

SAGE Cygnet Award Application

Cygnet 2: Visibility of women



THE UNIVERSITY OF
**WESTERN
AUSTRALIA**

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SAGE CYGNET AWARD APPLICATION FORM



SAGE

SCIENCE IN AUSTRALIA
GENDER EQUITY

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Date of Application	March 2026
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The University of Western Australia: SAGE CYGNETS

Scope (Institution-wide barrier or Sub-group specific barrier)	Current Cygnet ✓	Barrier
Sub-group barrier	Cyg1	Acting on gender imbalance in Engineering
Institution-wide barrier	✓	Visibility of Women
Institution-wide barrier		Women in leadership (to be submitted)
Institution-wide barrier		Academic promotions (to be submitted)
Institution-wide barrier		Changing how we define academic success (to be submitted)

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Glossary of Acronyms

ASB	Athena Swan Bronze
DEI	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
ECM	Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics
EMS	Faculty of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences
GEWG	Gender Equity Working Group
HMS	Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences
IAS	Institute of Advanced Studies
MDHS	Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences
PVC	Pro Vice-Chancellor
STEMM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine
UWA	University of Western Australia

Data Statement

UWA affirms that gender extends beyond binary categories. Historically, our data collection systems did not reflect this, but we are gradually improving our systems in partnership with UWA’s LGBTIQA+ Working Group.

Key barrier

In 2017, The University of Western Australia's (UWA) Athena Swan Bronze (ASB) process revealed a lack of visibility of women across the University. The lack of profiling of women researchers, the lack of women researchers in the media, and the gender imbalance in UWA-sponsored visiting fellows were identified as barriers to women's career success.

- Sub-barrier 1.1 Lack of women 'in the spotlight'.
- Sub-barrier 1.2 Lack of gender balance in visiting fellows.

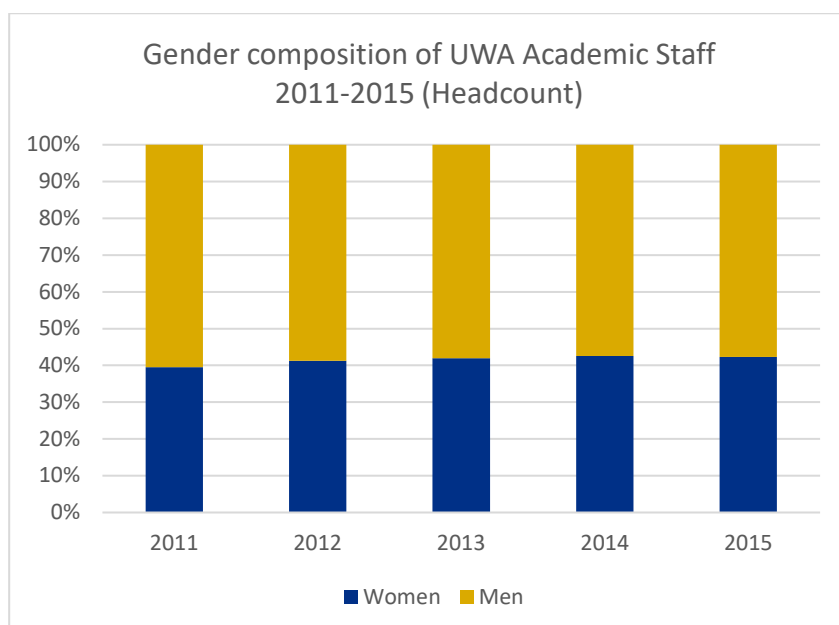
Evidence of barrier

1.1. Lack of women in the spotlight

The ASB process highlighted a lower rate of profiling UWA women compared with men, particularly in STEMM. Media and social media coverage has become increasingly important for research dissemination, engagement and impact,¹ reflected in analytics from platforms like Altmetric and PlumX, which have been shown to have some correlation with research citations.² However, cumulative advantage, reputation, and gender means male researchers are more likely to be represented in the media,³ aligning with our ASB findings.

From 2011-2015 women comprised 40% of academic staff (Figure 1).⁴

Figure 1 Academic staff by gender 2011-2015



¹ Emma S. Cowley et al., ““Post or Perish”? An Early Career Researcher’s Guide to Using Social Media’ (2024) 21(1) *Journal of Physical Activity and Health* 1 .

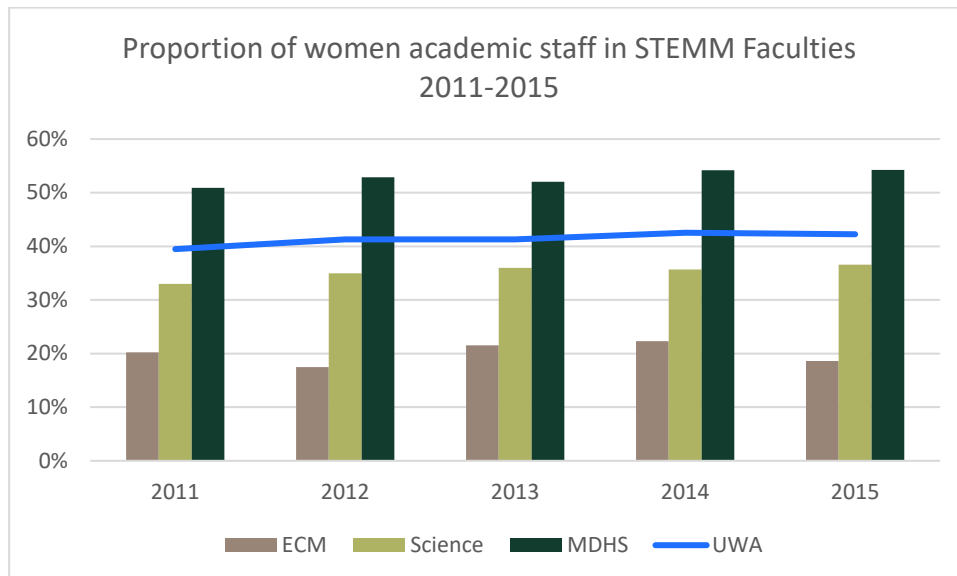
² Rodrigo Costas, Zohreh Zahedi, Paul Wouters, ‘Do “Altmetrics“ Correlate With Citations?’ (2015) 66. *Journal of the Association for Information Science and Technology* 2003.

³ Raphael H Heiberger, Bas Hofstra, Saïd Unger, ‘Professors in the media: dynamics of cumulative advantage, reputation, and gender’ (2025) *European Sociological Review*, *advance access*.

⁴ Women now comprise 48% of academic staff (March 2026).

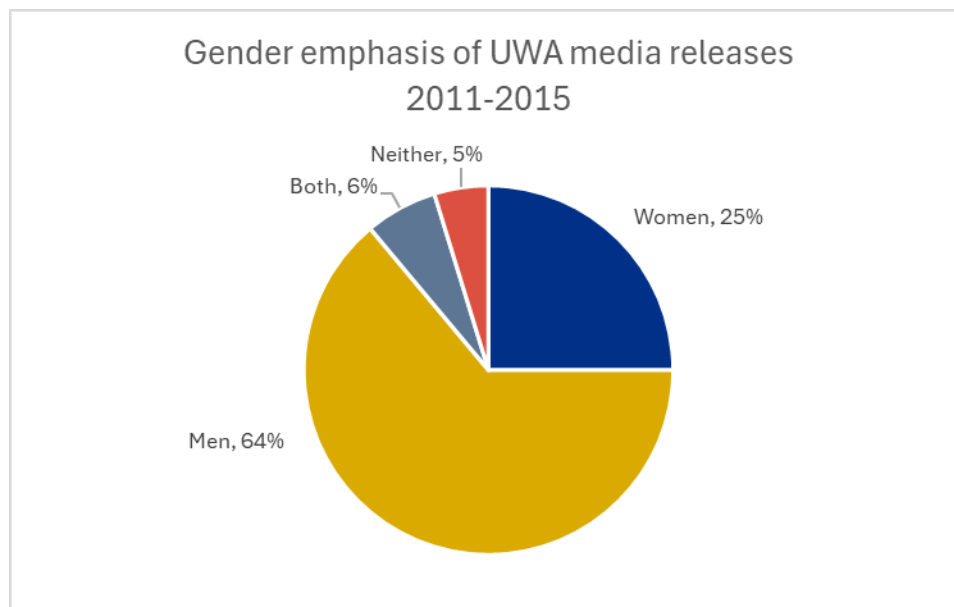
There were low proportions of academic women in the Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics (ECM) and the Faculty of Science; but over half of the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences (MDHS) academic staff were women (Figure 2).

Figure 2 Women in STEMM 2011-2015 (Headcount)



Analysis of UWA research-related media releases (2011 – 2015) revealed only 25% of media releases promoted women’s research (Figure 3).

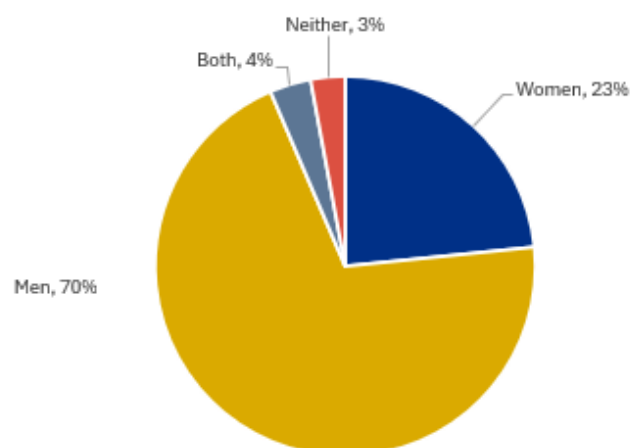
Figure 3 Media releases by gender 2011-2015



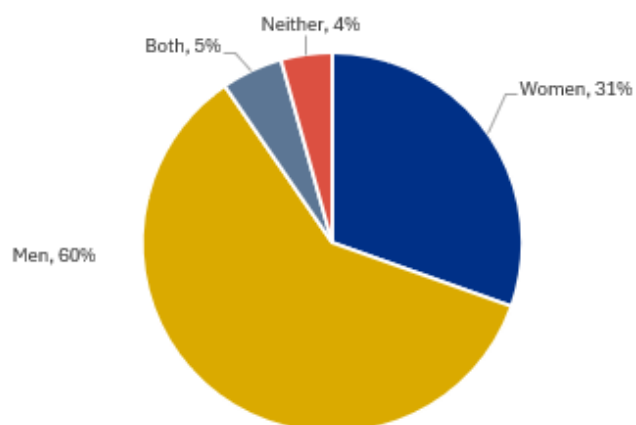
This imbalance was greater in STEMM-related media releases (23% women, 70% men) compared with non-STEMM (31% women, 60% men) (Figure 4). General media releases (i.e. not discipline-specific) were focused on men (43%), and there were more likely to be media releases featuring both men and women (27%) or a general article not featuring individual staff members (17%) than featuring women specifically (13%) (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Media releases by gender and type 2011-2015

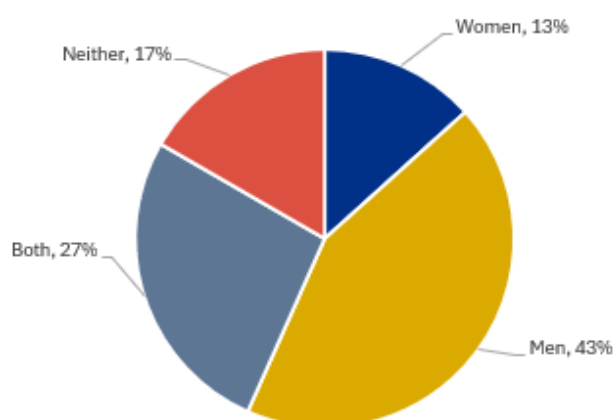
Gender emphasis of STEMM media releases 2011-2015



Gender emphasis of non-STEMM media releases 2011-2015



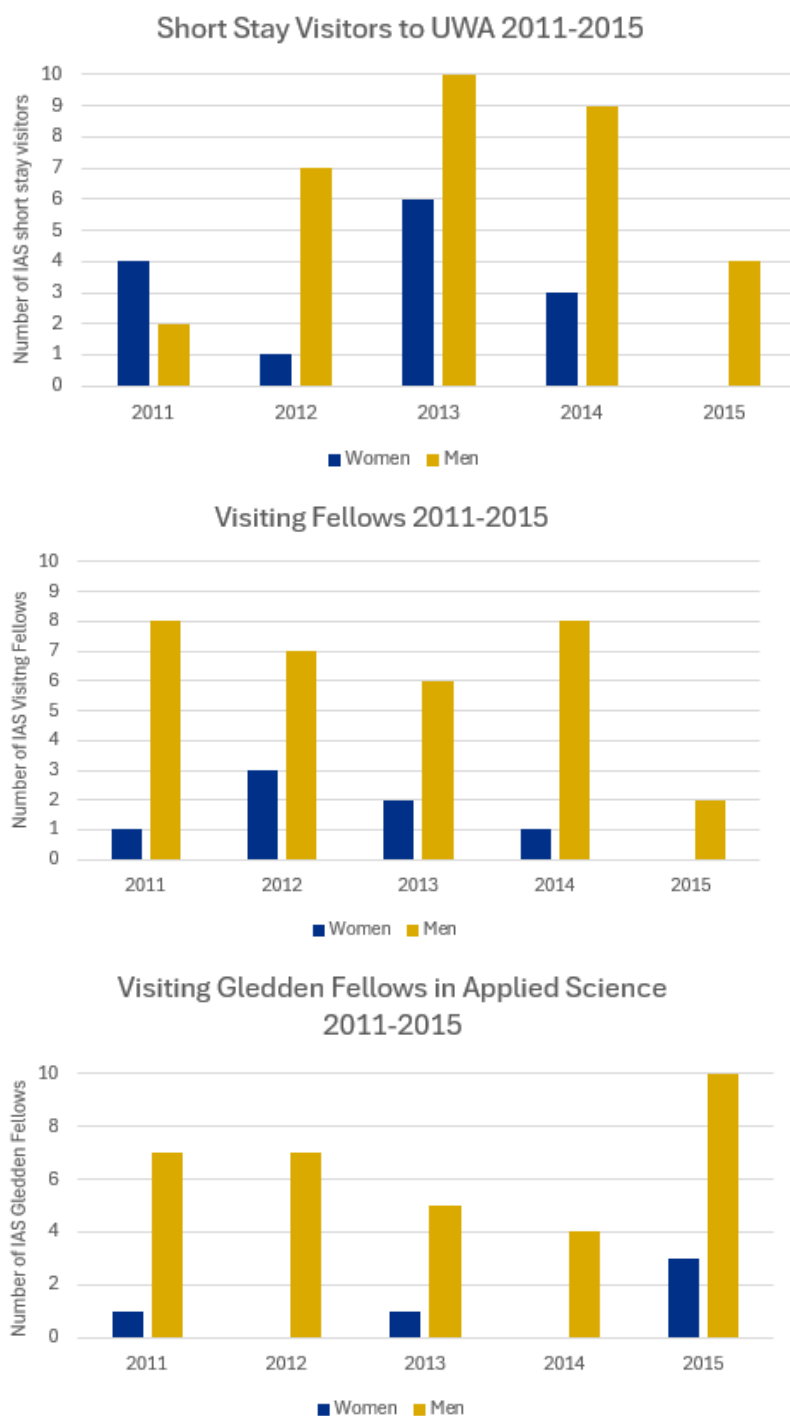
Gender emphasis of general media releases 2011-2015



1.2. Gender imbalance in visiting fellows

UWA's Institute of Advanced Studies (IAS) sponsors visiting global/national research fellows. IAS sponsors three types of researchers: short-term visitors, visiting fellows, and Gladden fellows (applied sciences and engineering). The ASB process revealed IAS-sponsored visitors were predominantly men (Figure 5).

Figure 5 IAS Fellows by Gender 2011-2015



Progress (Actions and outputs)

UWA has addressed low visibility of women by implementing actions from the ASB process.

Actions addressing sub-barrier 1: Lack of women ‘in the spotlight’

UWA implemented a communications strategy (2020–2024) to address the under-representation of women in media, public-facing expert roles, and internal profiling. Corporate Communications partnered with the UWA Gender Equity Working Group (GEWG) to identify and profile outstanding women through media releases, podcasts, and “staff spotlights”. The Associate Director of Corporate Communications joined the GEWG to embed accountability. A UWA panel pledge to gender equity was also introduced.

Action 1: Increase media releases on women’s research

A strategic approach was taken by Corporate Communications, to use Faculties/Schools and the GEWG to source newsworthy women’s research and achievements (rather than waiting for researchers to contact them).

Action 2: Feature women and diverse staff in ‘UWA Forward’

Although not initially identified as part of ASB (as the data analysis period pre-dated the introduction of UWA Forward), Corporate Communications identified scope to improve internal profiling of women in the e-newsletter ‘UWA Forward’. Unfortunately, a baseline was not established but dedicated focus on diversity is now evident. Working with the GEWG, Human Resources,⁵ and others, Corporate Communications profiled events, topics and staff members with a DEI focus. Since 2021, there has been greater focus on profiling women and non-binary staff. An example is the dedicated ‘*Inclusion and Diversity edition (1 December 2021)*’. Since then, UWA Forward incorporates DEI in most editions (see example in Figure 6).

⁵ Now ‘People & Culture’.



Around Campus



Ness Vaughan: You can't be what you can't see

Ness Vaughan knows the importance of visibility.

As incoming co-chair of UWA's LGBTIQA+ Working Group – and a trans non-binary person – they explain that awareness of diversity is not enough.

[Learn more](#)

Figure 6 Staff profile, UWA Forward 28/01/2026 - Ness Vaughan, Co-Chair of UWA's LGBTIQA+ Working Group

Action 3: Podcast Series

Internal funding was received in 2022 for a *Research on the Record* podcast. Across 2023–2024, 19 podcast episodes featured three men and 16 women (Table 1). The series was distributed through university channels, mainstream media, and Spotify, and generated coverage including interviews on ABC 720 Drive and live coverage on Nine News.

Table 1 UWA women profiled - 'Research on the Record' podcast

	Researcher	Discipline areas	Release Date
1	Professor Anna Nowak	Medical science; mesothelioma; neuro-oncology	11/07/2023
2	Eloise Moore	Astrophysics; computer science	9/08/2023
3	Dr Michelle Olaithe	Psychology; Sleep disorders; Obstructive Sleep Apnoea	29/08/2023
4	Professor Jaqueline Batley	Agricultural science; global food security; disease resistance	12/09/2023
5	Dr Jennifer Kelley	Marine biology; 3D body shape camouflage	27/09/2023
6	Grace Blackburn	Animal behaviour, cognition and communication	11/10/2023
7	Professor Amanda Davies	Population growth; demographic changes; infrastructure	25/10/2023

	Researcher	Discipline areas	Release Date
8	Dr Mehwish Nasim	Computer science; social media; misinformation detection tools	8/11/2023
9	Dr Kelsey Pool	Animal reproduction; disease impacting fertility	22/11/2023
10	Beth MacLean	Medical science; iron deficiency; women's health; CAPRI algorithm	6/12/2023
11	Dr Jessica Buck	Child health research; brain tumour research; paediatric oncology	21/12/2023
12	Emeritus Professor Carolyn Oldham	Environmental engineering; wetlands; water management; mining	10/01/2024
13	Emma Stephenson	Psychological science; mental load measurement	25/01/2024
14	Julia Haile	Psychological science; digital avatar facial expression realism	9/02/2024
15	Anna Faber	Molecular sciences; marine plastic-eating bacteria; bioplastics	19/03/2024
16	Dr Bhagya Dissanayake	Proteomics; early disease detection; agricultural resilience	15/05/2024

Highly downloaded episodes (as of December 2025): Professor Anna Nowak (314), Professor Amanda Davies (208), Dr Mehwish Nasim (167), Eloise Moore (151), Dr Michelle Olaithe (115), Professor Jacqueline Batley (131), and Dr Kelsey Pool (116).

Action 4: Implement a Panel Pledge

UWA introduced a panel pledge in 2020 – publicly committing to gender equity on panels at conferences and events. As of 2025, all Executive members and 358 staff had signed the public pledge. Two supporting resources are available - ‘Guidelines for Gender Equitable Conference Organisation’ and a ‘Response Template for Upholding the Panel Pledge’ with scripts for scenarios they may encounter as speakers.



UWA Commits to:

- Openly calling for gender equity on panels, at conferences and other professional events.
- Actively supporting women's voices and championing diversity more broadly.
- Ensuring that all forums that the University is involved in both within and beyond UWA take equal gender representation and other facets of diversity into account so that equity of voice is achieved.
- Ensuring that all forums organised by UWA take the gender of speakers and panellists into account and uniform gender panels are not hosted.
- Enquiring about the gender composition of the panellists/speakers and how the organisers are working towards both men and women being represented.
- Reserving the right to withdraw from events should diversity of speakers not be achieved.
- Recognising where gender representation is not achieved at an event, and if a UWA employee is speaking they reserve the right to:
 - mention that improved diversity in the speaker mix was requested, and
 - highlight relevant women leaders in the field and potential speakers in the presentation.



Sign up to take the pledge

Source: UWA Website

Actions addressing sub-barrier 2: Gender imbalance in Visiting Fellows

Action 5: IAS Gender Equity Plan

In response to ASB, the IAS formalised changes to improve gender equity, including establishing a selection committee, a formal nomination process, selection criteria, gender equity targets (minimum 40% women), and an engagement plan to promote the programs across UWA. These changes diversified the applicant pool, reducing reliance on informal practices that had favoured men; it improved gender balance and strengthened the visibility of women scholars overall. Gender equity in Gledden visiting fellowships and mobility grants remained imbalanced until a new IAS Director in 2024 engaged directly with Schools to invite nominations.

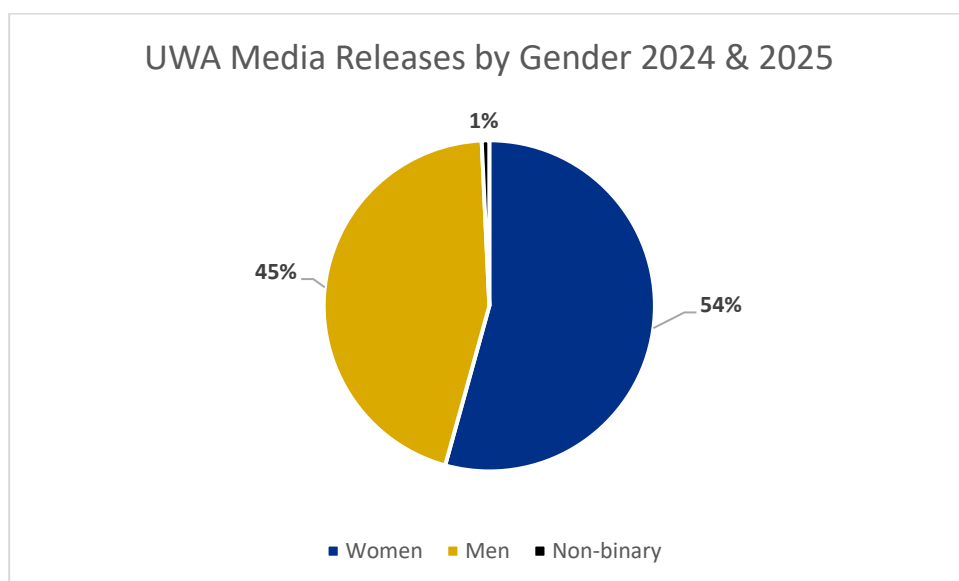
Outcomes

Where available, long-term data from each business area was used to show changes as a result of actions. However, data collection has at times been inconsistent and there are gaps, which we note here where applicable. Our data has lacked intersectionality (including gender beyond binary m/f), an area for improvement (see 'Further Actions').

Outcomes for sub-barrier 1: Lack of women ‘in the spotlight’

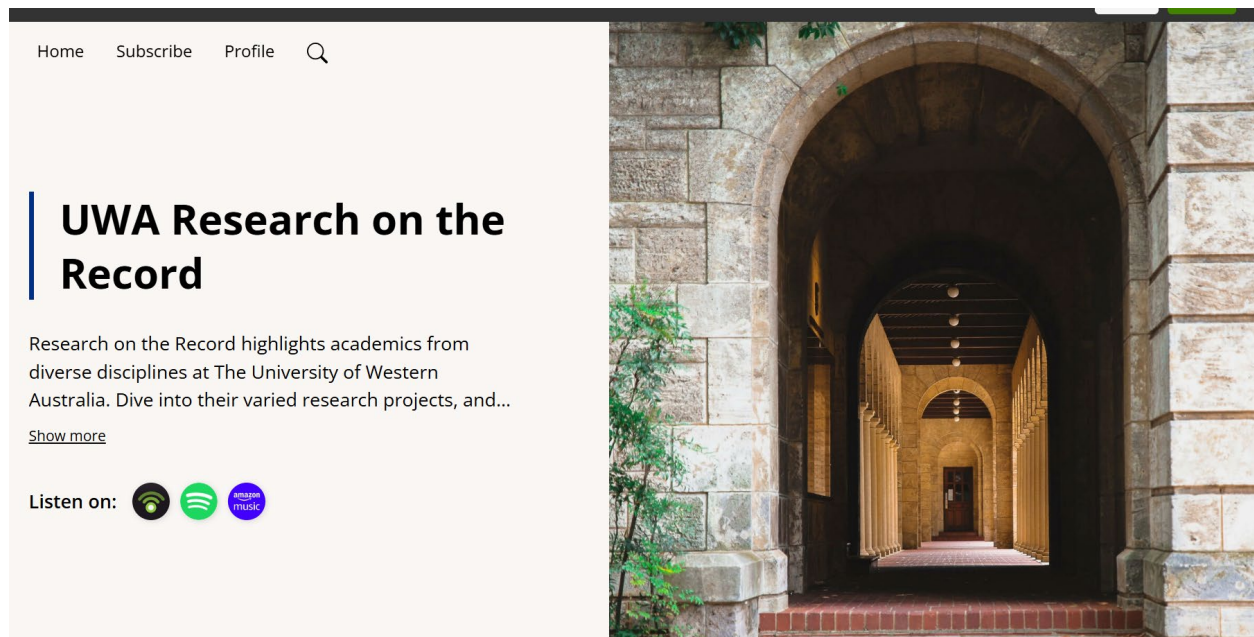
Actions to improve equal opportunity to promote research resulted in women featuring regularly in the staff newsletter, UWA Forward, and on the intranet. Non-binary staff were also profiled. Gender balance has increased from 2011 when media releases had only 20% women. Unfortunately, mechanisms for consistent data collection have not always been in place and we do not have disaggregated data by STEM/non-STEM. We do know that by 2023, UWA media releases were focussed on women 60% of the time, over-indexing for women researchers. This trend continued in 2024, when media statements featured 103 women (54%), 88 men (46%), and one non-binary staff member (1%); and in 2025, when outputs featured 118 women (55%), 95 men (44%) and two non-binary researchers (1.0%) (Figure 8).

Figure 7 Gender balance - media releases 2024 & 2025



An external driver was the ABC’s 50:50 Equality Project,⁶ introduced in 2018 when women made up only 30% of interviewed experts. UWA found the ABC continually requested women interviewees, and media releases responded to this demand.

⁶ Part of a global BBC initiative designed to tackle the severe under-representation of women’s voices.

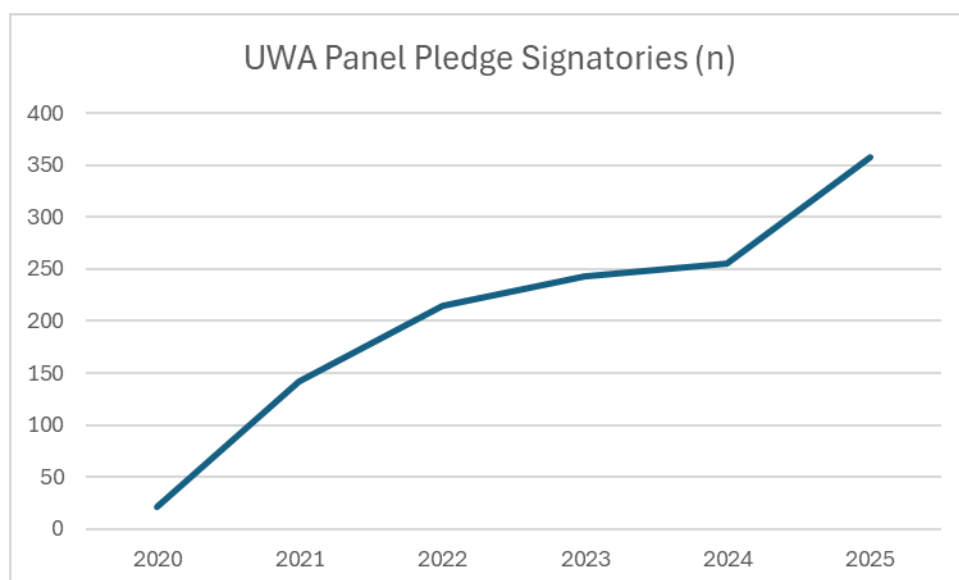


Source: UWA website

The *Research on the Record* Podcast series was impactful at promoting UWA women as experts. Downloads tracked strongly with a total of 2,446 (December 2025), exceeding the download figures of comparable UWA podcasts. Podcasts remain available and continue to receive engagement. As an example of media coverage from the podcasts, Nine News did a live interview with Dr Olaithe about her sleep apnoea research, and it was leveraged on the program's social media channels. UWA promoted the series on its social media channels, receiving strong engagement. This aligned with broader sector efforts such as ABC's 50:50 Equality Project, reinforcing systemic change in the representation of women as experts.

Panel pledge signatures gradually increased from 21 in 2020, to 358 in 2025 (Figure 9). An area for improvement is to track the implementation of the pledge which has not happened across the university. However, data was collected by the UWA Public Policy Institute ('PPI') and the IAS. The PPI held almost 50 events from August 2023-December 2025 and women represented 57% of panellists. Data is available from the IAS for 2025, and women represented 38% of panellists or presenters, indicating more needs to be done.

Figure 8 Panel pledge signatures 2020-2025



Outcomes - sub-barrier 2: Gender imbalance in visiting fellows

Gender balance in IAS-sponsored visitors was achieved for visiting fellows (40-47% between 2023 and 2025, Figure 10), compared with no women visiting fellows in 2015. For Gledden visiting fellows and mobility grants, gender balance was not achieved until 2025 following the proactive approach of the new IAS Director in 2024 who engaged with Schools to encourage nominations (Figure 11). COVID-19 drastically curtailed visitors for some time, such that there is limited meaningful data to analyse until 2023.

Figure 9 IAS visiting fellows 2023-2025 (number)

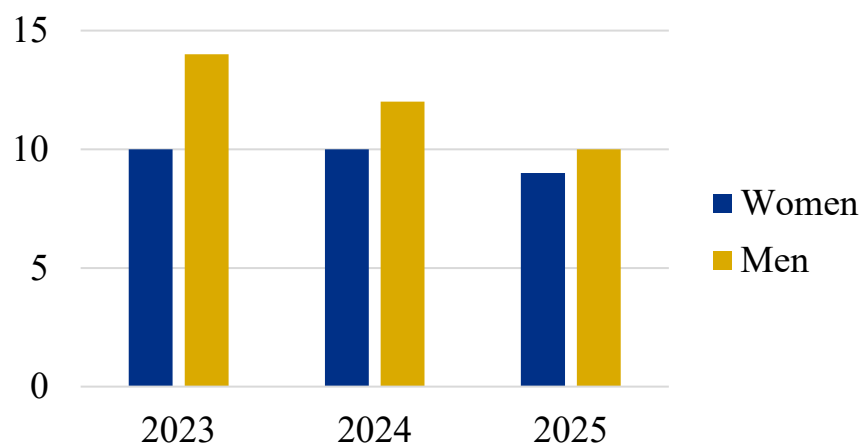
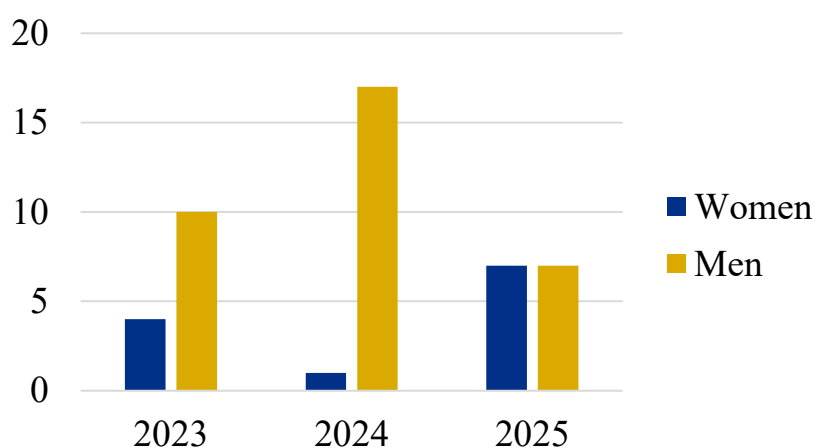


Figure 10 Gledden fellows & mobility grants 2023-2025 (number)



Impacts

In December 2025, eight people were interviewed to assess their perspectives on the impact of the initiatives (Table 2) and in March 2026, participants at a UWA International Women’s Day (‘IWD’) event received a post-event survey which also asked about awareness of Athena Swan and perceived impact of ASB initiatives. Data from a Career Barriers Survey (2023) and employee engagement survey (2025) also helped inform this analysis. Additional insights were sought from selected grant recipients, those who had been profiled in the media, and other stakeholders (purposive sampling). Responses quoted below are de-identified so that participants could contribute openly.

Table 22 Profile of interviewees, 2025

Role / Level	DEI Characteristics (self-identified)	Number
Professional staff member	Woman	2
Level E academic	Woman in STEMM	1
Level B academic	Non-binary person	1
Level D academic	Woman, CALD background	2
Level E academic, senior leader	Woman, carer	1
Level C academic	Woman with a disability	1

Theme 1: Career Advancement

Interview participants reflected that the enhanced visibility provided through media opportunities had a positive, impact on their career. One participant noted that they could demonstrate leadership in the field in grant and award applications as a result of their media presence;

I can now indicate in grant and award applications that I've featured on podcasts, here's a link to a radio interview that I've done... I think it helps to demonstrate leadership in my field.
 (Mid-career academic, woman)

Another reported their media presence resulted in being invited to co-chair a prestigious roundtable discussion in their field;

As my media exposure increased, more leadership opportunities came my way. I was invited to co-chair a roundtable discussion led by the Australian Academy of Science on RNA technology, which is an important new area of research and investment for the country. I was then named in 2021 as one of the 'People Who Mattered' by the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age for my work as a founding member of the Australian RNA Production Consortium. And we successfully lobbied the government to invest in this technology, knowing the potential of that technology to be transformative for the country. My growing confidence dealing with media really helped.
(Senior academic, woman in STEMM)

This suggests that enhanced visibility in the media could be a practical enabler of career advancement for women. Similarly, having an IAS Visiting Fellow was reported to have improved women's **networking, increased researchers' profiles** internally and externally, and created career advancement opportunities:

Having a woman of that calibre come here was fantastic - she raised our profile too, helped us influence the development of laws based on lessons learned from the UK. Because of her high-profile expertise, we were able to convene a roundtable with senior Federal government officials, and they were keen to engage with her and learn from the UK experience. We were then much more on their radar too and had more direct access for research impact.
(Senior academic, woman)

Theme 2: Developing Awareness, Confidence and Skills

The impact of media and/or podcast coverage was commented on by women, some reporting learning new skills in engaging with the media and some cited **increased confidence**, for example:

Having media presence is like exposure therapy, the more I do the easier it becomes. I realize that maybe I'm not completely coherent and I say too many umms and aahs, but in general the interviews go well, and then I'm less nervous. And I'm more likely to say yes if somebody approaches me in the future to give an interview.
(Mid-career academic, woman)

One noted an impact both from the media engagement and an interrelated benefit from their involvement in ASB and their development of **skills and tools to advocate for gender equity**:

My involvement with Athena SWAN deepened my understanding of the systemic and often subtle forms of gender discrimination in academia, including the impact of dual caregiving responsibilities. This insight has informed my public engagement work, where I regularly speak to media about the experiences of women and carers, contributing to over 1,000 media engagements since my involvement.
(Senior academic, woman in STEMM)

Participants who commented on the panel pledge saw it as **raising awareness** providing a **framework and tools – and a means of responding** - where gender balance was not achieved, it could be questioned with reference to the pledge. One respondent viewed the panel pledge and other ASB initiatives, including internal communications and profiling of diverse staff, as contributing to increased awareness. He said:

*I think it's now apparent that there is a need to have real consideration of gender balance in all aspects of our work.
(Senior academic, man in STEMM)*

Theme 3: Challenges

A challenge with new initiatives is their sustainability. While UWA women are now over-indexed in media coverage, the podcast was a time-limited project with associated funding, and has not continued. This reminds us of the importance of mainstreaming gender equity initiatives as well as undertaking targeted actions where required.

The UWA media team offer media training to researchers to assist their understanding of the media process and to help them to effectively manage media engagement; however, they cannot control all media engagement and a few respondents reported increased media engagement came with some **challenges**, such as:

I've had one instance where I think I'd somebody wanted to do a radio interview and I was there ready to go. But then they had questions and answers with the audience beforehand, and the topic beforehand was so interesting that they kind of bumped me. And then I didn't end up kind of having the interview. They did actually discuss about my research on the news, but they didn't invite myself or anyone from my team here. Instead, they invited a male doctor who said that he didn't agree with our findings. That was weird.

(Mid-career academic, woman)

In these cases, the UWA media team can help debrief so women do not lose confidence as a result of negative experiences. The team have also provided updated media guidance for researchers, available on the Intranet.

One participant questioned **how to assess the impact** of media; a question researchers grapple with:⁷

It's hard to quantify to what extent a media article caused people to look me up, contact me for an interview. It's a hard to kind of trace, but everything's connected. I'm sure having that media presence makes a difference.

(Mid-career academic, woman)

Theme 4: Conclusion – Cumulative Effects

One ASB initiative alone is unlikely to have had a transformative effect but initiatives across ASB, including the current cygnet on 'Visibility of Women', have changed institutional practice by introducing a panel pledge, aiming for gender balance in IAS grants, undertaking targeted media engagement, and creating a podcast series to profile academic women. Some women report these initiatives having an **accelerator effect** on their careers. A respondent to the IWD post-even survey commented on the **cumulative effect** of this work in response to the question: 'What (if any) changes or impact have you observed to date as a result of UWA's Athena Swan Program?':

⁷ Christina García-Villar, 'A critical review on altmetrics: can we measure the social impact factor?' (2021) 12 (92) *Insights Imaging* 1.

More women are in leadership roles, in meetings, enjoying research success and leading Schools. They are more visible at UWA than they used to be and lots of good role models around.

(Survey respondent, anonymous)

More remains to be done and areas for improvement have been captured in ‘Future Actions’ below.

Further Actions

Despite the increase in visibility already achieved, several areas for improvement were identified that if addressed would further improve the visibility of women at UWA and broaden diversity, equity and inclusion considerations for the organisation. Insights and data came from the Career Barriers survey (2023), the UWA IWD post-event survey (2026) which asked about awareness of Athena Swan and perceived impact of ASB initiatives, and eight key informant interviews (December 2025), as well as invited feedback from key stakeholders about the impact of the steps taken. Although only limited analysis can be conducted, the evidence collected to date indicates that the positive outcomes achieved have not benefited all women at UWA. Women who are Indigenous, of non-Anglo ethnic backgrounds, part-time or on short term contracts, neurodivergent, carers, disabled, or LGBTIQ+ face additional barriers that have not been fully addressed. Data suggests they face barriers at higher rates and lack sponsorship and other opportunities.

No.	Rationale/ Evidence	Actions & Outputs	Timeframe (start & end)	Person/Group responsible for implementing action	Senior Leader accountable for action delivery	Desired Outcomes/ Targets/Success Indicators
1	Some positive outcomes from the Panel Pledge regarding number of signatures, but limited to m/f gender equity, now scope to extend to diversity more broadly and to support more inclusive events. Better data collection on implementation is required.	Updated panel pledge, tracking tool, and inclusive events guide.	2026-2028	PVC Academic Advancement & Diversity	PVC Academic Advancement & Diversity & Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)	Updated pledge, events guide and tracking of implementation by key UWA bodies (research office, IAS, Public Policy Institute, Development & Alumni Relations etc.).
2	There is a lack of intersectional data to inform whether there is diversity in ‘visibility of women’, e.g. Indigenous women, women of colour, LGBTIQ+	Improve collection of intersectional	2026-2029	People & Culture; PVC Academic	Chief People & Culture Officer; Chief	Increase in intersectional data collected in human resources system.

No.	Rationale/ Evidence	Actions & Outputs	Timeframe (start & end)	Person/Group responsible for implementing action	Senior Leader accountable for action delivery	Desired Outcomes/ Targets/Success Indicators
	women, women with disabilities etc.. and a lack of consistent data collection mechanisms to track progress.	data and data to track progress.		Advancement & Diversity	Information Officer	DEI data collection systems and dashboards available.
3	Women are more visible at UWA but visible diversity in leadership beyond gender is limited e.g. diversity in relation to ethnicity, disability, culture, faith. Data suggests women from these backgrounds face barriers at higher rates and lack sponsorship and other opportunities. Informants recommended addressing racism and discrimination against LGBTIQ+ staff.	Track progress on visibility beyond gender (i.e. binary gender). Develop targeted initiatives to tackle racism. Socialise & promote compliance with LGBTQIA+ policy.	2026-2030	PVC Academic Advancement & Diversity; People & Culture	Chief People & Culture Officer	Use of DEI Dashboard to develop targeted responses. Anti-racism strategy developed. Increased awareness of LGBTIQ+ policy.
4	There is scope to improve consultation with the relevant advisory groups and staff with lived experience to strengthen future initiatives and effective implementation.	Engage with UWA's DEI advisory groups to develop and implement action plans that are	2026-2029	PVC Academic Advancement & Diversity; People & Culture; Executive	Chief People & Culture Officer; PVC Academic Advancement & Diversity	Guidelines for staff engagement on matters with DEI relevance developed and implemented.

No.	Rationale/ Evidence	Actions & Outputs	Timeframe (start & end)	Person/Group responsible for implementing action	Senior Leader accountable for action delivery	Desired Outcomes/ Targets/Success Indicators
		responsive to data and internal stakeholders with lived experience.				
5	Mixed views on progress suggest even key informants are not fully aware of activities and improvements, or that barriers for increasing visibility of women are being addressed only for some women.	Disseminate information and updates re. Athena Swan action plan, including achievements and gaps.	2026-2029	PVC Academic Advancement & Diversity	PVC Academic Advancement & Diversity	Organisational awareness of Athena Swan increased, accessing SAGE supports and communities of practice increased, progress on accreditation.