



SAGE Cygnet Award Application

Name of Institution	University of the Sunshine Coast
Date of Application	27 February 2026
Contact for Application	Elvessa Marshall, Program Manager – Athena Swan
Email	emarsha1@usc.edu.au
Telephone No.	07 5459 4716

Acknowledgement of Country

UniSC acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live, and recognise their continuing connection to land, water, and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging. UniSC deeply values and seeks to uplift, empower, and give a voice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and perspectives.

Acknowledgement of Country

UniSC is a place where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's perspectives, culture and knowledge is acknowledged, valued, and respected. We share deep pride in, and seek to uplift, empower, and give a voice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and perspectives.

If you are an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person, we encourage you to join the long tradition of trailblazers at UniSC, impacting our University and our world.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live, and recognise their continuing connection to land, water, and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.



Artwork

Knowledge is Sacred
Lyndon Davis





UniSC
Australia

UniSC: SAGE Cygnet 4

	✓ Current Cygnet	Barrier • List the Barrier addressed in this Cygnet • List the Barrier for Cygnets already submitted
Institution-wide barrier		Academic Promotion
Institution-wide barrier		Parents & Carers
Institution-wide barrier		Career Support & Development
Institution-wide barrier	✓	Recruitment
Sub-group barrier		Gender equity across the STEM pipeline and academic workforce (School of Science, Technology and Engineering) Under Review

A note on data

The University's current data systems categorise gender as 'F', 'M', and 'X'. In instances where data relating to non-binary or gender-diverse individuals has not been captured, either due to system constraints or the absence of respondents identifying as such, the 'X' category has been excluded from analysis. In recognition of gender diversity, this report uses the terms 'women' and 'men' rather than 'female' and 'male' throughout.

Glossary

ARTO/ROPE	Achievement Relative to Opportunity
AS	Athena Swan
ASIC	Athena Swan Implementation Committee
AS Consultations	UniSC Athena Swan staff consultations held in 2025
Culture Amp	A cloud-based employee feedback and analytics system.
Department	All other areas of UniSC not listed as School or Research Centre/Institute
DVC (A)	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
DVC (R&I)	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Innovation)
EBA	Enterprise Bargaining Agreement
EVP	Employee Value Proposition
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer
MyUniSC	UniSC staff intranet
Non-STEMM	At UniSC, all other Schools and Research Centres not included in the definition of STEMM
PageUp	A cloud-based platform that offers recruitment marketing, Applicant Tracking System (ATS), onboarding, analytics, learning and succession solutions.
P&C	People & Culture
RSA	Recruitment, Selection and Appointment
SAGE	Science in Australia Gender Equality
UniSC	University of the Sunshine Coast
VCP	Vice-Chancellor and President
WG	Working Group
X	unspecified, intersex, gender diverse

1. KEY BARRIER

A longstanding challenge to gender equity at UniSC has been the underrepresentation of women at senior academic levels (Levels D and E). Recruitment was identified a key contributor to this, particularly at the attraction and application stage.

Recruitment-related sub-barriers identified through the Bronze Award analysis and subsequent implementation activity were:

1.1 Gender disparities in application rates: Overall, fewer women than men applied for externally advertised academic roles, men accounted for 58% of applications.

1.2 Considering achievement relative to opportunity: Recruitment processes did not provide a structured mechanism for applicants to describe career context or interruptions for consideration by selection panels.

2. EVIDENCE OF BARRIER

Analysis of recruitment data during the Bronze Award reference period (2015–2017) identified persistent and systemic barriers affecting gender equity in recruitment at UniSC.

2.1 Gender disparities in overall application rates for academic roles

Recruitment data indicated that men submitted a greater proportion of applications for academic positions overall (Figure 1). While women applicants were proportionately more likely to be shortlisted and appointed, the overall pool of applicants reflected an imbalance at the first stage of recruitment, limiting the potential for gender-balanced shortlisting and appointment outcomes.

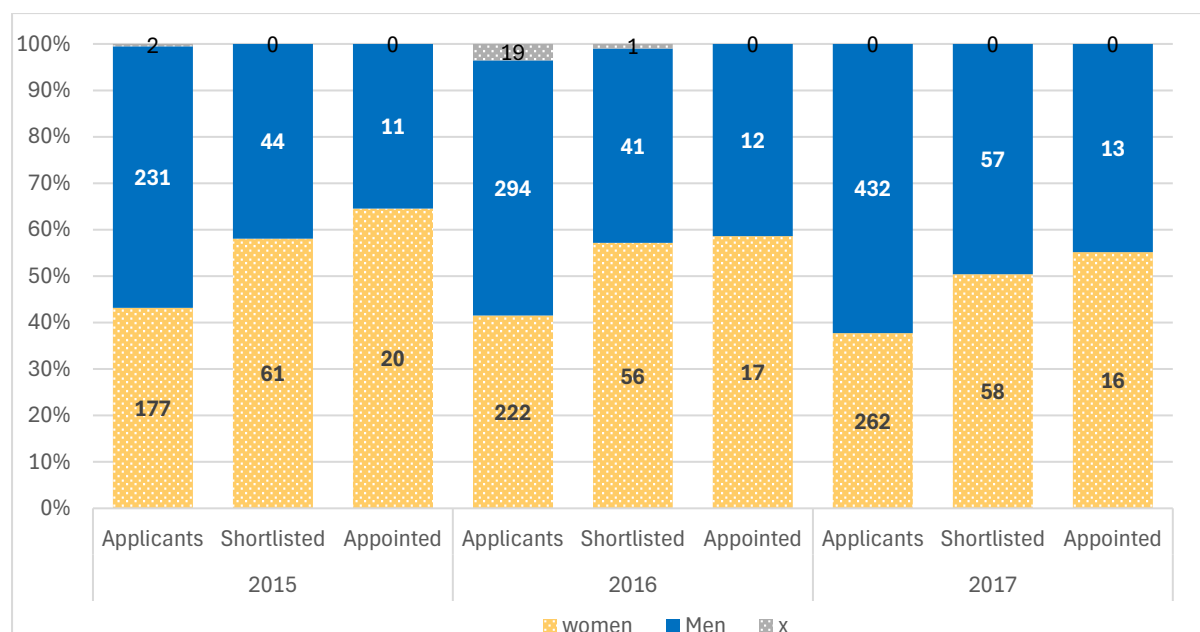


Figure 1. Academic recruitment, (fixed and ongoing) 2015-2017

Further analysis by academic level (Figure 2) shows that application stage gender imbalance was evident across all levels. Across the same period, women applicants were proportionately more likely to progress through shortlisting and appointment (Figure 3 & 4), reinforcing that the key barrier was at the attraction and application stage rather than in progression once women entered the recruitment pathway.

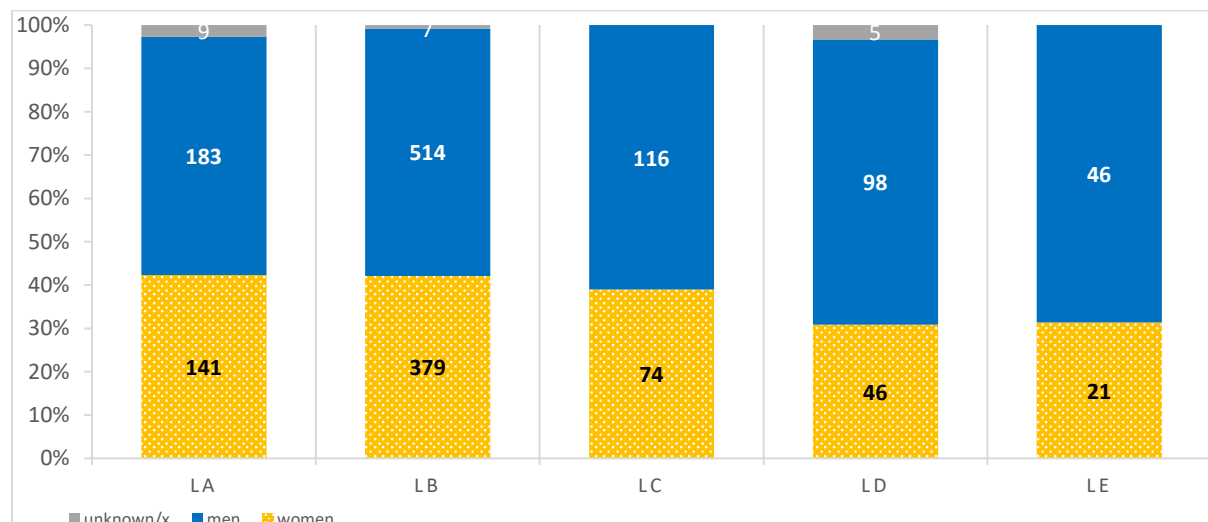


Figure 2. Applications for academic positions (fixed and ongoing) by level, (2015-2017)

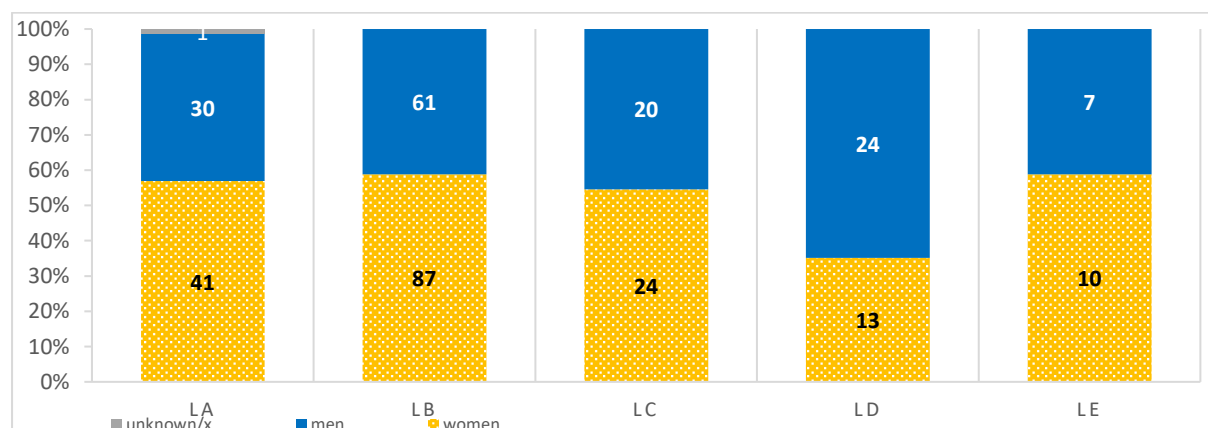


Figure 3. Shortlisted for academic positions (fixed and ongoing) by level, (2015-2017)

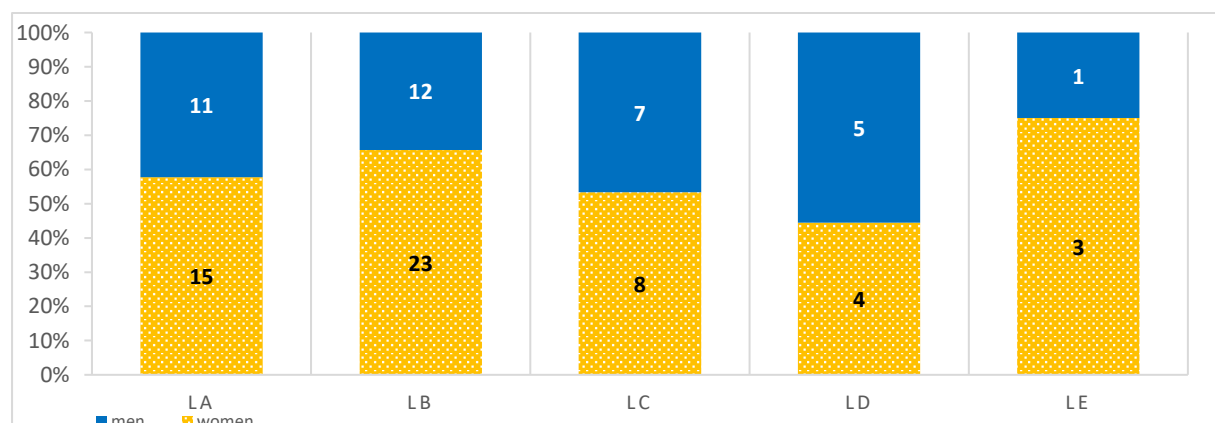


Figure 4. Hired for academic positions (fixed and ongoing) by level, (2015-2017)

2.2 Achievement relative to opportunity

The UniSC Athena Swan Implementation Committee (ASIC) identified opportunities to strengthen recruitment practice through contemporary, evidence-informed approaches increasingly adopted across the higher education sector. The ASIC undertook sector scanning to identify emerging good practice, noting that Institutions such as Monash University, had moved towards embedding equity by design, including the systematic incorporation of achievement relative to opportunity within recruitment and selection processes.

In response, UniSC determined that integrating achievement relative to opportunity statements into recruitment would enhance consistency and transparency, and support more equitable evaluation of achievement/performance for those with diverse career pathways.

3. PROGRESS (ACTIONS AND OUTPUTS)

Between 2018 and 2025, a structured, evidence-based approach to addressing barriers to gender equity in recruitment was undertaken (Table 1). Many of the initial actions were identified in the Bronze Action Plan and subsequently refined through iterative staff consultation, sector best practice, and continuous implementation review. Collectively, actions focused on strengthening recruitment governance, improving consistency in recruitment practice, and embedding equity considerations into recruitment systems and decision-making.

3.1 Improving gender equity in application rates

Initial efforts focused on formalisation of workflows into policies and procedures, and consistently embedding equity considerations across recruitment processes. In 2018, UniSC introduced a standard template for job advertisements to ensure that all externally advertised roles feature the Athena Swan initiative and wording that emphasises UniSC as an inclusive employer offering flexible work options and generous leave provisions.

From 2023, this work was further strengthened through a formal uplift of UniSC's Recruitment, Selection and Appointment (RSA) policy and procedure to formalise considerations such as assessment of achievement relative to opportunity. In parallel, UniSC commenced a refresh of its recruitment website content to more clearly communicate its commitment to gender equity, including information about the Athena Swan initiative and flexible working arrangements available to staff.

This was complemented by the launch of an Employee Value Proposition (EVP) strategy and campaign in 2023 that used media including videos that showcased a range of high performing women at UniSC. During filming for the videos, prompts were provided to encourage the women to speak about their own experience and career journeys bringing them to UniSC with the purpose to inspire potential candidates. People and Culture also selected and promoted specific videos strategically, for example, prioritising women's profiles when recruiting in areas of persistent underrepresentation.

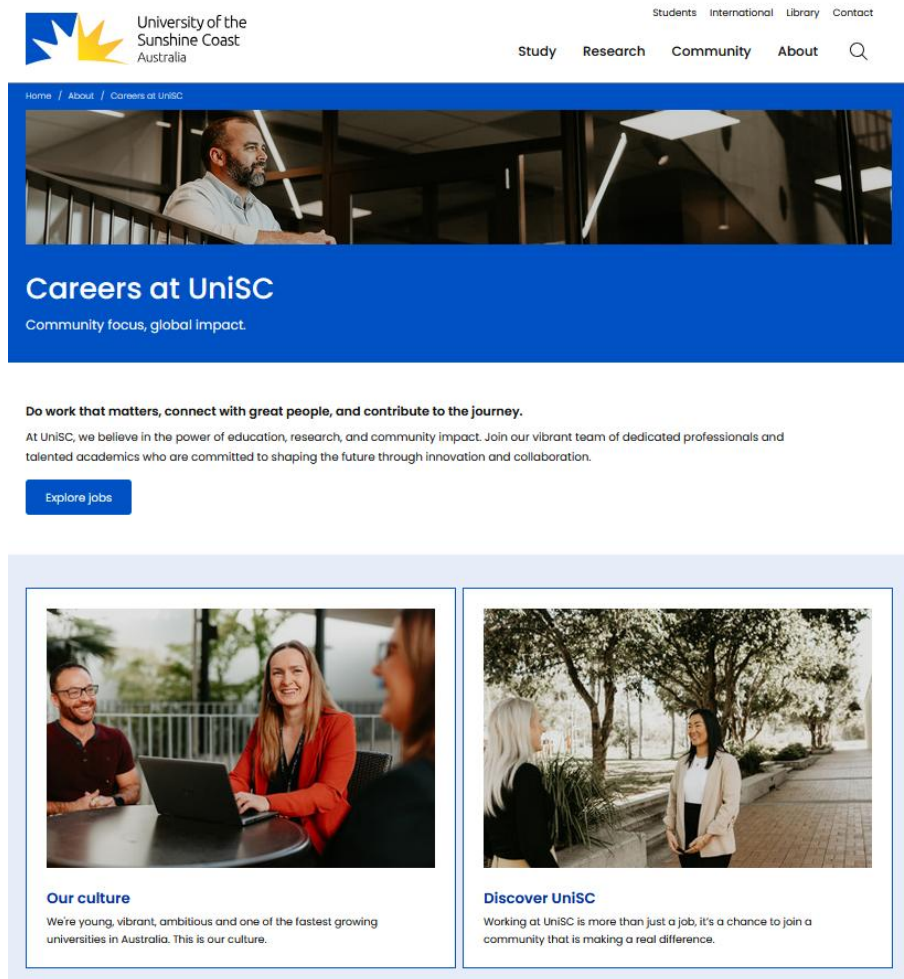


Figure 5. UniSC Careers website landing page



Figure 6. UniSC Employee Value Proposition campaign video, example

In 2024, UniSC implemented the PageUp Talent Acquisition platform, the University's first applicant tracking system to support RSA processes across fixed-term, ongoing and casual recruitment. The platform provides a coherent interface for applicants, strengthens consistency in application tracking, improves communication throughout the recruitment lifecycle, and simplifies reporting of outcomes.

The associated staff training module was also refreshed to provide guidance on ensuring inclusivity in the process. This guidance covered areas such as use of unbiased language in position descriptions and interview questions, standardised interview processes, identifying/addressing biases identified during the interview process, respecting the preferred names and pronouns of applicants, evaluating achievement relative to opportunity, avoiding assumptions regarding resume gaps, and advice on how to actively seek out diverse candidates. Specific information about managing biases is included in the training including affinity bias, stereotyping and conformity bias.

More recently, in 2025, UniSC has utilised targeted women-only recruitment for areas of underrepresentation, with three positions in the engineering discipline targeted to women applicants only as a special measure to promote equal opportunity under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld). One issue that arose was negative media coverage following the release of the first position advertisement. In response to this, a media strategy was developed to highlight the benefits of gender equity in academic disciplines where women are traditionally underrepresented and to emphasise UniSC's commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion. Additional information regarding the women-only recruitment processes and outcomes will be provided in UniSC's fifth cygnet which focuses on addressing gender equity barriers in the School of Science, Technology and Engineering.

3.2 Consideration of achievement relative to opportunity

In 2024, UniSC formalised achievement relative to opportunity (ARTO) considerations within recruitment processes, supported by updates to PageUp enabling applicants to include a free-text statement as part of their academic job application. The field was intentionally flexible, with no character limit, enabling applicants to provide contextual information relevant to career opportunity and achievement.

Table 1. Summary of Actions to Address Recruitment Barriers at UniSC (2018-2025)

Year	Action	Identified at Bronze or post-Bronze	Sub-barriers	Objectives	Activities	Outputs	Responsibility
2018 (further enhanced in 2024)	Creation of standardised recruitment templates	Identified at Bronze	1.1 Gender disparities in overall application rates for academic roles	Ensure alignment with best practice RSA Ensure consistency of recruitment practices	Standardisation of templates for job advertisements including inclusion of wording regarding UniSC's commitment to the Athena Swan initiative, flexible work arrangements and generous leave options.	Standardised approach to communicating UniSC's commitment to gender equity to attract job applicants.	People & Culture
2023-24	Update to RSA policy, procedures and training	Identified at Bronze	1.1 Gender disparities in overall application rates for academic roles	Promote UniSC's commitment to gender equity in RSA Ensure alignment with best practice RSA Ensure consistency of decision making and practices	Review and update of RSA policy and procedures (2023). Review and update of RSA training materials (2024).	University-wide policy and procedures. Online training materials (mandatory for selection panel chairperson; highly recommended for selection panel members, administrative support staff and coordinators).	People & Culture
2023-24	Website refresh	Identified post-bronze	1.1 Gender disparities in overall application rates for academic roles	Demonstrate UniSC's commitment to diversity and inclusion, including gender equity	Employee Value Proposition strategy launched. Videos and marketing collateral purposefully showcased a range of high performing women at UniSC.	EVP and Employer Brand Strategy. Refresh of the 'careers at UniSC' website.	People & Culture

2024	Implementation of Page Up Talent Acquisition platform	Identified post-bronze	1.1 Gender disparities in overall application rates for academic roles	Improve applicant experience and data capture potential	Introduction of the Page Up Talent Acquisition platform, UniSC's first applicant tracking system supporting RSA processes for recruitment across UniSC.	A systematic approach to RSA allowing for better tracking of gender outcomes.	People & Culture
2024	Relative to opportunity statements	Identified post-bronze	1.2 Considering achievement relative to opportunity	Enable better assessments of career accomplishments by applicants with career interruptions, which are often gendered Demonstrate UniSC's commitment to diversity and inclusion, including gender equity	Incorporation of Relative to Opportunity statement in online job application portal.	Job applicants empowered to situate their accomplishments in relation to their career opportunities.	People & Culture
2025	Targeted recruitment	Identified post-bronze	1.1 Gender disparities in overall application rates for academic roles	Encourage a wider pool of women applicants for certain positions	Trials of women-only recruitment for the following positions: - Associate Professor, Mechanical Engineering - Lecturer/Senior Lecturer in Civil Engineering - Lecturer/Senior Lecturer in Renewable Energy Engineering	Advertisements released under special measure to promote equal opportunity under the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (Qld).	People & Culture School of Science, Technology & Engineering

4. OUTCOMES

4.1 Improving gender equity in application rates

UniSC has implemented a coordinated suite of recruitment reforms to address identified barriers impacting gender equity outcomes. Evidence of progress is reflected in recruitment outcome data across the recruitment lifecycle (applications, shortlisting, and appointment), together with strengthened recruitment systems, governance, and increasingly equity by design approach.

Across the 2018–2024 period, women applicants have continued to progress strongly through shortlisting and appointment stages (Figure 7), consistent with Bronze-period findings that women were often more likely to be shortlisted and appointed once they applied. Gender representation often shifts positively across the recruitment pipeline, with women progressing more strongly from application to shortlisting and appointment than the applicant pool alone would suggest (Figure 8). This pattern is evident across all academic levels, including senior Levels D and E (Figure 9), indicating that where women are present in applicant pools they are competitively assessed and achieve strong selection outcomes. It should be noted that there were no Level E recruitment rounds conducted in 2018, and therefore no application, shortlisting or appointment data are reported for this level in that year.

However, despite measures implemented since Bronze, the proportion of women within applicant pools has remained broadly steady, indicating limited change at the application stage and reinforcing that overall gender equity outcomes continue to be shaped primarily by applicant pool composition rather than a lack of appointable women. Across multiple years, women have been shortlisted at rates above their representation in the applicant pool, providing a meaningful indicator of selection integrity. Correspondingly, lower shortlisting rates for men relative to their share of applications may reflect differences in suitability and alignment with role requirements, rather than gender-driven decision-making. Strengthening attraction strategies and improving applicant pool composition will therefore remain a continuing focus, particularly in disciplines and role types where women are underrepresented (Future Action 1, 2 & 3).

System level improvements were also implemented via the PageUp system to strengthen the accuracy and transparency of gender reporting across the recruitment process, including the introduction of gender capture at the application stage and the use of pronouns as a proxy measure¹ where gender data were unavailable. However, it should be noted that some 2023 data were excluded from Figure 9 (Level D/LD&E applications) only, as a high proportion of “unknown” gender in the applications dataset distorted the observed outcomes. The 2023 data have been retained in all other figures (including the overall applications analysis) and were removed from this level D/LD&E specific figure solely to ensure it reflects more reliable application rates for women and men.

A small number of roles within the dataset were advertised as broad-banded positions spanning two academic levels (e.g. Level B/C or Level C/D). This reflects standard recruitment practice in some disciplines, where appointments may be made at different levels depending on the candidate’s experience, track record, and performance against selection criteria. For the purposes of analysis and reporting in Figure 9, broad-banded roles have been classified to the lower academic level (e.g. B/C positions classified as Level B; C/D positions classified as Level C). This approach was adopted to

¹ In cases where gender data were not captured, pronouns were used as a proxy indicator. It is acknowledged that pronouns are not synonymous with self-identified gender and therefore represent an imperfect measure.

ensure consistency in reporting and to avoid potential overestimation of recruitment activity at higher academic levels.

It is acknowledged that Levels C and D represent critical transition points in the academic pipeline. While this classification approach provides a conservative and methodologically consistent basis for analysis, it may underrepresent some recruitment activity occurring at the higher level within broad-banded appointments. Where possible, future analyses will seek to disaggregate broad-banded appointments to more precisely reflect the level at which candidates are ultimately appointed.

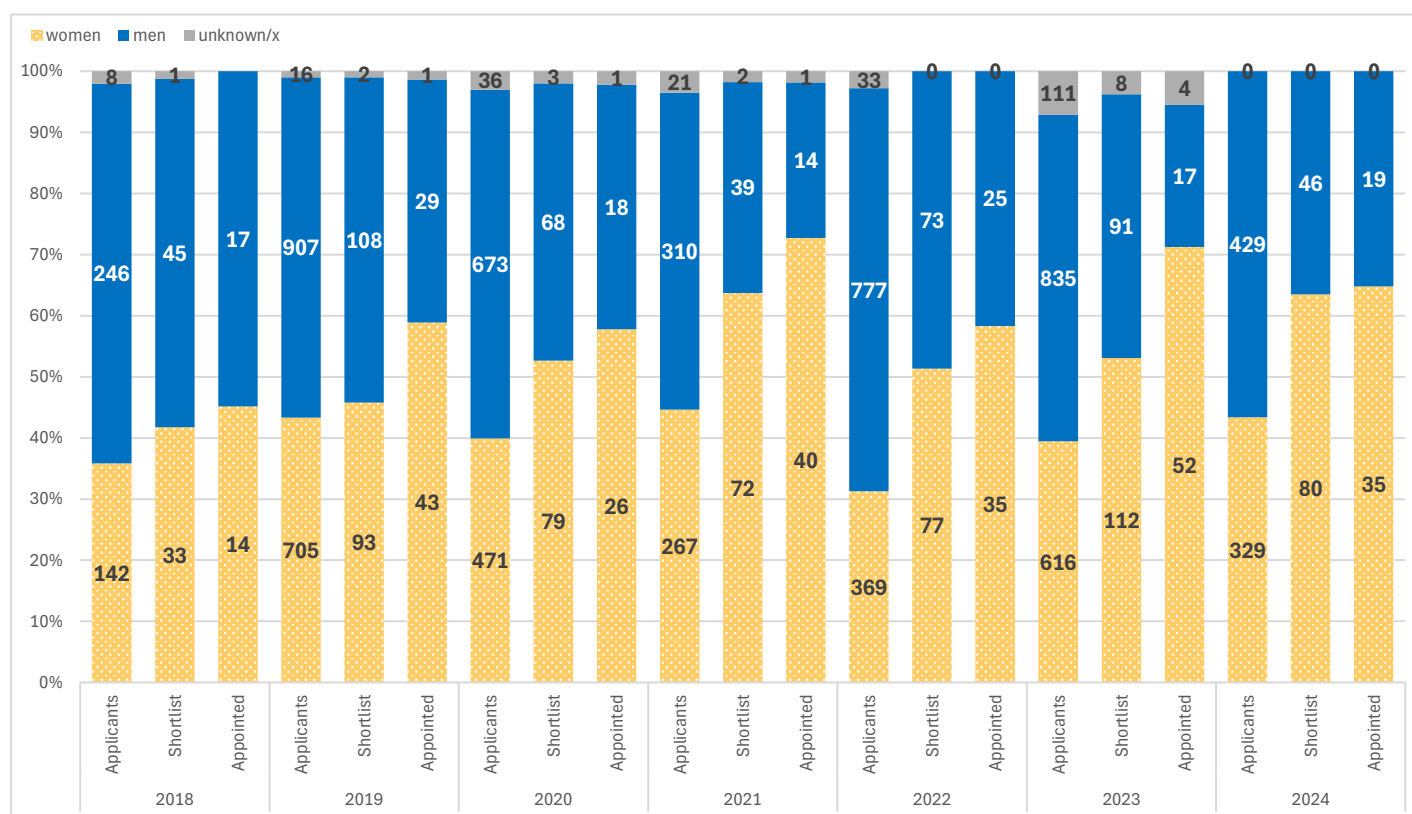


Figure 7. Academic recruitment (fixed-term and ongoing), 2018-2024

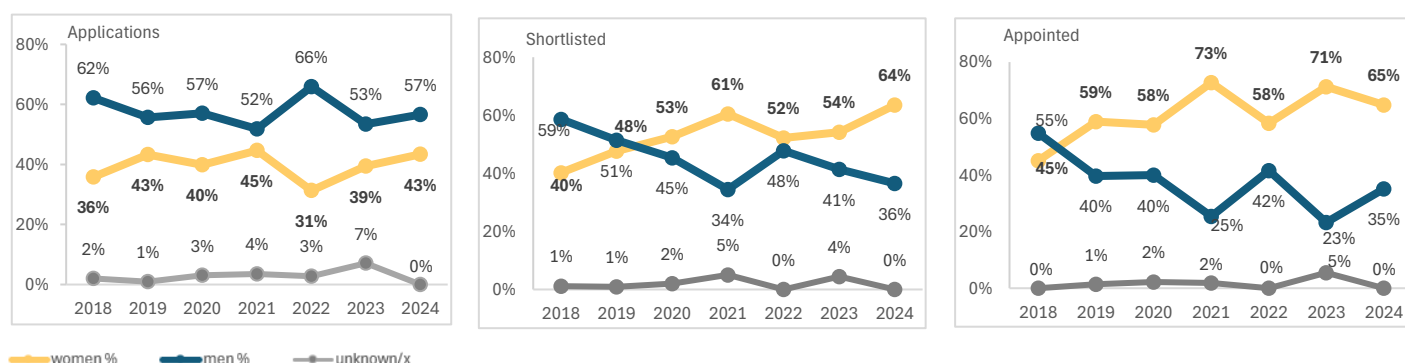


Figure 8. Percentage of women, men and x/unknown gender at application, shortlisting and appointment stages for academic positions (fixed-term and ongoing), 2018-2024

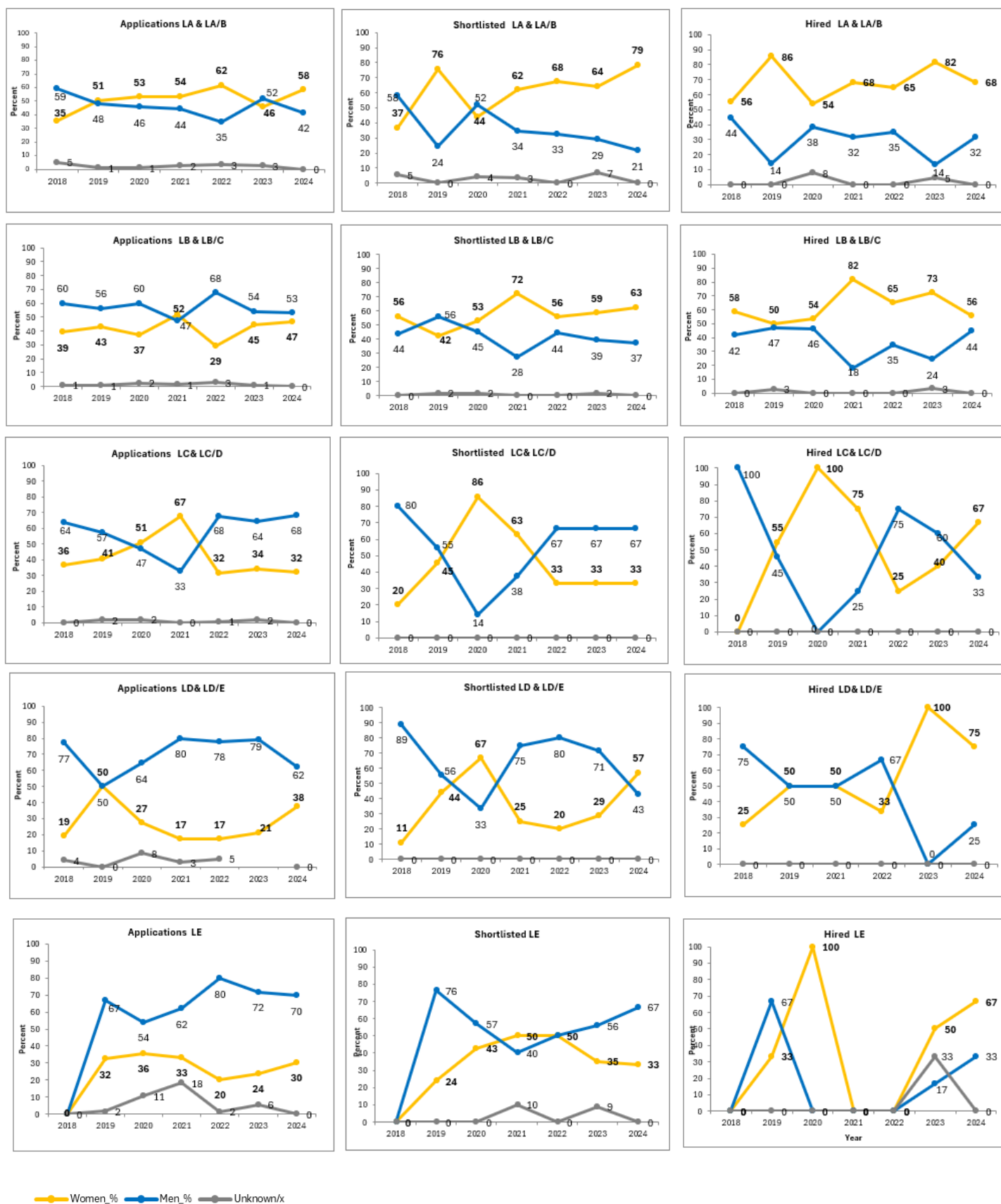


Figure 9. Percentage of women, men and unknown/x gender at application, shortlisting and appointment stages for academic positions (fixed-term and ongoing), by level 2018–2024

Website engagement relating to recruitment

A review of UniSC web pages relating to careers found strong engagement from women among career visitors between 1 January and 7 December 2025. Of users with a known gender, 63% were women (8,142) and 37% men (4,770). The visitors represented a good cross section of ages with the majority within the 25-34 and 35-44 age brackets, and were mostly local, with limited international engagement. The review did identify limited engagement with supporting pages around culture, diversity and inclusion, and noted that visitors to these pages were predominantly women. Therefore, while the information is available to prospective candidates, there may be opportunities to improve the visibility of this information. Recommendations from the website review included improving the amount of rich content relating to the EVPs to support more organic search strategies and cross-linking to the supporting top-level careers pages, as well as the potential to increase sponsored content relating to the EVPs on LinkedIn alongside current job opportunities, increasing visibility for select roles (i.e. those in traditionally underrepresented areas; see Further Action 2).

4.2 Achievement relative to opportunity statement assessments

A review of 339 de-identified statements provided by job applicants was conducted to understand how applicants used this field and whether additional guidance may be needed to support applicants in drafting statements. It should be noted that the review incorporated statements made by applicants of all genders and due to privacy considerations only statement text was able to be shared.

While a number of high quality ARTO statements were provided, over two-thirds of the statements did not outline career-impacting circumstances or periods of reduced opportunity. Instead these statements comprised either statements of general support for ARTO (e.g. *"I am a firm believer in assessing Achievement Relative to Opportunity, and I wholeheartedly support this process"*) or providing a career summary that did not include any reference to contextual factors affecting opportunity (similar to cover letter text).

Of the statements that did outline career impacting circumstances (n = 108), these mostly related to parental leave or caring responsibilities (38%) or were statements that indicated the applicant had experienced multiple periods of reduced opportunity (21%; see Table 2). Notably, less than half (48%) of statements documenting career impacting circumstances provided information about the impact of these factors on career achievements (e.g. *"I am the sole parent of my 30 year old daughter who has a disability"*). The review concluded that providing an opportunity for candidates to provide a statement is a positive step, however further guidance to applicants would be beneficial to ensure that those who have experienced career impacting circumstances have the best opportunity to have these appropriately considered during selection panel assessments (further action 6).

Table 2. ARTO statement assessments

Type of career interruption (based on Monash University guidance material)	Total statements	Statements outlining impact on career achievements
Parental leave / carer responsibilities	41 (38%)	20 (49% of statements in this category)
Major or prolonged illness/injury	6 (6%)	3 (50% of statements in this category)
Impairment, temporary or permanent disability	7 (6%)	1 (14% of statements in this category)
Personal trauma (e.g. bereavement, domestic and family violence)	5 (5%)	4 (80% of statements in this category)
Periods of part-time work, late or non-linear entry into academia, change in discipline focus, varied workload or relocation of a research laboratory or clinical practice setting or long-service leave	6 (6%)	3 (50% of statements in this category)
Country relocation or relocation of a research laboratory	12 (11%)	3 (25% of statements in this category)
Cultural or religious expectations	-	-
Impact of major events such as natural disasters (flooding, bushfires, storms, earthquakes), pandemics (such as the COVID-19 pandemic), war or political unrest	2 (2%)	1 (50% of statements in this category)
Other emergency situations, and/or	-	-
Other similar circumstances that impact productivity and success	6 (6%)	4 (67% of statements in this category)
Multiple career interruptions	23 (21%)	13 (57% of statements in this category)

5. IMPACT

The initiatives introduced between 2018 and 2025 have catalysed change, improving the experiences of prospective women applicants and laying the foundation for further progress. Feedback from 2025 Athena Swan (AS) consultation forums, the 2024 AS Leadership Survey, candidate experience surveys captured in the PageUp system.

Feedback was gathered using a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and consultation forums. Table 3 summarises participation across key data collection activities, disaggregated by gender and staff type where available.

Table 3. Summary of methods used to evaluate impact

Method	No. (n = x)	Women	Men	Non-binary or not disclosed	Academic staff	Professional staff
AS Leadership Survey (2024)	25 ²	56%	44%	Not collected	25	0
AS consultation (2025)	51	100%	0%	Not collected	16	35
Candidate experience - Application stage survey (PageUp - 2025)	89	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected
Candidate experience – Interview stage survey (PageUp – 2025)	49	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected	Not collected

5.1 Improving gender equity in application rates

The data from surveys incorporated into the PageUp recruitment system was reviewed for 2025 applicants. While these data were not disaggregated by gender (gender not collected), they can provide insights into candidate experiences and potential barriers to applications. Data collected at the application stage showed that 90% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the application process was clear, and 79% agreed or strongly agreed that the technology used during the application was easy to use. Qualitative feedback regarding the application process was generally positive, with comments such as:

- *“The email acknowledgement was very sensitively worded and rare to read. I felt appreciated and excited to potentially work for the university.”*
- *“Very smooth application and easily understandable to anyone.”*
- *“Excellent user-friendly setup for both local and overseas applicants.”*
- *“Answering application questions did not require a great amount of time. Uploading my Cover Letter and Resume was a smooth and straight forward process.”*

² Note, there was a total of 34 survey respondents although only 25 completed the questions regarding recruitment.

Some areas for improvement were identified, with comments such as:

- *"Advance warning of the ROPE would have been helpful."*
- *"The only thing I didn't like about the application process was that there were a large number of criteria questions on one page, and the application only saved info when you completed a page. Which meant that I ended up losing my many detailed responses when a problem occurred before completing the page."*
- *"A minor issue however the save function in the application process was 'save and exit' not 'save and continue' requiring additional workflow."*

Data collected following the interview stage showed that 82% of respondents found communication leading up to the interview to be excellent, with only one applicant rating communication as poor, and one as very poor. The positive response here suggests that should a candidate have equity needs relating to the interview (e.g. flexibility in scheduling due to caring responsibilities, accommodations for disability), they likely felt there was opportunity to discuss this, although this question was not asked specifically. Additionally, 93% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the interview questions were relevant and aligned with the job requirements. Qualitative feedback regarding the interview process was generally highly positive, with comments such as:

- *"The whole process was amazing - inclusive and professional. The panel took time to actively listen to my answers and were encouraging when I was struggling to find words to explain what I was saying."*
- *"The process has been exceptionally professional and smooth — a noticeable and refreshing contrast to what I'm accustomed to in [government]."*
- *"The interview team were very professional and outlined the process very well. Communication was succinct and transparent. All panel members were welcoming and made the interview non threatening. Follow up phone call was positive and constructive."*
- *"The whole process has been very professional and helpful."*
- *"I felt extremely welcomed and relaxed at the interview thanks to the panel members."*
- *"The interview process was thorough, professional, and provided opportunities to ask questions."*
- *"I would like to thank the panel for providing a very warm atmosphere during the interview. It helped immensely."*

The 2025 Athena Swan consultation sessions were conducted through two online sessions, engaging 51 staff members (16 academic and 35 professional). Eleven Athena Swan Committee and Cygnet Work Group members supported and facilitated the process. All contributing participants (excluding facilitators) were women. Feedback was gathered through facilitated discussion and Padlet inputs. The sessions provided an opportunity to gather the perceptions of staff regarding the initiatives focused on increasing applications from women. In relation to the implementation of the initiative of job advertisements featuring a commitment to Athena Swan and gender equity, a staff member noted their support stating that *"this may provide assurance to prospective colleagues that there are gender equity initiatives in place."*

In discussing initiatives in place, such as gender balanced interview panels, it was noted that these can help to demonstrate UniSC's commitment to gender equity, with statements such as *"Yes, this worked for me. It was great to see women on the interview panel."* However, considerations were raised such as whether the women on panels have the power to influence the process, with comments such as *"Yes, but there needs to be consideration of the level on the panel so its not all senior men and junior women."* Another consideration was whether the presence of women would

be enough to achieve genuine culture change, with statements such as *"...sometimes it feels like women who have succeeded in a man's world can sometimes expect other women to behave like them in order to climb the ladder, and perpetuate the issue, instead of helping change the culture."* Further, a potential unintended consequence of the requirement for gender balanced panels, particularly in areas of underrepresentation, was the additional burden placed on women to be involved in this service work, for example, *"We need to support the women who have to be in more meetings/interviews than men (to make up the gender balance). Can we pay them \$\$ so they can then pay research staff to do their other work, so that they are not disadvantaged for having to do all this extra work."*

Finally, the initiative of targeted women-only recruitment in areas of underrepresentation received support, with feedback such as *"Targeted recruitment is essential to disrupt entrenched gendered lenses in certain fields of study and practice and create role models."* However, the consultation also identified some issues relating to internal messages and backlash for existing staff, recommending *"Better internal communication so that other staff understand the specifics. People read the news articles that came out and drew incorrect conclusions about other parts of the university and a 'female agenda' when it was a specific issue that was being addressed."*

It should be noted that a limitation of the data collection was the inability to capture feedback from women who did not apply for roles at UniSC. Some may have seen a vacancy but chosen not to apply, or the advertisement may not have reached them.

5.2 Consideration of achievement relative to opportunity

As noted above, the inclusion of an achievement relative to opportunity statement in the PageUp application form for academic roles has received numerous positive responses from prospective applicants, reinforcing UniSC's commitment to gender equity. Discussions during the 2025 Athena Swan consultation sessions also highlighted the importance of shared understanding of the approach, with participants noting the value of training for both applicants and panel members (*"I think training around what it is and how to write one and review one is important"*).

While this theme emerged through consultation, findings from the 2024 Athena Swan Leadership Survey suggest that leaders generally perceive themselves as equipped to assess achievement relative to opportunity. The survey was distributed to Deans, Directors of Research Centres and Institutes, and Discipline Leads, receiving 25 responses (14 women, 11 men) to recruitment-related questions, representing approximately 70% of the targeted leadership cohort. The survey incorporated questions asking leaders about their experiences chairing recruitment panels, and whether they felt (1) *confident* and (2) *resourced and trained* to ensure that selection methods aligned with RSA policy requirements which include assessing achievement relative to opportunity and being free of bias and discrimination. In relation to both questions, 88% of leaders agreed or strongly agreed (Table 4) that they were confident in meeting the policy requirements.

Table 4. Leadership confidence and preparedness to assess achievement relative to opportunity

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
When chairing recruitment panels, <i>I feel confident</i> in ensuring that selection methods are transparent, valid, assess achievement relative to opportunity, and are free of bias, conflict of interest, direct and indirect discrimination	1 (4%)	0	2 (8%)	7 (28%)	15 (60%)
I am <i>adequately resourced</i> and <i>trained</i> to ensure that when chairing recruitment panels the selection methods are transparent, valid, assess achievement relative to opportunity, and are free of bias, conflict of interest, direct and indirect discrimination	1 (4%)	0	2 (8%)	8 (32%)	14 (56%)

An interesting question raised during the 2025 Athena Swan consultation sessions was whether the capacity to provide an achievement relative to opportunity statement should be extended to professional staff. While professional staff may not traditionally be held to similar metric-based measures as academics (particularly from a research perspective), it seems appropriate that all roles advertised have capacity to record a similar statement, this idea is captured in section 6 (Further Action 7)

6. FURTHER ACTION

Through co-design, data transparency, and sustained leadership commitment, UniSC has established a culture where equity considerations are highly visible in our recruitment process. While recruitment data show women continue to progress strongly through shortlisting and appointment once they apply, their representation within applicant pools has remained broadly steady across 2018–2024. This indicates that attraction and application stage representation remains the primary constraint on overall recruitment-related gender equity outcomes. Additionally, while the data suggest that equitable selection outcomes are currently being achieved, it is acknowledged that data associated with interview questions and scoring are not being captured systematically in current systems. Therefore, there remain opportunities to improve tracking of gender equity across the full RSA process as a preventative measure.

In addition, early implementation evidence suggests that achievement relative to opportunity is not being used as intended by many applicants, with a substantial proportion of statements functioning as general endorsements rather than providing contextual information about career opportunity and interruptions. This reduces the equity benefit the initiative was designed to deliver and indicates a need for clearer guidance and earlier prompting for applicants, alongside more consistent application by selection panels.

Building on this evidence, UniSC will progress the next phase of work through an action plan focused on strengthening the transparency and auditability of recruitment decision-making (including interview design and assessment), embedding intersectional recruitment practices through alignment with disability and Indigenous employment frameworks, improving applicant and panel capability in achievement relative to opportunity, strengthening attraction strategies through exploring richer EVP content and targeted promotion, improving gender-disaggregated reporting through enhanced dashboards.

Ref	Rationale / Evidence	Future Action	Timeframe	Person/Group Responsible	Desired Outcome / Success Indicator
1	Despite sustained actions to strengthen inclusive recruitment practices, recruitment data shows limited change in the number and proportion of women academic applicants overall and across academic levels. Influences on application behaviour may extend beyond recruitment messaging and may be shaped by broader contextual factors affecting academic career decisions. Targeted analysis is required to identify the factors underpinning lower application rates by women and to inform more effective attraction strategies.	Undertake investigation to examine influences on women's decisions to apply (or not apply) for academic roles, including: - Semi-structured interviews and/or focus groups with women across relevant disciplines and seniority bands (internal and external where feasible). - Benchmarking of gender application patterns against peer institutions and sector datasets. Review of relevant research literature on gendered application behaviour and academic labour-market dynamics.	2026 – 2027	People & Culture, supported by ASIC	Desired outcomes Understanding of the key barriers influencing gendered application behaviour. Targets - Summary identifying priority barriers and recommended actions. - Attraction strategy updated and explicitly mapped to identified barriers Success indicators Improved institutional understanding of gendered application patterns to inform future recruitment interventions.
2	Careers web page review findings	Consider improving the amount of rich content relating to the EVPs on web pages and increase cross-linking to the supporting top-level careers pages. Consider funding for increasing sponsored content relating to the EVPs on LinkedIn alongside current job opportunities.	2026	Marketing and Communications, People & Culture	Desired outcomes Increased applications from women

Ref	Rationale / Evidence	Future Action	Timeframe	Person/Group Responsible	Desired Outcome / Success Indicator
3	Currently, People & Culture staff review position descriptions and job advertisements for gendered language but this is reliant on the knowledge of the individual.	Systematise use of gender-neutral language in job advertisements and position descriptions. Potential to adopt GenAI/software tools to further reduce bias.	2026 - 2027	People & Culture	Desired outcomes Ensure avoidance of biased gendered language and increased inclusivity in recruitment materials Targets - By June 2026, gender-neutral language embedded in standard templates - By December 2027, optional tools or guidance explored to further reduce bias Success indicators Spot checks demonstrate reduced gender-coded language in advertisements
4	While analysis indicates that women are shortlisted at rates above their representation in the applicant pool, suggesting equitable selection outcomes, interview questions and scoring are not yet captured systematically. Establishing structured processes will strengthen transparency, auditability and ongoing monitoring, positioning this as a preventative quality-assurance measure to sustain equitable practice.	Implementation of PageUp flexible forms (2026–2028) to enable systematic capture of interview questions and scoring for each role. This will provide visibility of interview design, support periodic audits, and enable early identification of potential bias risks.	2026 - 2028	People & Culture	Desired outcomes Increased transparency, consistency and accountability in interview practices; Sustained equitable recruitment processes through proactive monitoring reduced future risk of bias in interview design and assessment Targets - By June 2026, flexible forms configured and available for use in PageUp. - By Dec 2026, flexible forms used in newly established roles and priority recruitment campaigns (not all roles). - By Dec 2028, at least one annual sample audit of interview questions conducted. Success indicators Interview questions and scoring captured in PageUp; sample audit completed and findings documented

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5	While women are shortlisted at rates above their representation in the applicant pool, 2025 Athena Swan consultations highlighted staff perceptions relating to potential bias and inconsistency in recruitment decision making. This action is framed as a preventative and exploratory measure to strengthen transparency and future-proof recruitment practice, rather than a response to demonstrated systemic bias in shortlisting outcomes.	Explore the use of GenAI features in Page Up for potential to identify systemic gender biases in scoring or comments provided by recruitment panels during the recruitment process.	2026	People & Culture	Desired outcomes Improved understanding of the potential for technology to support identification of bias in recruitment decision-making Targets TBD Success indicators • Completion of pilot with documented findings and recommendations. • Identification of recurring gendered language or patterns in panel comments. • Evidence of guidance or training updates informed by pilot outcomes. • Decision made on broader adoption based on evaluation.
6	Review of existing ARTO statements made have suggested that not all applicants understand the purpose of the ARTO statement or how to effectively communicate achievement relative to opportunity.	ARTO guidance and updates to application forms: • Further guidance and exemplars • Provide information about ARTO earlier providing applicants the opportunity to plan their submission prior to entering the online form • More information regarding flexibility in interview processes (e.g. to support those with caring responsibilities or accommodations for a disability)	2026	People & Culture, supported by ASIC	Improved utilisation of ARTO by applicants and standardised approach by selection panels in evaluating statements. Desired outcomes Improved clarity, accessibility and consistency of ARTO information for applicants Targets TBD Success indicators Reduction in applicant enquiries; improved panel confidence in applying ARTO

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7	Suggested by staff in 2025 Athena Swan consultations	Explore extension of ARTO option in online job application form to applicants for professional roles.	2027-2028	People & Culture, supported by ASIC	Desired outcomes Ensure equitable assessment of professional staff with non-linear career paths or career interruptions Targets - By December 2027, review of policy, system capability, and process requirements for extending ARTO to professional roles completed - By June 2028, formal decision made by governance on whether to implement extension Success indicators Review completed with findings documented; governance decision recorded; if implemented, recruitment applications for professional roles include ARTO option; guidance updated and communicated
8	PageUp has strengthened recruitment data capture and reporting, but current reporting relies on delayed, spreadsheet-based extracts, limiting real-time visibility and targeted action.	Develop a real time dashboard showing gender disaggregated data associated with recruitment that is available to the UniSC community.	2026-2027	People & Culture, supported by ASIC	Desired outcomes Improved transparency and evidence-based monitoring of gender equity in recruitment Targets - By December 2026, baseline gender-disaggregated recruitment data established - By December 2027, simple annual report or dashboard produced Success indicators Data used in SAGE Athena Swan reporting and informs future recruitment actions