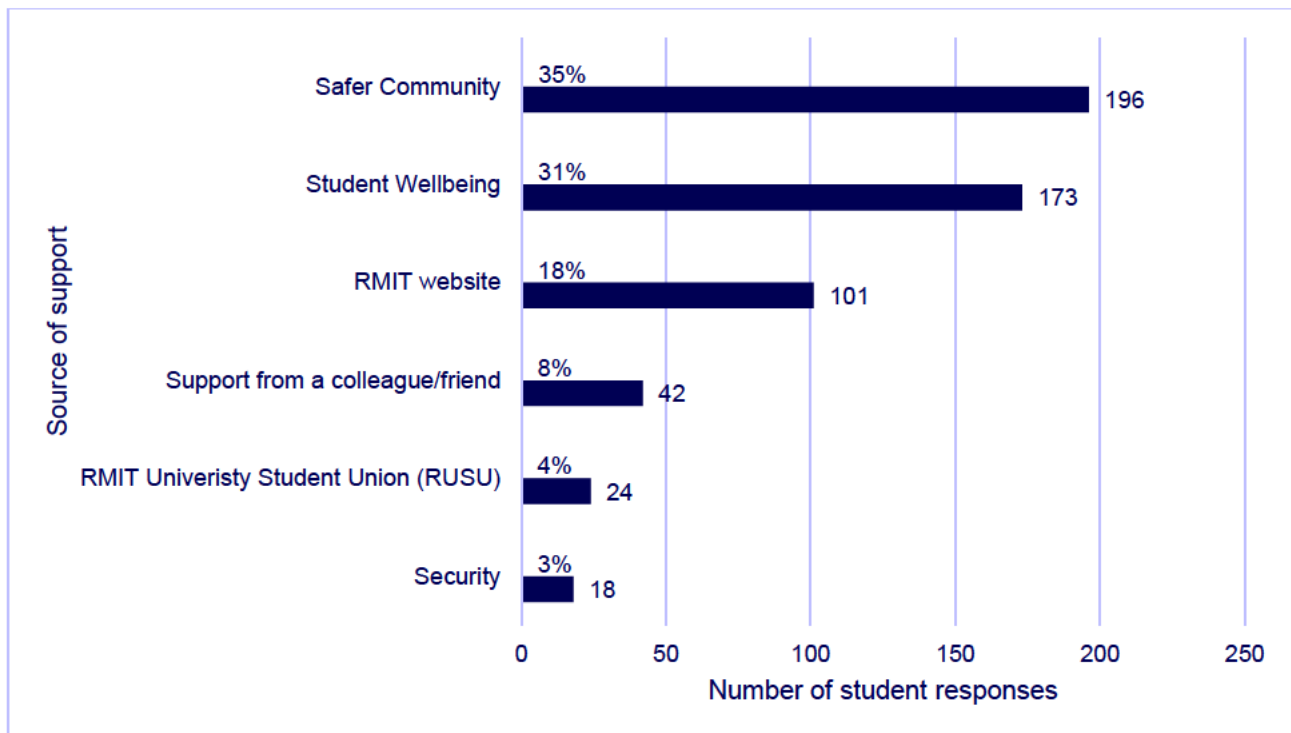


Figure 39: Student responses to GBV prevention survey 2025 - where would you go to get support?

Despite this awareness, data show that few staff and student disclosures of gender-based harm result in formal reports. Figure 40 shows the number of disclosures and formal reports made by students, as well as the number for which there were disciplinary actions taken, for 2023-25.⁵³

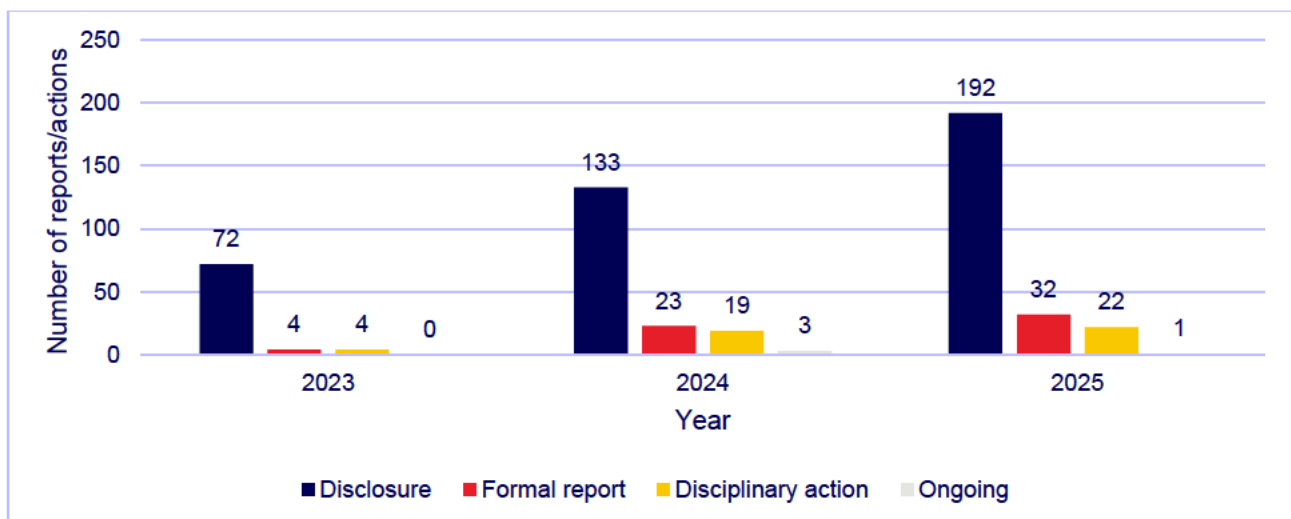


Figure 40: Student formal reports of gender-based harm, and resultant disciplinary actions, 2023-25

The data show that both the number of cases being supported and the formal reports made/disciplinary actions taken increased substantially from 2023 to 2025, despite formal reports remaining low relative to disclosures.

⁵³ 'Ongoing' reports were ongoing at the time this data was exported and may have since been resolved.

Figure 41 shows related staff data.⁵⁴ In both 2023 and 2024, one report was later withdrawn at the request of the discloser.

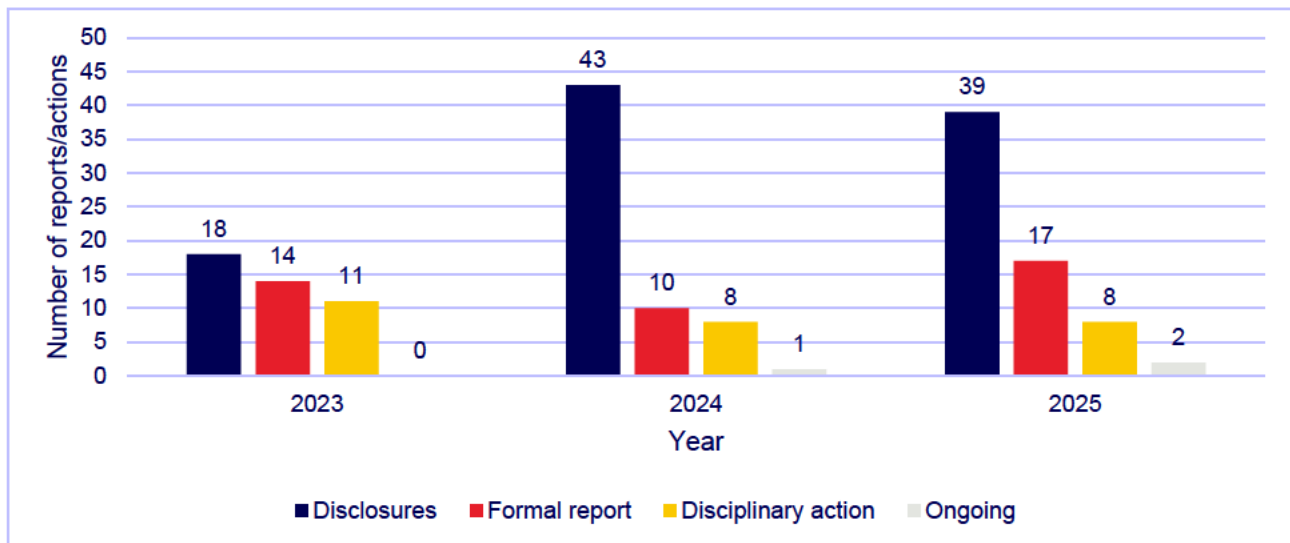


Figure 41: Staff formal reports of gender-based harm, and resultant disciplinary actions, 2023-25

In 2024, of 43 total staff disclosures, 10 (23%) resulted in a formal report and 80% of the formal reports had an outcome of disciplinary action. In 2025, of 39 total staff disclosures, 17 (44%) resulted in a formal report, but only 8 (47%) of the formal reports had an outcome of disciplinary action—meaning there were more formal reports in 2025, compared with 2024, but a smaller proportion of incidents resulted in disciplinary action being taken. There was a higher number of disciplinary actions taken in 2023 when disclosures and formal reports were much lower. This “lowering of the threshold” for disclosures and reports perhaps reflects the broader awareness of GBV.

The data is shared through the University’s *Gender-Based Violence Annual Report*. This key accountability mechanism helps keep our community informed of RMIT’s progress towards the goals of our *GBV Strategic Action Plan*.

2.2. Leadership and accountability

RMIT has made significant progress in strengthening leadership capability and accountability for respectful cultures and the prevention of GBV. As part of establishing a baseline, the University has reviewed current evaluation data on leaders’ self-reported capability.

In 2025, 15 executive leaders⁵⁵ attended training on preventing gender-based violence, delivered by sector leader Our Watch. Self-reported changes⁵⁶ in capability following the training show that 78% of respondents reported a slight, moderate or major increase in skill, and 56% reported a slight, moderate or major increase in confidence in preventing violence against women (Table 16).

⁵⁴ As with students, ‘ongoing’ reports were ongoing at the time this data was exported and may have since been resolved.

⁵⁵ Including the Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellors and Associate Deputy Vice Chancellors.

⁵⁶ Nine participants completed pre- and post-training evaluation surveys.

Table 16: Participant post-Our Watch training survey results 2025 (skill and confidence)

Statement	Number of survey respondents					
	Decrease	No change	Slight increase	Moderate increase	Major increase	Total number of responses
Skill						
Identifying your role and influence in prevention gender-based violence at your university	0	2	6	0	1	9
Identifying action you can take, as a leader, to create an enabling environment for the Educating for Equality model	0	2	3	3	1	9
Confidence						
Take individual and organisational action to promote gender equality and prevent violence against women	0	4	4	1	0	9

While indicating positive shifts for some participants, the data also highlight opportunities for further training to support more consistent confidence and capability across the executive cohort.

Leaders, themselves, are actively shaping the next phase of this work, identifying opportunities to embed expectations for respectful cultures within performance and accountability frameworks. As this work continues, RMIT is shifting from reliance on individual leadership commitment to a more consistent, systems-led approach.

2.3. Social and cultural norms

Staff Survey results provide some insight into the social and cultural norms at the University. In 2025, staff of all gender identities and sexual orientations consistently agreed with the statement '*In my organisation sexual harassment and gender-based harassment is not tolerated*', with percentage agreement ranging from 67% to 90% (Table 17).⁵⁷ Perceptions of organisational responsiveness to psychosocial risk and accountability for poor behaviour show more variability and generally lower agreement, particularly among respondents who identify as non-binary or prefer not to disclose their gender identity.

⁵⁷ Where there were no responses for a particular gender identity category (e.g. 'non-binary', 'a-gender'), these categories were left out of the table, for simplicity.

Table 17: Staff Survey 2025 responses (all staff) - experiences of respectful cultures and behaviours, by gender identity and sexual orientation

Statement	Gender identity							
	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Queer					Heterosexual		
	Woman or female	Man or male	Non-binary	Other	Prefer not to say	Woman or female	Man or male	Prefer not to say
<i>At RMIT, people are held accountable for poor behaviour.</i>	30%	44%	38%	0	17%	42%	49%	26%
<i>RMIT as an organisation is responsive when concerns are raised about psychosocial risk.</i>	47%	53%	36%	0	33%	60%	62%	41%
<i>In my organisation sexual harassment and gender-based harassment is not tolerated.</i>	85%	86%	73%	67%	83%	89%	90%	89%
<i>If you made a complaint, were you satisfied with the way your formal complaint was handled?</i>	40%	43%	-	-	-	49%	52%	-

For people of colour, as with a range of other metrics, responses were generally similar or more favourable than in the case of non-people of colour (see Table 18)⁵⁸, except in the case of non-binary people of colour, who were much less likely than their non-POC peers to report that *'people are held accountable for poor behaviour'* and less likely to report that *'RMIT as an organisation is responsive when concerns are raised about psychosocial risk'*.⁵⁹ These findings highlight the importance of an intersectional lens, as gender and racial marginalisation can intersect to shape markedly different workplace experiences, which are not visible when gender or race are considered in isolation.

⁵⁸ Where there were no responses for a particular gender identity category (e.g. 'non-binary', 'a-gender'), these categories were left out of the table, for simplicity.

⁵⁹ Findings should be interpreted with caution, given small sample sizes of non-binary staff.

Table 18: Staff Survey 2025 responses (all staff) - experiences of respectful cultures and behaviours, by gender and racial identity

Statement	Gender identity							
	Person of colour				Not person of colour			
	Woman or female	Man or male	Non-binary	Prefer not to say	Woman or female	Man or male	Non-binary	Prefer not to say
<i>At RMIT, people are held accountable for poor behaviour.</i>	47%	60%	17%	45%	36%	43%	38%	18%
<i>RMIT as an organisation is responsive when concerns are raised about psychosocial risk.</i>	62%	71%	33%	55%	55%	56%	37%	30%
<i>In my organisation sexual harassment and gender-based harassment is not tolerated.</i>	88%	92%	67%	73%	87%	89%	67%	80%
<i>If you made a complaint, were you satisfied with the way your formal complaint was handled?</i>	47%	58%	-	-	43%	45%	-	40%

Qualitative feedback suggests that these perceptions are shaped not only by formal policies and processes, but also by the visibility of leadership commitment and the consistency with which behavioural standards are reinforced. One staff member commented:

'Overall, it is good, but the executive are broadly silent on the issue. It seems that there is a reluctance to publicly support us in case of conflict with overtly conservative and confrontational members of staff.'
- Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) Survey 2024 respondent⁶⁰

This feedback suggests that, for some staff, confidence in the University's approach is influenced by whether leaders are seen to actively and publicly champion respectful and inclusive workplace behaviours. As another staff member noted:

⁶⁰ No demographic data is available for free-text responses to the AWEI Survey as these responses are provided in a randomised format, to protect confidentiality.

'Some people consistently demonstrate poor behaviour and this is tolerated. However, I have been heartened to hear the interim... DVC call out incivility on two occasions, stating we can and must be civil and respectful. A powerful message.'
- Staff Survey 2025 respondent⁶¹

Together, these comments point to a tension between perceptions that some inappropriate behaviour goes unaddressed and recognition that clear, public leadership messages can positively influence workplace culture. They suggest that visible accountability and consistent reinforcement of expected behaviours may be important factors in strengthening staff confidence that psychosocial risks and harmful conduct are being effectively managed.

Action

Items 5.5, 5.8 and 5.9 build a more visible, leadership-led culture of respect by strengthening prevention-focused messaging, equipping senior leaders to actively champion GBV prevention and embedding clear behavioural expectations into performance systems.

2.4. Staff and student experiences of respectful cultures and behaviours

The University has drawn on a range of qualitative evidence to understand how staff and students experience efforts to promote respectful cultures and behaviours, as discussed in the Data Explainer. From staff, this includes participant feedback from a dedicated workshop, and from those who participated in executive leader training and/or the Working Together with Men (WTWM) program. From students, feedback was compiled through a student survey and two dedicated focus groups with HDR student representatives.

Policies, processes/systems and resources

Qualitative evidence indicates that improvements to processes/systems are not yet consistently experienced as accessible, transparent or safe by all cohorts.

HDR student focus group participants reported limited visibility of outcomes following disclosures and concern about confidentiality, particularly where supervisors or senior staff are involved. Fear of reprisal and damage to academic progression were identified as deterrents to reporting. These findings suggest that while systems exist, they have not fully mitigated the structural power imbalances inherent in research and teaching environments, nor been communicated in ways that build confidence among those most at risk.

Action

Item 5.2 responds to the need to strengthen reporting processes.

Embedding prevention messages and accountability in everyday practice

Student survey responses indicate strong support for the University's existing prevention initiatives. Students reported a good baseline awareness of GBV issues and recognised the value of early interventions. Simultaneously, they expressed a desire for more visible, student-facing initiatives that feel embedded in everyday campus life, such as peer-led activities, digital campaigns and clear, accessible messaging in shared spaces.

Students consistently highlighted classrooms as a critical setting for reinforcing expectations around respectful behaviour. Many felt that explicit discussions led by tutors/lecturers would normalise these conversations and signal that GBV prevention is a shared responsibility. One student noted:

⁶¹ No demographic data is available for free-text responses to the Staff Survey as these responses are provided in a randomised format, to protect confidentiality.

'Tutors and lecturers talking about it at the start of a tutorial/lecture to inform the class what RMIT is doing to spread awareness.'
- student survey participant

One workshop participant highlighted a recent concerning upward trend in aggressive behaviour by students in classroom settings, leading to anxiety/nervousness in some educators. This participant also suggested that students have been using AI to share inappropriate imagery on University learning platforms.

Action

Item 5.7 responds to the need to address problematic student behaviours.

Finally, leadership staff who participated in training highlighted the importance of sustaining conversations about respectful cultures and behaviours beyond formal training. Participants emphasised the value of ongoing opportunities to deepen practice and called for clearer accountability mechanisms to ensure shared ownership. One training participant suggested:

'What gets measured gets done. Consider how accountability for culture can be built into manager performance, e.g.: KPIs.'
- executive leadership training participant

Action

Items 5.5-5.9 respond to the need to embed prevention messages and accountability in everyday practice.

Intersectionality

HDR focus group participants raised concerns that some respectful culture initiatives do not adequately reflect the intersectional realities of the University community. While diversity was visible at a surface level, participants questioned whether cultural backgrounds beyond a limited set of identities were meaningfully included. One participant noted:

'At a surface level, there's a very diverse culture. School-wide or College-wide, I haven't seen any efforts to include diverse people of other backgrounds, beyond Australian Indigenous students. People from other backgrounds have Indigenous people, too, but this is not considered...research themes often look at gender or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, but people from other backgrounds are not considered.'

- HDR focus group participant (male-identifying)

This comment points to a perceived gap between visible representation and deeper inclusion in institutional priorities and research framing. It suggests that while diversity may be present in general terms, it is not consistently translated into recognition within formal structures such as research agendas and engagement activities. This is also reflected in the findings of Key Barrier 1, which highlighted gaps in perceived equity despite some gains for CALD staff.

A Working Together with Men (WTWM) 'accountability panellist'⁶² also made some suggestions for areas for improvement, including engagement with marginalised groups and trauma-informed facilitation, saying:

⁶² As a part of the WTWM program 'accountability panellists' were engaged to give the male allies feedback on their gender equality project ideas.

'There could be a workshop that specifically focuses on how more marginalised people can contribute in ways that are safe and meaningful to them. This would be core in terms of any systems change... it would be excellent to see more about lived experience and potentially trauma-informed facilitation included in the training.'
- WTWM program participant

This reinforces the need to move beyond broad inclusion statements towards practices that actively enable participation from people with different lived experiences in ways that are psychologically safe and structurally supported. Together, these perspectives suggest that strengthening respectful culture initiatives may require more deliberate attention to intersectionality, as well as facilitation approaches that enable meaningful engagement rather than passive representation.

Action

Items 5.1, 5.4. and 5.10 respond to the need to incorporate further intersectional, trauma-informed perspectives in work to embed prevention and respect.

Summary

RMIT has continued to strengthen respectful cultures and GBV prevention, with 2025 evidence showing high awareness, engagement and participation among staff and students, supported by improved policies, data systems and leadership capability-building. However, many staff and students continue to seek informal support rather than formal reporting, reflecting varied contexts, power dynamics and the time required for new systems and expectations to embed. Qualitative data indicate uneven experiences across cohorts: while training and campaigns have strengthened shared language and confidence, clearer reinforcement in everyday academic settings and greater visibility of prevention and response processes are still needed. Overall, RMIT has moved beyond awareness-building and is now focused on institutionalising respectful culture through consistent capability, accountability and evaluation embedded across teaching, research and leadership practice.

Key barrier 5: Action Plan

Ref	Rationale/Evidence	Actions & Outputs	Timeframe (start & end)	Person / Group responsible for implementing action	Senior Leader accountable for action delivery	Desired Outcomes and Impact
5.1	While awareness of GBV is high, this has not yet translated into consistent reporting, trust in systems or equitable perceptions of safety across cohorts. Implementing the National Code through aligned policies will support a systems-led approach to prevention and response.	Implement the National Code as a whole-of-institution commitment. Align University policies and processes with the National Code, informed by staff and student voice and intersectional perspectives.	Q3 2025–ongoing	GBV Advisory Group	Vice Chancellor	The University implements the requirements of the <i>National Code</i>, in full. Policies meet the requirements of the Code. Student voice and intersectional perspective reflected in GBV prevention efforts. Target: Achieve 100% alignment with relevant National Code requirements (all applicable standards) verified by annual external compliance review by Q4 2026.
5.2	Despite strong awareness of Safer Community, only a small proportion of disclosures progress to formal reports—particularly for students—reflecting concerns about confidentiality, outcomes and fear of reprisal. Improving visibility and centralising access to reporting pathways builds confidence in institutional processes, reduces uncertainty, and supports equitable access to support and accountability mechanisms.	Strengthen visibility and accessibility of Safer Community/complaint-handling through communications and centralised platforms.	Ongoing	Safer Community University Communications	Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk Executive Director, Communications	Safer Community is seen as a go-to service for staff and students. Key materials are shared amongst staff, enhancing seamlessness of experience for complainants. Target: Satisfaction ≥ 85% among service users.

5.3	Training evaluations demonstrate measurable improvements in knowledge, confidence and capability among staff and student leaders, yet evidence suggests cultural change requires sustained effort beyond one-off interventions. Expanding facilitated training and embedding evaluation across all learning offerings enables continuous improvement, supports long-term behaviour change, and ensures alignment with National Code requirements.	Review and implement learning and development (i.e. e-modules and trainer-facilitated training) on preventing and responding to GBV, in line with the National Code requirements. Expand trainer-facilitated training to wider audiences and embed evaluation protocols across all learning offerings.	Q3 2025–ongoing	Prevention and Respect team	Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk	All learning and development reviewed and meeting best practice standards and embed evaluation protocols. Staff and students report increased knowledge, skills and confidence in preventing GBV and promoting respectful cultures. Target: Average knowledge/skills/confidence uplift $\geq 20\%$ from pre- to post-assessment; retention
5.4	HDR students report uncertainty about complaint processes, concerns about confidentiality, and fear of academic consequences due to power imbalances in supervisory relationships. Engaging HDR representatives strengthens intersectional voice, ensures initiatives are relevant to their unique context, and supports more inclusive and trusted prevention and response approaches.	Seek HDR student feedback on prevention and response at RMIT through Athena Swan HDR representatives.	Ongoing	Athena Swan team	Associate Deputy Vice Chancellor, Gender Equity	HDR student needs better met by prevention and response initiatives. Target: Have a HDR student representative in attendance at all Athena Swan Steering Group meetings.
5.5	Student feedback highlights strong baseline awareness alongside a desire for more visible, everyday reinforcement of respectful behaviours across campus spaces and learning environments. Prevention-focused branding and	Promote a culture of respect and professionalism through campus-wide campaigns , including prevention-focused branding, communications and messaging.	Ongoing	University Communications Prevention and Respect team	Executive Director, Communications Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk	RMIT culture typified by respect and professionalism, as reflected in Staff Survey outcomes. Target: Improve Staff Survey items on respectful behaviours

	communications help normalise shared responsibility, embed expectations in daily university life, and complement formal training by sustaining engagement and cultural momentum.					and psychological safety by ≥ 5 percentage points by 2028.
5.6	While staff broadly agree that harassment is not tolerated, perceptions of organisational responsiveness and accountability remain uneven across identity groups. Targeted training for staff and Senior Officers strengthens confidence in responding to disclosures, managing student conduct and navigating reporting pathways, supporting earlier intervention and more consistent application of standards.	Increased training for staff around responding to students' distress and challenging behaviours , including more upskilling for Senior Officers in managing student conduct issues and tailored training, as well as reporting procedures.	Q4 2025–ongoing	Safer Community team Prevention and Respect team	Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk	Senior Officers and educators in “higher risk” areas report increased knowledge, skills and confidence in preventing GBV and promoting respectful cultures. Target: $\geq 95\%$ completion of tailored training for identified high-risk areas
5.7	Emerging risks associated with fake, graphic or inappropriate imagery create psychosocial hazards and challenge traditional teaching boundaries. Building staff capability to respond to these issues—and embedding professional behaviour expectations into course design—supports safer learning environments while equipping students with clear standards for respectful digital and academic conduct.	Addressing inappropriate behaviours in the classroom, including use of inappropriate graphic imagery/AI. Develop pilot psychosocial support initiative (for trauma-informed teaching) in DSC, including workshops for staff.	Q2 2025–2027, and then ongoing	Mental Wellbeing and Psychosocial Risk team DSC representatives	Director, Employee Experience and Capability College Deputy Vice Chancellors	The development of professional behaviours in students together with an understanding of psychosocial and environmental risk in student's destination industries, incorporated in classroom education and rubric course assessment tools. Target: The use of AI for promoting graphic imagery is curbed and responded to appropriately when it occurs.

5.8	Evaluation of executive training shows clear gains in leaders' skills and confidence to prevent harm and model respectful behaviour, leaders themselves identifying the need for stronger accountability. Continued investment in senior leadership capability supports a shift from individual commitment to institution-wide responsibility.	Further University senior executive and leader training on leadership for the prevention of GBV.	Q3 2025–ongoing	Prevention and Respect team	Executive Director, Health, Safety and Risk	Leaders report increased knowledge, skills and confidence in preventing GBV and promoting respectful cultures. Target: ≥ 95% of leaders (HEW 10+ / academic leaders) complete leader-specific GBV/respect program by 2028
5.9	Qualitative evidence highlights the need to move beyond awareness toward accountability embedded in everyday practice, including performance and leadership frameworks. Integrating respectful behaviour expectations into core people systems reinforces shared ownership, supports early intervention, and helps sustain cultural change over time.	Embed value/behaviour expectation in performance and learning processes. Continually refine people leader programs (e.g. compliance programs) in relation to respectful behaviours and related issues.	Q2 2026–ongoing	Reward and workforce Initiatives team Employee Experience and Capability team	Vice President, People and Culture	Performance in relation to respectful behaviours improves, as reflected in Staff Survey outcomes. Target: Improve Staff Survey items on respectful behaviours and psychological safety by ≥ 5 percentage points by 2028.
5.10	The WTWM pilot demonstrated that sustained, well-resourced allyship programs can deepen leadership capability and challenge entrenched norms that enable harm. Expanding this initiative builds a visible network of male advocates, redistributes responsibility for change, and strengthens collective leadership in preventing gender-based violence.	Continue and expand Working Together with Men program to academic and professional senior leaders. Create and sustain a community of male advocates.	Q3 2025–Q3 2028	WTWM team	ADVC, Gender Equity	Senior leaders who identify as men deepen their knowledge and skill in allyship for gender equality and harm prevention. Target: Participants demonstrate a minimum 5 percentage point improvement in self-reported knowledge, skills and confidence in allyship behaviours (pre- and post-program assessment).