



SAGE Cygnet Award Application

Cygnet 5: Changing how we define academic success



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SAGE CYGNET AWARD APPLICATION FORM



SAGE

SCIENCE IN AUSTRALIA
GENDER EQUITY

SAGE Cygnet Award Application

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The University of Western Australia: SAGE CYGNET #5

Scope (Institution-wide barrier or Sub-group specific barrier)	Current Cygnet ✓	Barrier
Sub-group barrier	#1 awarded	Acting on gender imbalance in Engineering
Institution-wide barrier	#2 awarded	Visibility of Women
Institution-wide barrier	#3 awarded	Women in leadership
Institution-wide barrier	#4 submitted	Academic promotions
Institution-wide barrier	✓	Changing how we define academic success

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Glossary of Acronyms

ARTO	Achievement Relative to Opportunity
ASB	Athena Swan Bronze
HR	Human Resources

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 LGBTIQ+ Advisory Group.

Key barrier – Changing how we define academic success

The University of Western Australia's (UWA) Athena Swan Bronze (ASB) process identified that a narrow definition of academic success had created a barrier to women's career progression and retention. Performance tools captured a narrow, research-focused definition of academic success, overlooking service, engagement and teaching, and achievements relative to opportunity (ARTO).

The ASB process identified four sub-barriers:

- 1.1 Use of research performance tool 'Socrates'
- 1.2 Teaching-intensive careers undervalued
- 1.3 ARTO inadequately implemented
- 1.4 Sabbatical limitations

Promotions were also impacted (examined in Cygnet 4). Here we cover promotions only regarding ARTO.

Evidence of the barrier

Women had a more volatile voluntary employee-initiated turnover rate 2017-2019 (Figure 1).¹

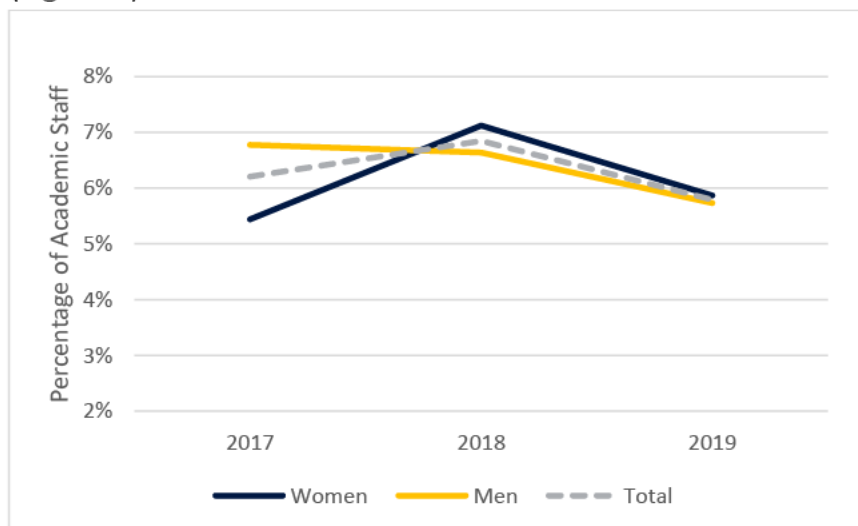


Figure 1 Academic Staff Turnover Rate 2017-2019

¹ Voluntary Employee-Initiated Turnover data sourced from Australian Higher Education HR Benchmarking Program Dashboard. This data includes ongoing and fixed-term staff.

1.1 Socrates

In 2006, UWA launched research performance tool 'Socrates' to support the Research Quality Framework.² From 2008, academics received 'Socratic Index' scores, based on PhD supervision, grants, and publications.³

'Socratic Index' scores equated research with academic success. Schools used it in different ways for performance reviews, sabbatical, promotions, grants/awards, and teaching allocations. It did not take account of teaching, service, leadership, fractional appointments, career breaks, and ARTO – disproportionately impacting women.

Because SI [Socratic Index] is mathematical people think it is not biased. But it is biased against career interruptions and those who work part time. Why do I have to justify my existence every year, because my SI is lower, when everyone knows I work part-time? (ASB staff consultation, 2017)

Appraisal data (2017-2019),⁴ showed women received lower ratings than men (Table 1). We use the highest two ratings ('exceeded', 'exceptional') as indicators of 'high-performance'.

Exceeded/Exceptional Appraisal Ratings		
	Women	Men
2017	4%	8%
2018	27%	30%
2019	31%	34%

Table 1: High-performance appraisal ratings 2017-2019

1.2 Teaching-Intensive Careers Undervalued

Teaching-intensive roles have been viewed as low-status and career-limiting,⁵ despite sector-wide growth, including growth in this pathway at UWA (Figure 2).⁶

² A national framework introduced to measure and assess the quality of research in Australia.

³ Gender analysis of the Socratic Index was outlined in the AS Bronze Award application.

⁴ Pre-2017 data unavailable and 2017 data incomplete.

⁵ Bexley, E., James, R. and Arkoudis, S. (2011) The Australian academic profession in transition, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, The University of Melbourne.

⁶ Ross, P. M. (2026). Evolution of academic roles, the emergence of education focused roles, and the policy solutions needed for building resilience in education focused academic roles in higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 45(3), 781–799.

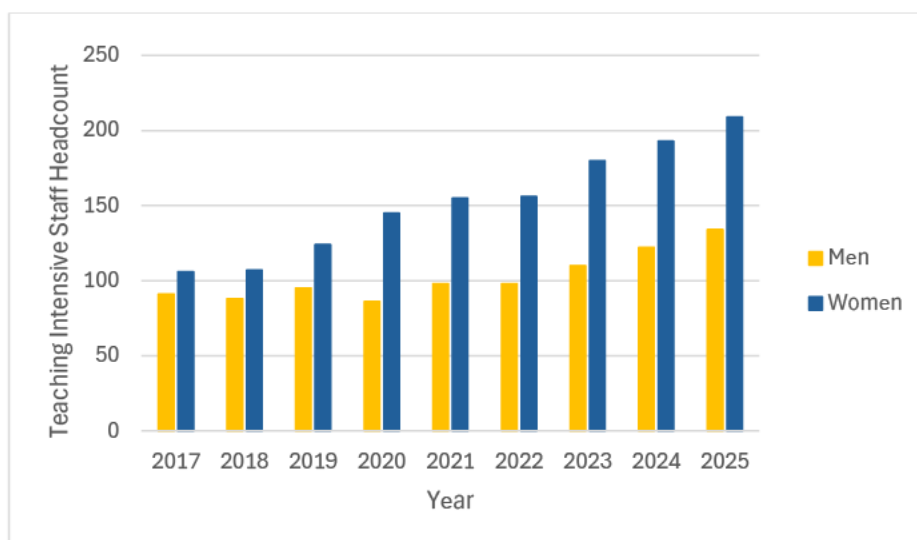


Figure 2 UWA Ongoing/Fixed-Term Teaching-Intensive Headcount

Women in teaching-intensive roles experienced unique growth (Figures 3 and 4).

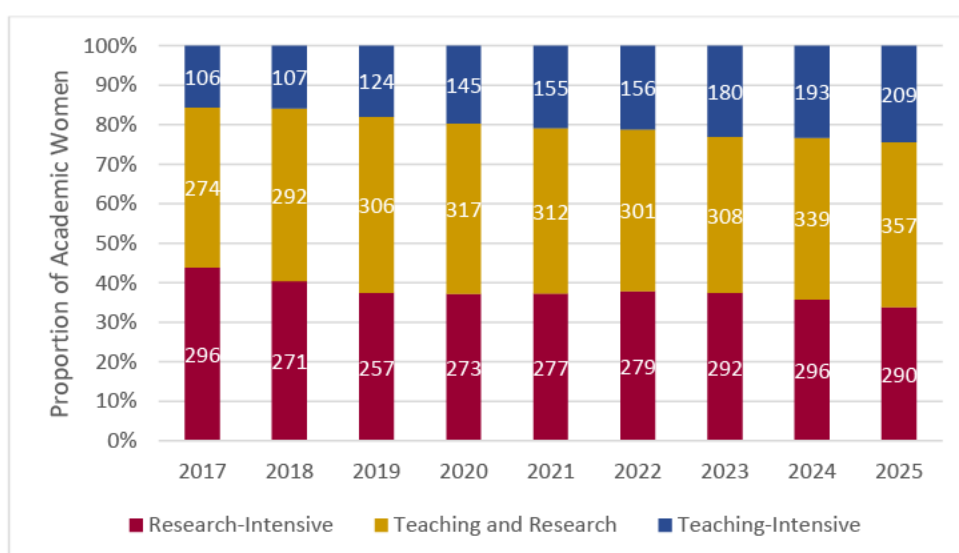


Figure 3 UWA Proportion of academics by role - Women

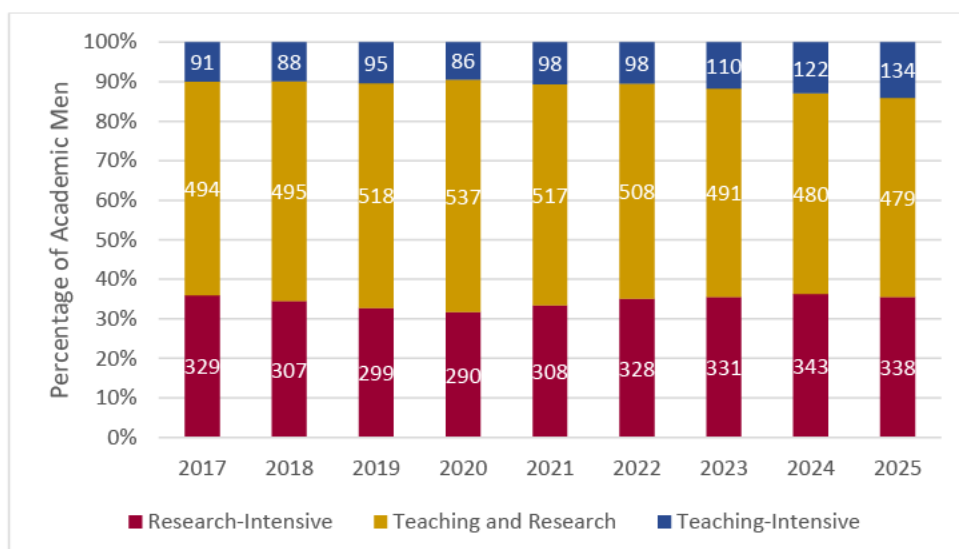


Figure 4 UWA Proportion of academics by role - Men

2017 survey results (Table 2) show negative perceptions of teaching at UWA.

Faculties	Research is regarded favourably within my work unit (% Favourable)		Teaching is regarded favourably within my work unit (% Favourable)	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Health & Medical Sciences	86	82	74	67
Arts, Business, Law & Education	93	80	70	56
Science	96	93	67	76
Engineering & Mathematical Sciences	100	89	50	55
UWA total	92	87	69	65

Table 2 2017 All-staff Survey (Academic Staff Results)

1.3 ARTO Inadequately Implemented

The ARTO policy was introduced in 2013, but ASB found it inconsistently embedded in HR processes. Some workload models assumed full-time, linear careers, disadvantaging women who were more likely to have higher teaching loads, limiting research opportunities and career progression.

1.4 Sabbatical Restrictions

ASB implementation revealed sabbaticals were important for academic success, enabling research, or teaching development, without the usual teaching/service commitments, more frequently carried out by women. The 2017-2019 Sabbatical Policy

excluded teaching-intensive staff, disproportionately impacting women. Women had lower sabbatical rates (Figure 5).

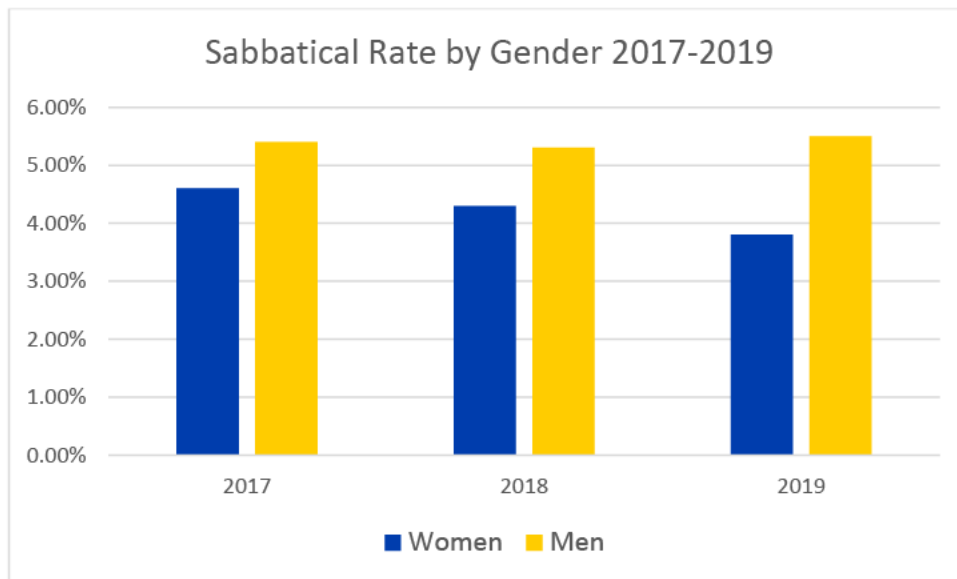


Figure 5 Sabbatical rate by gender 2017-2019

Although the sabbatical policy included travel allowances for partners and children, this did not include adult dependents, disadvantaging women.⁷

Some staff reported an expectation to travel and bear costs - a burden for women with caring responsibilities.



Progress (Actions and outputs)

Socrates

The ASB Action Plan committed to review Socrates and Academic Council discontinued the 'inadequate and inequitable'⁸ metric in 2019 (Figure 6).

⁷ Who are more likely to be carers, see Alison Andrew, Oriana Bandiera, Monica Costa Dias, Camille Landais, Women and men at work, *Oxford Open Economics*, Volume 3, Issue Supplement_1, 2024, Pages i294–i322

⁸ All-staff email sent 10 April 2019.

Disestablishment of the Socratic Index

Socrates will no longer display the Socratic Index

Login
Socrates
3

The "Socrates Research Quality Management System" will no longer display the Socratic Index.

The Socratic Index has previously been used as a comparative metric of research activity within UWA, taking into account publications, HDR student supervision, and grant success. This metric has been found by Research Committee and Academic Council to be both inadequate and inequitable for this purpose.

Figure 6 Socrates: communication 2019

Teaching-intensive Careers Undervalued

In 2019-2020, a teaching-intensive pathway to Professor was introduced, informed by consultation and benchmarking and level-specific promotions criteria were published (Figure 7).

2.2 Criteria ⓘ

Review the relevant criteria for the level of promotion you are seeking

To Level B	To Level C	To Level D	To Level E
Teaching intensive Teaching intensive [PDF] Teaching intensive [Doc]	Teaching intensive Teaching intensive [PDF] Teaching intensive [Doc]	Teaching intensive Teaching intensive [PDF] Teaching intensive [Doc]	Teaching intensive Teaching intensive [PDF] Teaching intensive [Doc]
Research intensive Research intensive [PDF] Research intensive [Doc]	Research intensive Research intensive [PDF] Research intensive [Doc]	Research intensive Research intensive [PDF] Research intensive [Doc]	Research intensive Research intensive [PDF] Research intensive [Doc]
Teaching and Research Teaching and Research [PDF] Teaching and Research [Doc]	Teaching and Research Teaching and Research [PDF] Teaching and Research [Doc]	Teaching and Research Teaching and Research [PDF] Teaching and Research [Doc]	Teaching and Research Teaching and Research [PDF] Teaching and Research [Doc]

Figure 7 Promotion Pathways and Criteria – Intranet

To strengthen recognition of teaching, UWA joined the Advance HE (Higher Education) Fellowship scheme in 2019. The Fellowship framework is incorporated into relevant promotions criteria and Fellows are recognised through award ceremonies and post-nominals (Figure 8).

^ Recognition of Fellows

Achieving Fellowship demonstrates a commitment to teaching, learning and the student experience, through research, reflection and development.

Fellowship can be used as evidence of excellence in award applications, promotion applications and your annual performance review.

It contributes to your continuing professional development as you have engaged with the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) in your discipline area.

AFS Award Ceremony

Fellows are recognised at our annual Teaching Excellence Awards Ceremony and receive their certificates and Fellowship pins.

Next ceremony: 23rd November 2026 TBC

Post-nominal letters

Following their receipt of their UWA AFS award, Fellows are welcome to use the post-nominal letters AFHEA, FHEA or SFHEA.



Figure 8 Advance HE Fellows - Intranet

ARTO Implemented

ARTO has been systematically embedded in promotions, sabbaticals, performance appraisal and research awards since 2020, although data has not been consistently collected.

Guidance for appraisers highlights women's lower promotion application rates and encourages managers to support eligible staff (Figure 9). It also recognises the value of service ('academic housework'⁹) disproportionately undertaken by women.

Career Planning/Promotion

Understanding barriers to career progression and identifying career advancement opportunities as part of the performance review process provides an opportunity to discuss career planning and timing for promotion. Research has shown that women wait longer to apply for promotion than required.

An employee who consistently exceeded performance expectations, meets goals, seeks out and takes additional responsibilities, demonstrates behaviours aligned to the core values of the University, regularly works and thinks above their current level and shows leadership potential, should be encouraged to apply for promotion.

As part of the evaluation, supervisors should recognise service roles and outreach responsibilities as valuable contributions. Supervisors should ensure equitable distribution of such roles to men and women.

Figure 9: Appraisal Guidance for Managers

ARTO in promotions was improved through a statement, form (Figure 10) and updated guidelines.

⁹ See, e.g., Tamar Melanie Heijstra, Finnborg Salome Steinthorsdóttir & Thorgerdur Einarsdóttir, 'Academic career making and the double-edged role of academic Housework' (2017) 29(6) *Gender and Education* 764.



Achievement Relative to Opportunity (optional)

Applicants are invited to detail circumstances affecting their academic career path and profile. These factors may include, but are not limited to, personal or other non-academic circumstances that have restricted or delayed professional career, and other work-related delays caused by secondments/projects with other organisations or industry.

This statement is optional.

Please advise of any FTE changes related to any issues identified in your summary below and the length of time impacted.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Carer responsibilities for children, elderly parents, family members requiring special care.
- Ill health, disability or medical conditions whether temporary, episodic or permanent.
- Career interruptions related to parental leave, working in a different field or late entry to academia.
- Part-time or flexible working arrangements.
- Refer to the [Achievement Relative to Opportunity](#) information.

This statement is usually provided to the Head of School with your application – please advise if you do not want this to be sent to the Head of School.

Limit of 3,000 characters

Figure 10 ARTO in Promotions - Guidance

Sabbatical Limitations

The sabbatical policy, amended in 2022, explicitly included teaching-intensive staff and equity considerations:

'...applications are particularly encouraged where these facilitate the development of academic staff who (i) hold significant teaching responsibilities; (ii) are women; (iii) are Indigenous; (iv) under-represented equity groups; and/or (v) early- or mid-career.'

Travel support for adult dependents with a disability was also included. Unfortunately, broader equity data has not been collected, limiting outcome assessment (see 'Future Actions').

Decoupling 'Socratic Index' from sabbatical decisions reduced barriers for women - more likely to be: in service/teaching-intensive roles, fractional, carers, and underrepresented in high-citation science fields.

Outcomes

Following Socratic Index removal, introduction of Advance HE Fellowships, and sabbatical and promotions changes, we expected improved recognition and retention of women, higher promotion rates, performance ratings and representation in leadership (as removing Socrates itself cannot be measured per se). Cygnet 3 outlined

increased women's representation in senior positions,¹⁰ and Cygnet 4 detailed increased promotion rates.¹¹

Retention

Voluntary employee-initiated turnover among women remains volatile, although in recent years the gap is narrowing, possibly indicating a shift towards gender parity (Figure 11).¹² This trend will be monitored and further explored through engagement surveys.

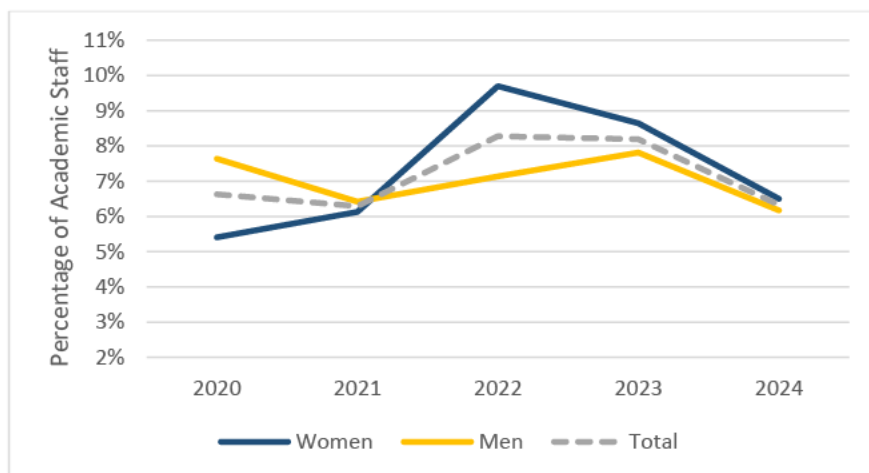


Figure 11 Academic Staff Turnover Rate 2020-2024

Recognition

While appraisal data was incomplete, analysis of high-performance ratings shows that women were less likely to receive these ratings in 2017-2019. The gap narrowed in 2020, widened in 2021, and more women than men achieved higher ratings 2022-2024 (Figure 12). A new appraisal system 'MyProgress@UWA' was introduced in 2026 to improve a consistent approach to appraisal, goal setting and identifying development opportunities. The online system will also significantly improve data capture and assist in identifying areas of inequity.

¹⁰ Including gender balance on: Executive, Committees, Heads of Schools.

¹¹ 4.0% in 2017 - 5.3% in 2025.

¹² Voluntary Employee-Initiated Turnover data sourced from Australian Higher Education HR Benchmarking Program Dashboard. This data includes ongoing and fixed-term staff. 2025 data is not available at time of submission.

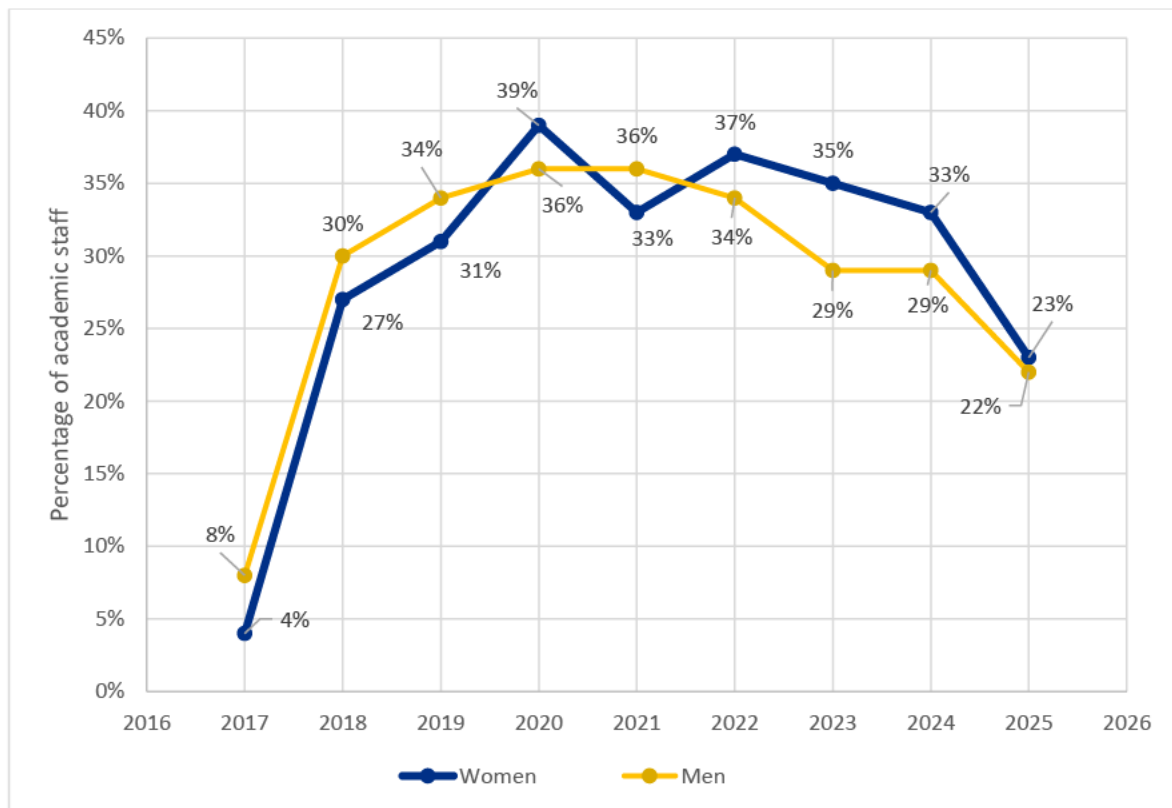


Figure 12 High performance appraisal ratings 2017-2025

Teaching-Intensive Careers

Figure 13 shows increasing promotion rates for teaching-intensive women,¹³ which indicates that the new teaching-intensive career pathway is enabling career progression. Rates will continue to be monitored as we work towards parity with other academic roles.

¹³ Cygnet 4 outlined increases in promotion rates for teaching-intensive women.

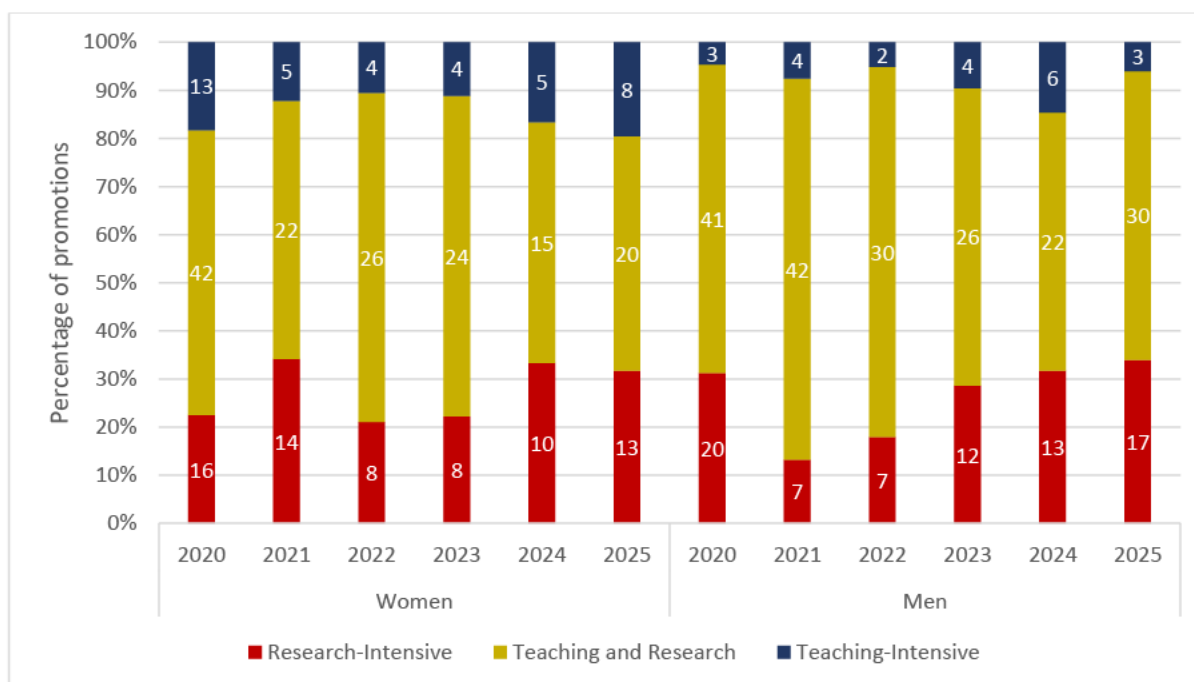


Figure 13 Promotions by academic role 2020-2025

The number of Advance HE fellowships awarded has increased over the years, except for 2024 (Figure 14), signalling the value placed on the program by participants and the University.

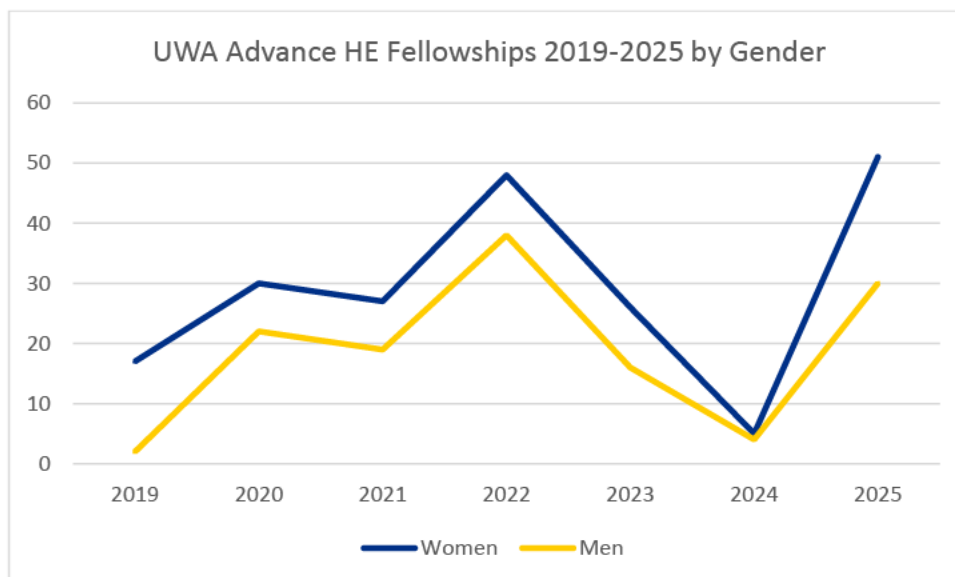


Figure 14 Advance HE Fellowships Awarded 2019-2025¹⁴

Women are over-represented across Fellowships (Figure 15), including Principal (3 women, 2 men) and Senior Fellow (69 women, 32 men).

¹⁴ To determine gender, we cross-referenced our human resources system with the data on Advance HE fellowships. A further 52 people were awarded fellowships but have since left UWA and so we have not been able to determine gender and have excluded the data from our analysis.

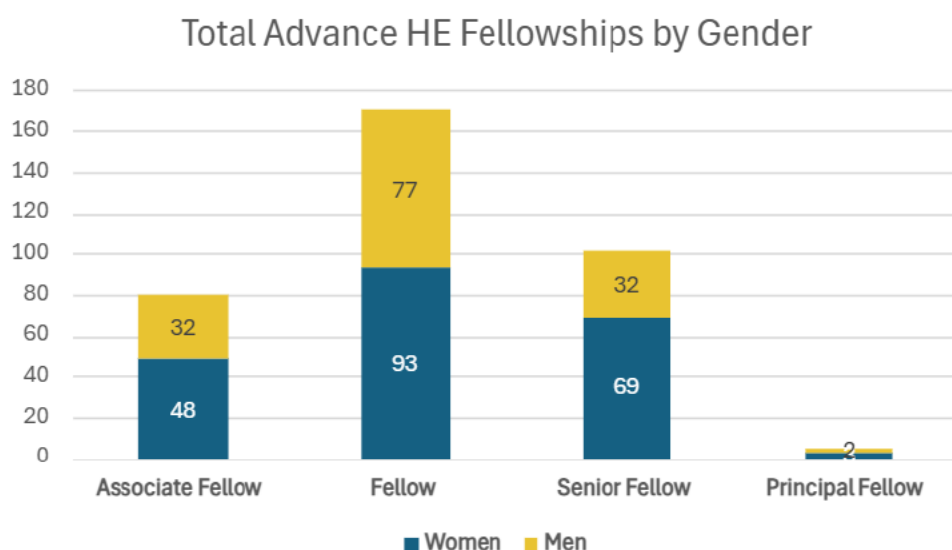


Figure 15 Fellowships by Gender

Fellowship status is used in applications for: promotion, ongoing positions, and secondments, and in performance appraisals. An interviewee noted:

a higher percentage of people that are winning [teaching] awards have got that fellowship.
(Professional staff member)

ARTO

Promotion applications data (2023-2025) shows women use ARTO more frequently than men (Table 3).¹⁵

Year	Men total	Men ARTO usage	Men % ARTO usage	Women total	Women ARTO usage	Women % ARTO usage
2023	68	25	36.8%	48	30	62.5%
2024	54	24	44.4%	38	19	50.0%
2025	73	25	34.2%	57	28	49.1%
Total	195	74	37.9%	143	77	53.8%

Table 3 ARTO in promotion applications 2023-2025

Multiple contributing factors mean the impact of ARTO on promotion rates is difficult to determine, but from 2023-2025, women using ARTO had slightly higher success rates, men had slightly lower rates (Table 4). As increasing men's uptake of parental leave is

¹⁵ Unfortunately, baseline data was not consistently collected pre-2023.

an institutional priority,¹⁶ we will be exploring the reasons behind the lower success rate for men to determine appropriate actions.

	Men with ARTO	Men without ARTO	Women with ARTO	Women without ARTO
Applicants	74	121	77	66
Promoted	49	84	58	47
Success Rate	66.2%	69.4%	75.3%	71.2%

Table 4 Promotion outcomes by gender and ARTO use 2023-2025

Sabbatical

Sabbatical policy changes have had mixed outcomes. Uptake remains below pre-pandemic levels. Women had lower participation rates than men in 2023 and 2025, reaching parity in 2024 (Table 5). We plan to explore the barriers to sabbatical and appropriate support mechanisms.

Year	Women	Men
2017	4.6%	5.4%
2018	4.3%	5.3%
2019	3.8%	5.5%
2020	3.4%	2.9%
2021	1.1%	0.5%
2022	0.4%	0.3%
2023	3.1%	4.2%
2024	3.7%	3.7%
2025	2.6%	3.9%

Table 5 Sabbatical rate (2020-2025)

Impact

Qualitative and quantitative data was used to assess the impact of initiatives (Table 6).¹⁷

¹⁶ UWA Gender Equity Action Plan, available at: <https://www.uwa.edu.au/about/leadership-and-governance/strategy-and-values/diversity-equity-and-inclusion/gender-equity>.
¹⁷ Due to low numbers and privacy considerations, disaggregated analysis was not possible. However, sampling intentionally included staff with disability, caring responsibilities, CALD backgrounds and non-binary identities to ensure these perspectives informed evaluation. The responses quoted below are de-identified so that participants could contribute openly.

Source	Year	Number of participants
Interviews (Table 7).	2025	8
Staff engagement survey	2025	2,619 (63% of staff, 1007 men, 1608 women, 4 non-binary staff).
International Women's Day (IWD) post-event survey ¹⁸	2026	15 (15% of participants) gender not recorded, most event participants were women.
Gender Equity in Academic Promotions Program (GEAPP) pre- and post-surveys	2026	27 (47% of participants)
Purposive sampling: interviews or email input from staff with relevant experience (e.g. teaching-intensive)	2023-2026	7

Table 6 Data sources

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

Table 7 Profile of interviewees, 2025

The cumulative effect of removing Socrates, supporting teaching and teaching-intensive careers, increasing use of ARTO, promotions procedure changes, and sabbatical policy reform has contributed to modest gains in retention of women, more high-rating performance appraisal outcomes for women, and some increase in women's sabbaticals. Women report teaching being valued and supported, and more career development opportunities (e.g. sabbatical, Advance HE Fellowships).

Measuring Academic Success

Removing Socrates was seen as a significant ASB achievement:

...academic success in some schools was indicated by the Socratic Index, a number based on research performance. You were assessed by comparing your Index against what was expected for your level. There was no achievement relative to opportunity, or

¹⁸ Also asked about awareness of and perceived impact of ASB.

accounting for part-time work, or teaching or service loads. Our Athena Swan action plan changed how the Index was used.
(Interview, Academic Woman, Level E)

However, others note that the sector needs to change as '...NHMRC and ARC define success', irrespective of how UWA measures it.

Funding bodies are changing their approach to gender equity, such as NHMRC's structural priority funding and gender equity targets in Investigator Grants. Australia's imminent access to Horizon Europe research funding, which has gender equity requirements, will further drive gender equity in the sector.

Increased application of ARTO

Increased use of ARTO was a theme in responses to the 2026 IWD survey.

The implementation of 'Achievement relative to opportunity' at UWA has had a positive impact on how women feel about applying for promotion. There is a greater incentive to do it.
(IWD Survey, Anonymous)

...(there is) more focus on achievement relative to opportunity, more research grants with an equity focus/criteria.
(IWD Survey, Anonymous)

Interviews with promotions committee members also highlight positive impacts:

There has been an optional relative to opportunity statement for a while, even under the old promotion system. But I'm on the new promotions committee and the relative to opportunity statement is given really deep consideration these days.
(Interview, Head of School, woman)

In performance appraisals, participants noted that ARTO is often an informal part of the process, dependent on the individual appraiser:

After switching from full-time to part-time, I received a lower performance appraisal rating. I don't think being part-time was considered. The next year, a different appraiser pointed out that I was fractional, and I received a higher rating, aligned with what I received before being part-time.
(Email input, Level E woman)

Misunderstandings of ARTO remain. The quotes below describe circumstances which can be considered in ARTO but which people understood could not be:

...life stages are not really factored in – teen children and perimenopause / menopause.
(Interviewee, academic woman)

...children's special needs are not really taken into account.

(Interviewee, academic woman)

There was also some confusion about how ARTO was used:

I don't know who reads it and how it is taken on board.

(Interviewee, academic woman)

In GEAPP survey data, 25 out of 27 respondents reported an increased understanding of ARTO as a result of the promotions sessions for women and non-binary staff. Also reflected in survey comments:

... the "achievement relative to opportunity" form can be used to explain a role that doesn't fit traditional academic, not just career breaks

I had thought that the achievement relative to opportunity did not apply to me - but after listening to the discussion on this I realised that i did indeed have a narrative for this section.

(GEAPP survey data, anonymous)

Therefore, ongoing education on ARTO is needed and future initiatives should evaluate ARTO in performance review, sabbatical, workload allocation, and internal grants. The ARTO policy/procedures are also currently under review to ensure suitability.

Sabbatical opportunities

Broadening sabbatical eligibility has removed barriers and is viewed positively:

'Despite being teaching-intensive, I was allowed to go on sabbatical to produce two manuscripts... If it had not been for sabbatical, I would have never had the time to complete this book, as my busy semesters do not allow for much research.

(Email input, Level B woman)

'Not being required to travel as part of a sabbatical is a huge relief. I have incorporated short trips... without the need to be away from home for an extensive period.'

(Email input, Level E woman)

Quantitative data (Table 5) does indicate persistent inequity - further investigation of barriers will be undertaken.

Valuing and supporting teaching

Perhaps the most significant impact was shifting the focus from research metrics alone to a more holistic assessment of academic roles, including valuing teaching:

Teaching is now seen as just as important as research and that sends a really positive message to our academic community, and all of our teaching support staff.

(Interview, Head of School, woman)

Advance HE Fellowships are well-regarded and included in promotions criteria.

*UWA holds incredible value to the (Fellowship) framework and recognises that the people who achieve fellowship are looking at developing effective teaching...
(Interview, Professional staff member, woman)*

However, it was observed that people might use Advance HE without contributing to the community – a requirement of the program – and that women might be more likely to contribute than men:

*[people use it]...just for the promotion and just to put the application in, get the fellowship category and then get the promotion.
(Interview, Professional staff member, woman)*

Despite gains, challenges remain, which will be addressed through various items in the below Action Plan:

*As a teaching-intensive academic, my contributions are often undervalued. I am not always regarded as a serious academic.
(Email input, Senior Academic, woman)*

Further Action

Several areas for improvement were identified that if addressed would further improve broader acceptance of diverse academic careers.

Reference	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.	ARTO influence seems to be slightly positive in promotions outcomes for women, slightly negative in promotions outcomes for men, and not well tracked in other areas (e.g. sabbatical, performance review, internal grants, workload allocation etc.).	1.1 Establish transparent reporting process for ARTO. 1.2 Investigate variation of ARTO use by School, role type, FTE, gender.	2026-2028	PVC AAD Chief People & Culture Officer	SDVC	More balanced promotion outcomes for people using ARTO and not using ARTO, irrespective of gender.
2.	Fluctuation of annual sabbatical rates.	2.1 Investigate intersectional barriers to sabbatical. 2.2 Develop consistent institutional approach to sabbatical approval process, including ARTO. 2.3 Establish transparent	2026-2029	PVC AAD Chief People & Culture Officer SDVC	SDVC	More gender balance in sabbatical rates. More consistent proportions of applicants and approvals across Schools.

		sabbatical reporting process.				
3.	Improvements may not be uniform for all women and for diverse staff.	3.1 Embed data collection of non-binary as well as gender (F/M) and intersectional data.	2026-2028	PVC AAD Chief People & Culture Officer	SDVC	Better data on overall diversity, equity and inclusion outcomes.
4	Teaching and teaching-intensive careers continue to need support.	4.1 Ensure teaching-intensive and especially fractional staff are encouraged and supported to submit timely applications for promotion	2026-2028	PVC AAD Chief People & Culture Officer	SDVC	Increased promotion rates for teaching intensive staff / staff with a higher teaching and service, and with consideration of support for part-time (fractional) staff.