



SAGE

SCIENCE IN AUSTRALIA
GENDER EQUITY

Introduction to the SAGE Athena Swan program

About Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE)



What we are

We are a not-for-profit organisation founded by the Australian Academy of Science, the Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering and the Department of Industry, Science and Resources.

Our purpose

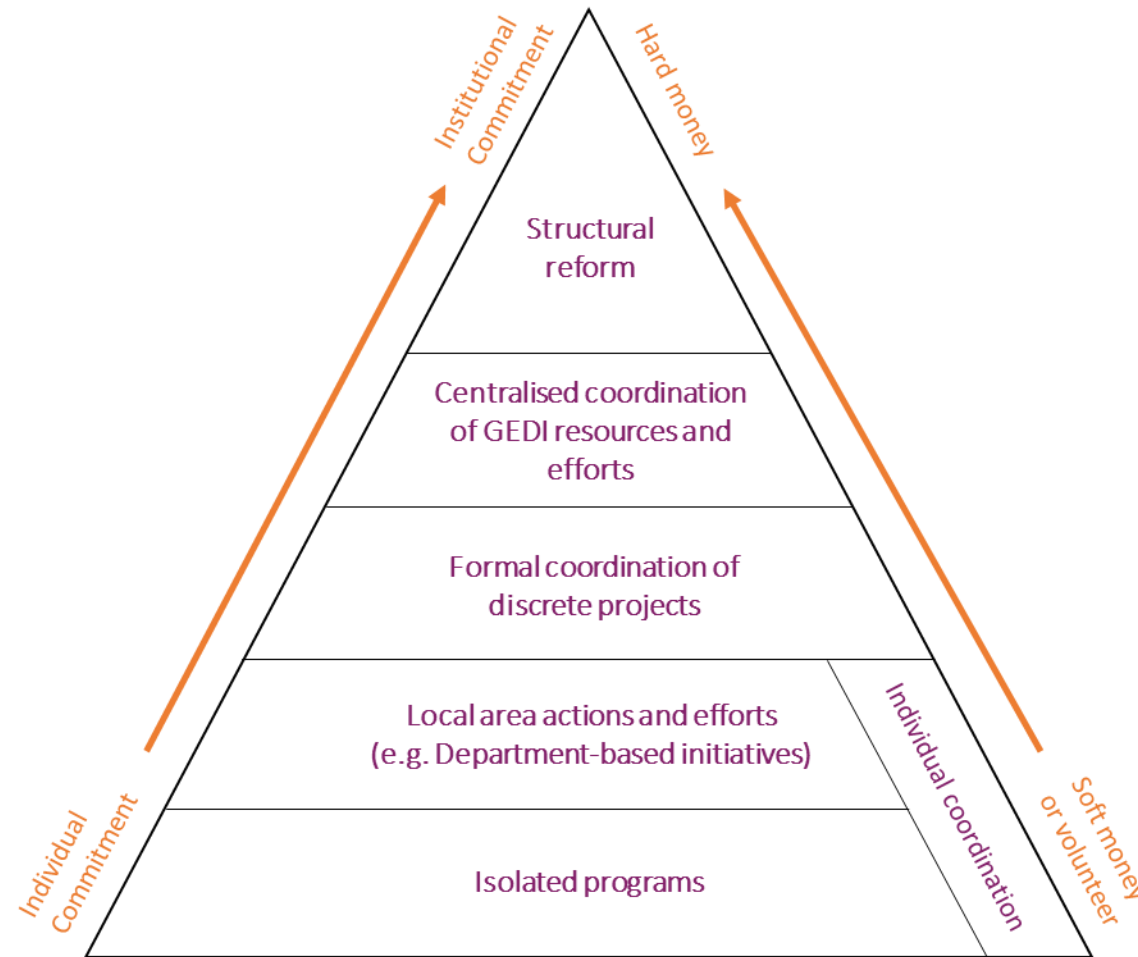
To promote and advocate for gender equity, diversity and inclusion in Australian tertiary education and research sectors, thereby fostering excellence, building trust in the sector, and strengthening its future.

What we do

We deliver the SAGE Athena Swan program, Australia's only internationally recognised, evidence-based, tailored workplace accreditation program. We support, advise and guide tertiary education and research institutions to build their skills and deliver meaningful and sustained action that moves the dial on gender equity, diversity and inclusion.



What does it take to achieve meaningful change?



Adapted from Matyas MI and Malcom SM (1991) *Women, minorities and persons with physical disabilities in science and engineering*, American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Why choose the SAGE Athena Swan change program?



Builds your capacity to take a systematic, data-driven approach to GEDI.



Dismantles structural inequalities through a long-term, iterative action plan.



Embeds an intersectional lens.



Provides international recognition through the Athena Swan brand.



Aligns with data collection frameworks and legislative compliance requirements.



Peer support - access to leading-practice case studies and Communities of Practice.

"Working with SAGE has given us the tools we need to sustain a workplace that truly progresses gender diversity. The SAGE Framework ensures we always stay alert, constantly questioning how we can do things better where it matters most."

Professor Cobie Rudd, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Regional Futures) & Vice-President at Edith Cowan University

Senior leaders' commitment

When an institution becomes a SAGE subscriber members, its senior leaders must make a commitment to:

 Ensure that gender equity, diversity and inclusion work is appropriately resourced	
 Undertake transparent and rigorous self-assessment processes	
 Design initiatives based on institutional data	
 Monitor, evaluate, and publicly report on progress made	
 Actively incorporate Indigenous knowledges and perspectives	
	 Consciously consider all genders, recognising that gender is not binary
	 Take an intersectional approach to advancing gender equity, diversity and inclusion
	 Engage with those most impacted by inequitable practice
	 Increase the safety and wellbeing of staff and students
	 Embed change in institutional governance and accountability structures

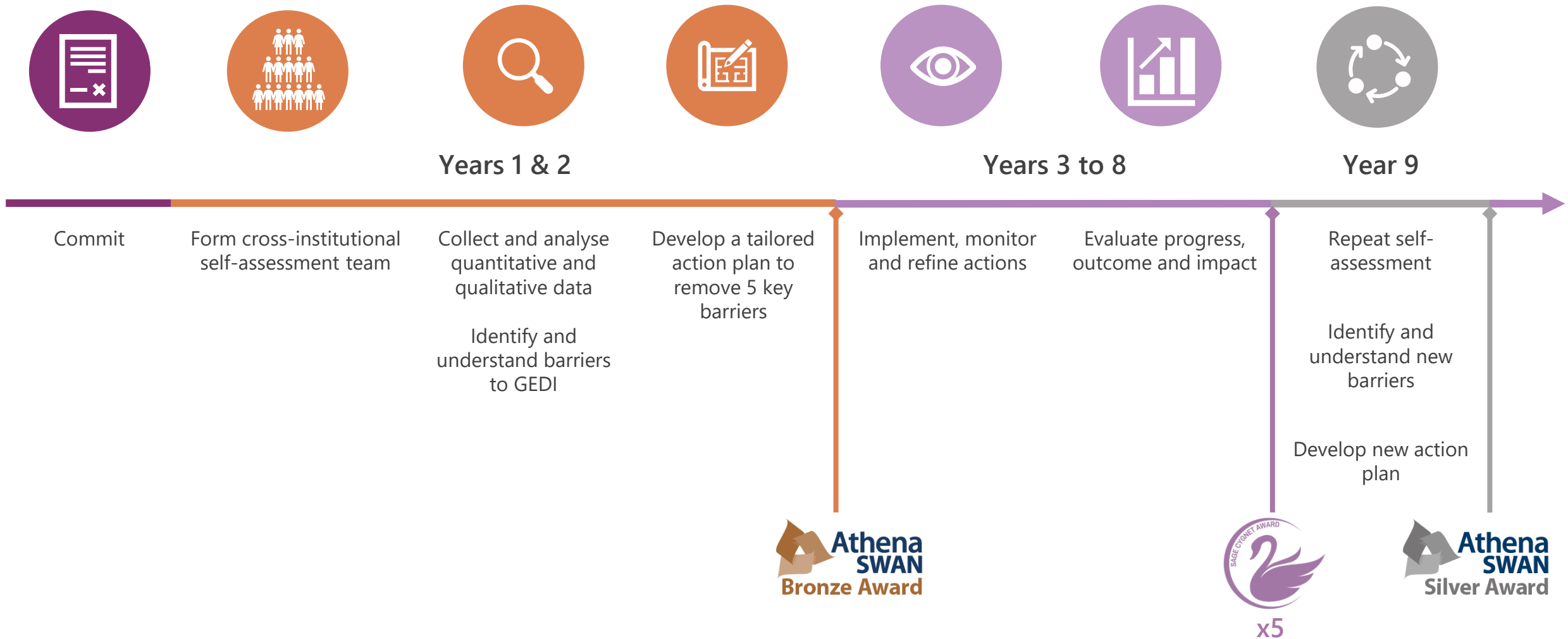
SAGE Athena Swan award levels



Criteria	Bronze	Cygnets	Silver	Cygnets	Gold*
Assess your organisation's current state of gender equity, diversity and inclusion (GEDI)	✓		✓		✓
Identify structural, systemic and cultural barriers to equity	✓		✓		✓
Develop an action plan to address five priority barriers	✓		✓		✓
Demonstrate progress, outcomes and impact from actions taken		✓		✓	
Embed systemic change to continuously surface and remove GEDI barriers					✓

*under development.

The SAGE Athena Swan pathway to change



Barrier: Promotion

RMIT reformed **promotion processes** to increase applications for STEM roles from women and gender-diverse staff.

Among the measures RMIT delivered were:

- embedding **Achievement Relative to Opportunity** as a standard part of every academic appointment, assessing what people achieved and the impact they had;
- implementing mandated training in **inclusive hiring** and decision-making for hiring managers;
- making **gender-balanced shortlists** and **behavioural-based interviewing** standard practice;
- and improving **parental leave and flexible work** arrangements for everyone.

"It was hard for me to return to academia after having my son. At other universities, they wanted to know about my past 3 years and what I had been doing. But at RMIT, they were more understanding that I was being a parent and raising a child."

– Staff member

The Impact

The proportion of manager roles held by women rose to **52.6%** in 2025, up from 45% in 2021, while the University's STEM pay gap has more than halved over the same period, falling from 9% to **4.3%**.

Five STEM Schools have now achieved an overall **40:40:20** gender distribution of academic staff.

On average, in 2018–2021, **19%** more women applied for STEM roles and **36%** more women were appointed, compared to the 2015–2017 period.

Applicants reported feeling safer disclosing their gender and appreciated having diverse interview panels and the consideration of achievement relative to opportunity in the process.

Source: [RMIT's Silver Award application](#) on recruitment.



Barrier: Attracting Indigenous talent

To grow their Indigenous workforce, the University of Newcastle:

- conducted Indigenous-targeted recruitment
- supported Indigenous staff to gain PhDs and academic positions at the university
- established an Office of Indigenous Strategy and Leadership to provide a welcoming environment for Indigenous staff, students and community members.
- developed cultural and intellectual property protocol
- ensured Indigenous perspectives were embedded into their research ethics process
- provided cultural capability training for non-Indigenous staff and students

As a result, **Indigenous staff representation rose from 1% to 3%**, bringing it close to population parity.

Source: [University of Newcastle's Cygnet Award application](#) on Indigenous cultural competency.



Barrier: Culture inclusive of LGBTIQ+ people

Griffith University sought to make their services and culture explicitly inclusive of LGBTIQ+ staff and students by:

- adding a LGBTIQ+ service to student counselling offerings.
- creating a LGBTIQ+ inclusion learning module for exchange and international students.
- producing staff and student resources on gender affirmation, LGBTIQ+ allyship and domestic violence in LGBTIQ+ relationships.
- ensuring their systems use the individual's preferred name to avoid misgendering and deadnaming.
- removing outdated language ("sexual preference" or "lifestyle choice") and binary gender references from their policies.

Since these changes were implemented, the proportion of LGBTIQ+ staff who would recommend Griffith as a good place to work increased from **69% to 80%**, on par with the agreement rate for non-LGBTIQ+ staff.

Source: [*Griffith University's Cygnet Award application*](#) on LGBTIQ+ inclusion.

Barrier: Physical, digital and procedural inaccessibility for people with disability

The Problem

In 2019, systemic physical, digital and procedural inaccessibility was identified as a core barrier at RMIT.

Staff with disability reported:

- significantly lower access to what they needed to do their job effectively.
- substantially lower confidence that organisational systems supported effective work.
- lower levels of belonging and authenticity
- lower levels of reasonable workloads.

The Change

Accessibility was embedded across governance, planning, procurement, and accountability through a coordinated, institution-wide approach.

Staged improvements delivered to physical and digital environments, aligned with DDA, universal design, and WCAG standards.

Cont...

Inclusive recruitment and workforce capability strengthened through Disability Confident practices, targeted training, and practical resources.

Consistent access was improved through strengthened workplace adjustments, assistive technology, specialist supports, and accessible learning arrangements.

The Impact

Staff reported positive experiences of their involvement in the Disability and Neurodiversity Staff Network, noting that the network increased their sense of community and belonging.

Some staff reported that reasonable adjustments, including flexible workplace arrangements, led to greater work productivity and physical, neurological and mental wellbeing, while others reported difficult interactions with colleagues.

Staff with disability reported an improvement in workload equity.

Source: *RMIT's Progress and Impact Summary*

SAGE member institutions have lower gender pay gaps

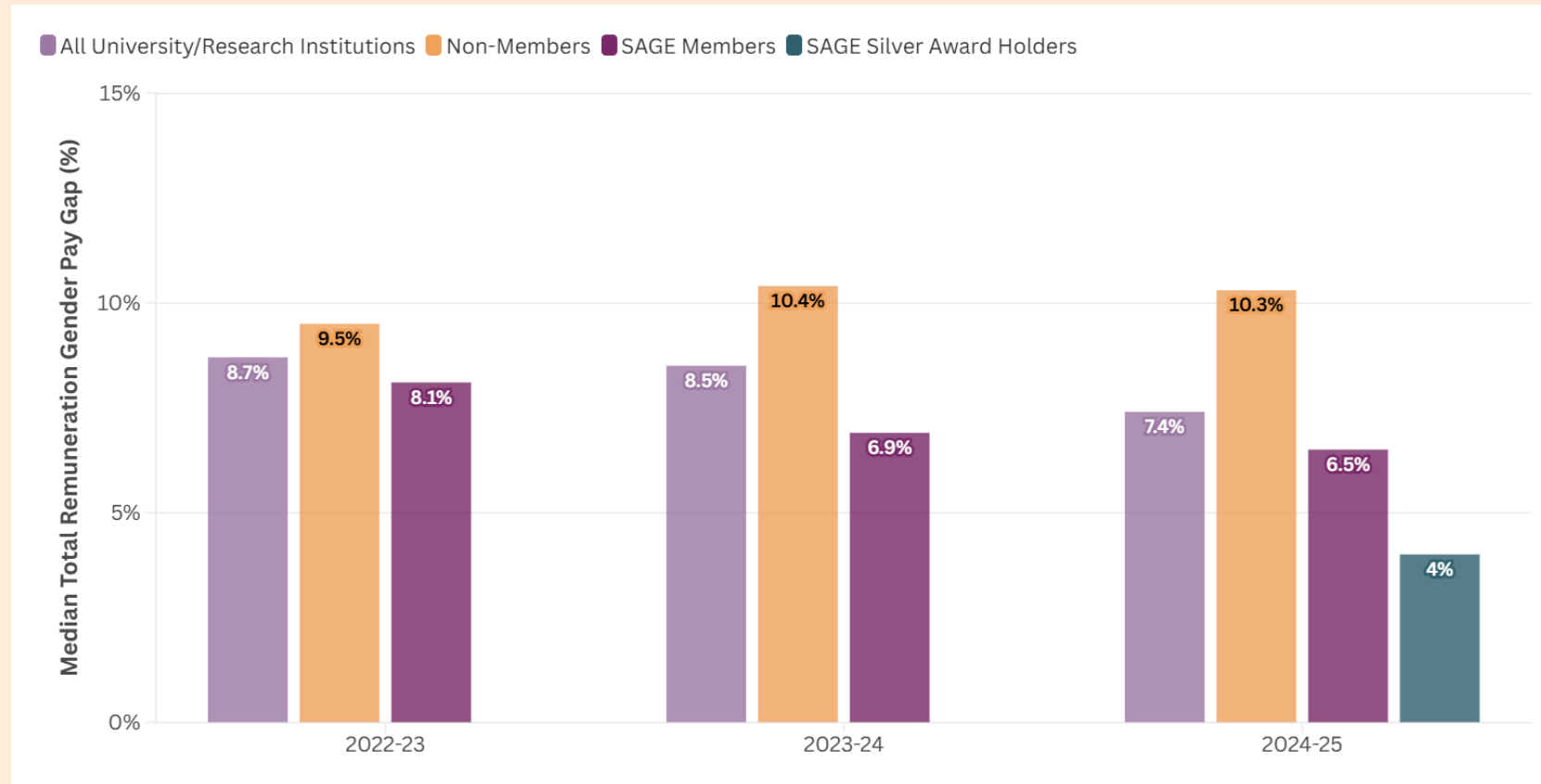


Chart based on 2022-23, 2023-24 and [2024-25 Workplace Gender Equality Agency employer results data](#) for median total remuneration pay gap and analysed for [SAGE's Gender Pay Gap Report Card](#). Twenty-eight universities, six medical research institutes and four public sector research agencies were SAGE program members in the 2024/25 WGEA reporting period and included in the pay gap analysis. Data shows a steady decline in the gender pay gap over the three years. In 2024/25, member average gender pay gap was 6.5%, non-member average gender pay gap was 10.3% and six program members holding a Silver Award had an average gender pay gap of 4%, some of whom were awarded Silver in late 2025 and 2026.



Why you can trust SAGE

We're evidence-driven.

We use data-driven approaches and evidence-based solutions to cultivate transformational change.

We're experts in your sector.

People know us as the experts in workplace GEDI in the Australian tertiary education and research sector.

We're with you every step of the way.

We provide you with tailored support, one-on-one advice, webinars and workshops, tools and resources.

We promote collaboration.

We use our extensive networks and partnerships to share leading practice (through our communities of practice) and advocate for change.



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For more information contact SAGE at
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