



## **APPENDIX – Literature Review**

**Gender inclusive practices and work/life balance in  
Australian Universities**

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# Purpose and scope

The Universities Australia Women's research program for 2021-2022 has a specific focus on inclusive practices and work/life balance for women in Australia's university sector. The purpose of this literature review is to provide the evidence base for the current state of gender inclusivity and work/life balance and to offer examples of national and international leading practice of DEI in universities and other knowledge-based industries, which have innovative solutions to many of the challenges faced by women in the workforce that can be transferred into the university sector.

While the remit and focus of this project is 'women', the authors acknowledge that there are additional and compounding challenges experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, LGBTIQ+ individuals, people with disability, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, that may intersect with the drivers of gender inequality outlined in this literature review.

## Introduction

Existing research into the experience of women working in the university sector suggests that although women now outnumber men in higher education, both as students and staff, they continue to be substantially underrepresented in senior and executive-level positions (Lipton, 2017; Whitehouse & Nestic, 2014). Indeed, at the initial level of first appointment for professional staff, men predominate from HEW 6 and above. For academic staff, more women are appointed at the lower levels across teaching intensive, research intensive, and teaching and research roles (Strachan, et al., 2016).

Factors constraining women's career progression include institutional gender stereotypes and bias, unequal distribution of workloads, caring responsibilities, women's limited access to informal networks, limited support for caring responsibilities and gendered performance measurement (Baird, et al., 2021; Eslon-Ziya & Yildirim, 2021; Strachan, et al., 2016).

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) policies and programs are widely used in the private and public sectors to promote the representation and participation of women and address structural barriers (e.g., Baker, 2009; Eslon-Ziya & Yildirim, 2021; Lipton, 2017; Nash & Churchill, 2020). While most Australian universities have adopted progressive gender equality strategies, there remains a disconnection between institutional policy and practice (Gilbert, et al., 2020). Furthermore, while the Australian university sector has historically led the charge in the development of equity and diversity policies, they are now falling behind Australia's private sector and governments (Whitehouse & Nestic, 2014).

For women working in the university sector, both in research and as professional staff, the vicissitudes of recent years are compounding the challenges of having a successful career. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly altered how, when and where university work is conducted, with working from home or remote work the most pronounced change. The pandemic induced widespread shifts in teaching and learning, namely an acceleration of the move to online teaching and learning (Medina, 2020; Smyth C. C., 2021). Remote work presented both challenges and opportunities for people in the university system with care responsibilities, mostly women. While flexible working arrangements and time recovered from commutes increased productivity, it also amplified disparities in living situations and the domestic division of labour,

and exacerbated mental health conditions (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020). In July 2020 80 per cent of women reported doing most of the unpaid domestic work in their households, compared to 39 per cent of men, and women were over three times as likely as men to report they did most of the unpaid caring work (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020). This has been amplified through the pandemic as women have taken on the increased time associated with children learning remotely and additional unpaid domestic work (Davis, et al., 2022).

## Methodology

This literature review draws on journal articles and grey literature to examine the experiences of women working at universities and to unearth leading practices in supporting women at work.

Research from all disciplines was included in the literature search criterion, and the breadth of results included journal articles from education and social science fields, and grey literature spanning government and peak body reports and non-peer reviewed articles.

The literature review search was conducted in two stages. The first search used the search term: (“women” or “gender”) AND “staff” AND (“universit\*” OR “higher education”) AND (“inclusion” OR equal\*) in ABSTRACT

This search resulted in 37 papers, which were then reviewed by title and then by abstract. Papers were excluded if they were determined to be not relevant or focused on countries without comparable higher education systems or structures of gender inequality. Following this review, there were 16 papers. This number was considered too limiting and so a second search was conducted using the search term:

(“women” or “gender”) AND “staff” AND (“universit\*” OR “higher education”)

This search resulted in 313 papers which were reviewed within the same parameters as outlined above. Including the results from the first search, the final number of scholarly journals and reports was 53 papers. For both searches, the results were refined to those that were published in English between 1 January 2012 to 12 January 2022 to ensure this review captured the most up to date information. This corpus was supplemented by recent papers by key experts in the field if their papers did not emerge through the database search.

ProQuest Education and ProQuest Social Sciences were used as the primary databases for the primary literature search, with Google Scholar and Google used for any supplementary search. The relevancy and inclusion of each source was determined solely by the authors and no independent or parallel assessment was conducted on the literature that is included in this review.

For the section ‘Leading gender-inclusive practice in knowledge industries’, the initial literature review search, including grey literature, did not provide the innovative examples that were expected. As such, this section of the literature review has a broadened literature scope to include articles from industry sources, such as *The Harvard Business Review*, and a greater number of leading practice examples that were known to the authors prior to the literature review search.

# Gender representation and inclusivity at Australian universities

This section outlines the experiences of women who work in the Australian university sector. The drivers of inequalities operate at multiple levels:

- the sectoral level, which includes how universities are funded and regulated, how achievement is recognised and how networks are cultivated and shared.
- the organisational level, which includes the policies, practices and culture at universities.
- the intra-university level, which includes disciplinary norms and the importance of leadership and leaders.
- the personal / familial level, which includes the work undertaken outside the the university sector and which ultimately impact how individuals are perceived and treated within the sector.

The majority of research refers to academics and there is much less research on the experiences of professional staff. While there is some evidence that female professional and academic staff share similar challenges and barriers to inclusivity and progression, such as ‘overloads’ in teaching or administration, casualisation of the university workforce, gendered performance measurement (Strachan, et al., 2016), the literature examined in this following section predominantly refers to academic staff. Where the experiences of female professionals in the university sector have been captured in the research, this distinction is explicitly referenced.

Consistent themes emerge in the literature as ongoing challenges for women in the university sector:

- **The uneven valuing and distribution of work - ‘academic housework’ and domestic labour and the impact of the managerialisation of universities**
- **Gendered performance measurement and barriers to career progression**
- **Exclusion of women from networks and professional development opportunities**
- **(In)flexible working arrangements**
- **Casualisation of the university workforce**
- **Sexual harassment in universities**

## The uneven valuing and distribution of work

Over the past three decades, there has been an increase in managerialism at universities (Gilbert, et al., 2020; White, et al., 2011). Managerialism is characterised by the norms, technologies, management practices, performance indicators, value-for-money resource allocation, regulatory standards and frameworks that make up a system. The advance of managerial culture in Australian universities has increased the focus on research as the primary measure of success, for both individuals and institutions, as research activities become increasingly driven by external funding and the enumeration of research outcomes (Gilbert, et al., 2020; White, et al., 2011; Baker, 2009). Research activities feed directly into university rankings and an academic's employability is often determined by their research outputs and publication rates (Gilbert, et al., 2020). Notably, the focus on outputs and outcomes, in the form of research and publications, is also often dependent on the number of hours worked by the individual (Cannizzo & Osbaldiston, 2016; Nash & Churchill, 2020). This managerialist culture rewards individualism, competition, and male norms and work practices such as self-reliance, controlling situations, and the drive to win, often at the expense of those with caring responsibilities, more likely to be women (Harford J. , 2018). These norms are often also at odds with a more recent push in academia for increased interdisciplinary, collaborative research.

The transition of universities into sites of managerial norms and expectations mean that researchers and their research, in particular those that bring in external funding, are valued and rewarded above all other academic activities (White, et al., 2011). The marketisation of this sector has also led to increased administrative tasks as universities focus more on the alignment of research and teaching with broader institutional strategies and government priorities—often falling to female academics to shoulder (Cannizzo & Osbaldiston, 2016; Gilbert et al., 2020).

The emphasis on research as the measure of academic success disadvantages female academics who often have heavier teaching loads and are more likely to be experiencing larger administrative burdens than their male counterparts (Gilbert, et al., 2020; White, et al., 2011). In Strachan, et al. (2016) a third of staff respondents indicated they were spending a higher proportion of their time on teaching than expected, half were spending more time on administration, and approximately three-fifths were spending less time on research than expected under their contract (Strachan, et al., 2016). Often referred to as 'academic housework', teaching (or some teaching roles), support and administration workloads are more likely to be undertaken by female staff than their male counterparts, regardless of level of seniority (Gilbert, et al., 2020; Harford J. , 2018; White, et al., 2011; Strachan, et al., 2016).

While these activities are essential to keep a university running, they are not recognised or valued in the same way as research. As shared by a participant in Gilbert, et al.'s 2020 study, male academics are not similarly burdened with 'academic housework': "...there's other people... male people, around me that aren't doing it. I know what they're doing and it's not – it's benefiting them." (p. 14). Women experience a slower career progression as a result (Gilbert, et al., 2020; Whitehouse & Nestic, 2014).

The ability for women, particularly those who are mothers, to decline additional academic housework is identified in the literature as almost impossible (Cooray, et al., 2014; Nash & Churchill, 2020). The structural expectations for women are entrenched to such an extent that even other women in senior leadership positions see academic housework as something that women are more inclined to agree to (Cooray, et al., 2014; Gilbert, et al., 2020).

Conversely, men are seen as able to choose their administrative roles and teaching tasks more strategically, leading to greater opportunities for professional development, research and publication, and ultimately, promotion through academic ranks (Cooray, et al., 2014). This strongly suggests the academic sphere is structured to not only favour those who do not have caretaking responsibilities but also to reward those who can work the extended hours that enable consistent research and publication (Sattari & Sandefur, 2018).

### **THE IMPACT OF COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced additional challenges and barriers to women in academia globally. Notably, Smyth, et al. (2021) advise the shift to online learning has increased the workload for teaching staff in general, with early evidence indicating women with caring responsibilities have been disproportionately affected.

Teaching during a pandemic has required agility and adaptability in course content and delivery. This has not only created additional time pressures for the teaching faculty at universities, but research from Medina, et al. (2020) indicates that this has also increased the pervasiveness of self-doubt and external criticism experienced by these individuals.

These challenges were seen to be further compounded for faculty members who had outdated or malfunctioning technology, decreased or absent staff support, or, notably, were caring for small children or other family members. Further, teaching staff were often also noted by Medina, et al. (2020) to be carrying out additional pastoral care, caring for their own or students' physical or mental health as well as their own. Indeed, recently published research by Peetz, et al. (2022), confirmed working from home throughout the pandemic has increased the overlap between family and work responsibilities. The conflation of a space for 'work' and a space for 'non-work' that occurred during the pandemic (and has largely remained even as universities welcome people back to campus) meant the ability for academics to effectively compartmentalise work time and personal time has been made harder (Peetz, et al., 2022).

## **Gendered performance measurement and barriers to career progression**

*“In higher education, bias in performance evaluation has been posited as one of the reasons why few women make it to the upper echelons of the academic hierarchy.”*

Fan, Y, Shepherd, L.J, Slavich, E et al. 2019, 'Gender and cultural bias in student evaluations: Why representation matters', PLoS ONE, Vol. 14, No. 2, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0209749>.

According to Cooray, et al. (2014) and Lipton (2017) the value of women in Australian higher education and the subsequent success they are able to achieve continues to be measured and evaluated within patriarchal structures, which has led to a consistently higher proportion of men reaching higher academic ranks across the Australian university sector. Even after two decades of equal employment opportunity legislation in Australia, women are still underrepresented in senior academic positions (Kjeldal, et al., 2005). Many of the men in leadership positions at universities have been in those positions for a long time, often as a result of achieving tenure,

slowing the ability for women to attain the same level of professional achievement during their career (Coe, et al., 2019). Research on gender-based differences in rank at the University of Wollongong used longitudinal administrative data to reveal gender is indeed a significant variable in progressing through academic ranks, where males are represented in greater proportions at all levels from lecturer to professor (Cooray, et al., 2014).

The focus on research-related outputs at the institutional and structural levels not only inhibits opportunities for women to progress overall, but also impacts the progression of those women who work in traditionally female-dominated faculties (Pearce, Hitchcock & Keane, 2019). There is a higher proportion of women in these faculties (e.g., Arts, Creative Arts and Education), which correspond with overall lower expectations for research and publication output (Baker, 2009; Cooray, et al., 2014). While this alone does not preclude women from progressing within those faculties, universities (both nationally and internationally) continue to place value on research activities as hallmarks of performance, and so men in these fields are still more likely to progress more than their female colleagues (Baker, 2009; Whitehouse & Nesic, 2014).

The recognition and reward systems that are in place do not often take into account performance relative to opportunity or Research Opportunity and Performance Evidence (ROPE), and instead are structured to enable and acknowledge long hours, career paths that were uninterrupted by parental leave or career breaks, relocation as required and visibility—both in publications and physically at the office (White, et al., 2011; Harford J. , 2018). In addition, reward systems can be subject to gender bias. Bailey et al. (2016) investigated the gendered outcomes of both market and performance loadings (bonuses) in a large number of academic institutions. They found that discretionary loadings are particularly susceptible to gender influences. This susceptibility is considered a consequence of the concept of ‘regulation distance’, that is, discretionary payments lack the transparency and regulatory oversight of employment legislation such as the *Fair Work Act*, and the ‘meritocracy paradox’, that systems that appear to reward skills and effort may involve processes that entrench discrimination (Ruberly, 1995; Bailey et al., 2016).

As a direct result of men in influential positions, the university organisational hierarchy becomes an intimidating space for women, both in Australia and globally (Silver, 2019; Eslen-Ziya & Yildirim, 2021). Eslen-Ziya and Yildirim’s survey (2021) suggests that even the *perception* of a strong male hierarchy in the university sector is associated with perceptions of gendered-challenges by women. As a result of this hierarchy, female academics receive fewer rewards, have difficulty obtaining a ‘reputational status’ and are promoted at a slower pace (Eslen-Ziya & Yildirim, 2021).

In Cooray, et al.’s 2014 study, interviewees *felt* that a larger proportion of male academics applied for promotion compared to their female counterparts. Interviewees also believed that males were higher risk-takers in that they applied for promotion even if they were not certain of gaining it, which aligns with broader research outside the scope of this literature review (Cooray, et al., 2014). On the contrary, female academics applied for promotion only when they were fairly certain they would be successful, often placing them years behind their male colleagues (Cooray, et al., 2014).

**A further barrier to perceived higher performance and progression for women is care, often referred to as the ‘care penalty’.**



*“The challenge of mothering while pursuing an academic career is one of the most significant obstacles to women’s success in the academy.”*

Gilbert, E., Denson, N., Weidemann G.2020, *Negotiating Mothering and Academic Work: A Mixed Methods Intersectional Feminist Study*, unpublished manuscript, School of Psychology, Western Sydney University, Australia

Women who have children are systematically penalised in academia. In a study by Whitehouse and Nestic (Gender and career progression in academia: assessing equity and diversity policy directions in Australian universities, 2014), interviews with both female and male senior and executive leaders revealed that the commitment to family responsibilities, either real or perceived, is the main barrier to women’s career advancement in academia.

Further confirming this is a 2020 study of the everyday experiences and career opportunities of mothers across Australian universities, which highlighted experiences of being micromanaged, passed over for opportunities, excluded from meetings they would have otherwise been included in and being positioned as inconsiderate or expecting special treatment after becoming mothers (Gilbert, et al., 2020). Huppertz, et al. (2019) notes that women who have children often have less academic capital than their male colleagues, which means they must work harder and ‘give up’ leave entitlements to keep their career progression on par with men. Notably, the loss of academic capital is not often offset by the equal opportunity policies that may be in place (Huppertz, et al., 2019).

According to the literature, institutional supports put in place to improve gender equity and equal opportunity are often poorly applied and women often feel guilty for accessing policies designed to improve work-life balance (Cooray et al., 2014; Nash & Churchill, 2020). Further, the overreliance on ‘leave’ as a solution to an individual’s workplace pressures and care responsibilities, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, creates a temporary solution despite care permanently disrupting ‘work time’ and career pathways (Nash & Churchill, 2020).

## Exclusion of women from networks and professional development opportunities

*“Young women often need somebody, it could be male or female, to say to them ‘you have the ability to go further’ and it [can be] really transformative.”*

Harford, J 2018, ‘The perspectives of women professors on the professoriate: a missing piece in the narrative on gender equality in the university’, *Education Sciences*, vol. 8, no. 50, p. 11

Women in the university sector are routinely overlooked for networking and professional development opportunities, such as mentoring or sponsorship. Senior academics are often unable or unwilling to make time to take part in formal or informal mentoring or sponsorship programs, or introduce junior academics to their networks unless there is a clear benefit to their own career (Oishi, 2017).

Where potential mentors or sponsors are available, the literature suggests that many female academics are reluctant to enter into formal mentoring relationships because they are unable to see themselves in their mentor/sponsor or, in the cases where male leaders are available, are concerned about implicit gender biases, do not see the individual as a good leader or are cognisant of the possibility of sexual harassment (Gilbert, et al., 2020). Additionally, male mentors and sponsors often have a greater tendency to position women as the 'problem' and to 'fix' them by encouraging their female mentee/sponsee to adapt to male practices and behaviours, rather than address inequitable policies and structures (Harris, et al., 2013).

Networks, both formal and informal, provide key resources for career development and social support that are critical to fostering career progression and ambition (Oishi, 2017). Networks can serve as important channels for mentoring, information, decision making on appointments and research collaborations. Exclusion, therefore, can undermine women's career advancement, particularly in male dominated faculties (Eikhof, 2016).

Participation in networking activities usually occurs outside standard working hours and is therefore contingent on geographical and temporal flexibility, which women constrained by caring responsibilities often do not possess (Eikhof, 2016). Women's limited access to, and in some cases exclusion from, informal networks for professional socialisation also damages their career progression (Oishi, 2017). Exclusion can also result in their disadvantage in appointment processes that are not transparent or open as they are often considered as 'unknown' in comparison to their male counterparts who have been able to participate in academic networks (Harris, et al., 2013).

## (In)flexible working arrangements

*“The feminisation of the Australian higher education sector means that there is a growing institutional recognition of the need for supports and strategies to advance institutional gender equality.”*

Nash, M & Churchill, B. 2020 'Caring during COVID-19: A gendered analysis of Australian universities responses to managing remote working and caring responsibilities', *Gender, Work & Organisation*, vol. 27, no. 5, pp. 833-846

While supports such as parental leave and flexible working arrangements are appreciated by working parents, accessing them in practice is more complex (Gilbert, et al., 2020). Further, there is evidence that formalised institutional support can reaffirm gendered inequalities, such as high workloads that directly result from biased workload distribution, blurring of boundaries between work and home and assumptions that women utilising flexible work opportunities will under-perform (Cannizzo & Osbaldiston, 2016; Gilbert, et al., 2020).

The vocational nature of academia also creates self-imposed expectations on research output, as individuals are not able to simply 'switch off' when they stop work for the day and passion further blurs the boundaries between work and personal life (Currie & Eveline, 2010). The continuing adoption of e-technology means that work can be conducted anywhere and anytime, resulting in the disappearance of boundaries that once separated work from other spheres (Currie & Eveline, 2010). As the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated and changed ways of working, staff who are working from home in the university sector consistently report taking on too much work, which can be hard to manage when their workplace does not set limits on how much work can be completed by the employees (Currie & Eveline, 2010; Peetz et al, 2022).

Indeed, as outlined above, recognition and promotions are often awarded to those who are working more than the standard work week hours (Currie & Eveline, 2010). Research conducted by the University of South Australia Business School found that work-life balance practices, both self-driven and established by the institution, have a positive effect on the proportion of women in management positions, but the effect is not visible until eight years later (Kalysh, et al., 2016). Prior to this outcome, workers are better able to create a boundary between their work and non-work lives by drawing on practices implemented and/or supported by their institution (Currie & Eveline, 2010; Kalysh, et al., 2016).

In many cases, accessing flexible working arrangements is highly dependent on one's manager and the faculty culture, and many women are hesitant to request flexible working arrangements due to a fear of reduced opportunities, promotions and job security (Smyth, et al., 2021). Cultures of inflexibility are particularly prominent in male-dominated disciplines, where managerial norms are most entrenched (Smyth, et al., 2021; Baker, 2009; Cooray, et al., 2014). Further, while junior staff in lower skilled and more precarious roles (e.g., casual positions) are often more likely to require flexible working arrangements, in practice the supports are often more accessible to senior staff (Smyth, et al., 2021).

## Casualisation of the university workforce

There is a consistent rhetoric of employee 'choice' in electing to undertake casual or contract work and to remain in these roles which does not reflect the reality of many individuals working in the university sector (Cannizzo & Osbaldiston, 2016). In fact, many individuals, disproportionately women, employed as casual or on a contract basis have done so in lieu of more secure, stable work elsewhere, in anticipation of eventually being offered a permanent position (Cannizzo & Osbaldiston, 2016; Strachan, et al., 2016). This has resulted in a feminised casual labour force in the university sector, which is consistently under-employing female staff.

One estimate is that 80 per cent of undergraduate courses at Australian universities are taught by casually employed academics, with a small amount (approximately 10 per cent) remaining as casual employees for more than 10 years (Cannizzo & Osbaldiston, 2016; Nash & Churchill, 2020). These employees typically do not have paid leave entitlements and are subsequently unprotected should they need to balance caring responsibilities with their paid work. A high proportion of the casual workforce in the university sector are women (Cannizzo & Osbaldiston, 2016).

## Sexual harassment at universities

Sexual harassment is prevalent within academia, particularly within STEM disciplines (Greider, et al., 2019; Medeiros, 2021) and is more likely to occur in male-dominated organisations and divisions. Strachan, et al. (2016) noted in their survey that one-quarter of staff respondents had experience harassment or bullying in the workplace, with 35 per cent of female academics and 33 per cent of female professional staff reporting harassment compared to 23 per cent and 27 per cent for male staff, respectively (Strachan, et al., 2016). The gender imbalance in university leadership and the hierarchal power structure of university institutions (Medeiros, 2021; O'Connor, 2020) means sexual harassment is most likely to be perpetrated by a senior male university employee, regardless of research or administrative role, towards younger, less senior females, including graduate and undergraduate students (Tenbrunsel, et al., 2019).

Greater levels of harassment for female academics are reported by those who work in regional universities (48 per cent) over non-regional regional universities (35 per cent) (Strachan, et al.,

2016). Additionally, harassment was recorded in greater instances where workplace culture was perceived as discriminatory, and among academic women, the attitude towards staff with family responsibilities was an issue (Strachan, et al., 2016).

A proposed solution is to treat sexual harassment in the same fashion as academic misconduct. This would mean that harassment could be reported, investigated and addressed through similar mechanisms that are already commonplace, and the implications of which are widely known in the university sector. To facilitate this, it is useful to create institutions which can enforce punishments, create an anonymous whistle-blower system and keep records which could be disclosed to funding agencies and potential employers (Greider, et al., 2019). The prevalence of sexual harassment in an academic workplace can be linked to the existence of a gendered hierarchy.

## Leading gender-inclusive practice in universities

Gender-inclusive initiatives are primarily driven by leaders acknowledging that their institutions operate in performance environments that are not conducive to the success of women at work. Leading practices to address this imbalance focus on breaking down patriarchal and managerial structures and creating a new system that enables women to succeed in their chosen field. Within the scholarly literature, while there is a considerable amount of research on the drivers of gender inequalities (as outlined in the previous section) there is less information available on leading gender-inclusive practice. Some areas of leading practice in Australian universities are detailed below.

### Redistribution of work

The redistribution of academic housework is identified as a key initiative to creating the space for women to undertake research activities, providing the opportunity for women to invest their time in similar ways as their male colleagues (Cannizzo & Osbaldiston, 2016; Gilbert, Denson, & Weidmann, 2020). As part of this redistribution of the overall workload allocation for university staff, including professional staff, it is important to build in greater transparency and equity requirements, ensuring equitable expectations of outcomes and greater recognition of administration and pastoral care-work that is disproportionately undertaken by women and casualised staff (Cannizzo & Osbaldiston, 2016; Gilbert, et al., 2020).

Additionally, the conscious implementation and communication of expectations, such as minimum teaching hours, as equitable across the university institution has been suggested as an important element to mitigate gendered ideas on work type and load (Cannizzo & Osbaldiston, 2016).

### Policies and Supports

As the business case for gender equity is strengthened in the university sector and more women make their way into influential positions, there is growing recognition for supports and strategies that advance institutional gender equity. Nash and Churchill noted in their 2020 paper that 83 per cent of all higher education employers have a gender equality policy or strategy, compared to 75 per cent of all Australian industries; and 90 per cent of all Australian higher education

employers offer flexible working arrangements compared with 72 per cent of all Australian industries (Nash & Churchill, 2020). The challenge that many universities are facing is to ensure that their policies and supports are further enabled by other gender-inclusive practices, to mitigate an overreliance on them as mechanisms to achieve gender equity.

However, leading practice in ensuring that these gender equity policies and supports are enablers of women at work, rather than tokenistic, is to enable easy access and communication. Barriers to effectively utilising the supports that universities have established, including onerous administrative processes, are often present because the supports and policies are grounded within managerial and patriarchal institutions (Gilbert, et al., 2020). Strategies, such as paid parental leave or flexible working arrangements, should be clearly communicated to staff and easily available for reference, and the process for accessing them should not be time consuming, complicated or unnecessarily bureaucratic (Gilbert, et al., 2020; Carlson, et al., 2021).

Institutional interventions that are leading practice in improve experiences and outcomes for women in the university sector include paid parental leave, equitable recruitment and promotion policies and processes, and family-friendly work events (Cardel, et al., 2020).

## Mentoring and sponsorship

Australian research suggests that mentoring has a significant role in supporting the progression of female academics, particularly in providing opportunities and distilling information to more junior staff (Rainnie, et al., 2013). One of the advantages of having strong mentorship is that it provides fellow female academics with transparency and support to navigate the promotion processes (Rainnie, et al., 2013). Mentoring and sponsorship provide opportunities to develop skills, confidence and connections, which are considered critical to enabling women to succeed in their career (Dashper, 2019). Although mentoring and sponsorship are similar mechanisms to support women in the workforce, the different dynamics in each relationship create diverse opportunities for women to leverage in their professional life (Ang, 2018).

Despite the positive effect of mentorship on women's career progression, a major hurdle for women to overcome in the first instance is the unavailability of appropriate mentorship, given the lower proportion of women in leadership and influential positions in the sector. In particular, of those individuals who are potential mentors, there is a lack of diverse representation, which can limit the extent to which women in the university sector relate to or model themselves after, especially 'when they are single and childless' (Sattari & Sandefur, 2018; Baker, 2009).

This barrier notwithstanding, mentoring is an important facilitator of advancement, as it can provide many opportunities, including but not limited to, advice and encouragement to stay in the field and promotion opportunities through recommendation, advice and networking events (Thompson-Burdine, et al., 2019). A consistent theme for the benefits of mentoring is the confidence the mentor-mentee relationship offers the mentee in undertaking self-promotional activities to progress, which is often associated with male norms (Harford J., 2020; Harford J., 2018).

The nature of the relationship between the mentor and mentee is critical to achieving the goals of the mentee, particularly personality fit and similar life experiences, which are key to creating a relationship with empathetic guidance and respect. The importance of having an influential sponsor in a promotional and/or recruitment context is equally critical to ensure a favourable outcome during 'closed door' discussions (O'Connor, et al., 2020). Where the mentor and sponsor

relationships were with individuals in influential positions, evaluators took this into account when awarding promotions (O'Connor, et al., 2020).

## Leading gender-inclusive practice in knowledge industries

Knowledge industries are those which primarily rely on knowledge and technology to generate revenue (Nelson, 1963). Within this category are industries such as education, consulting, finance, law, information technology and health services. Like the university sector, knowledge industries have fewer women than men in leadership positions and experience lower retention of women at all levels (Chief Executive Women, 2021; Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2022). Indeed, the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) reported only 1 in 4 organisations have a gender-balanced<sup>1</sup> leadership team in 2020-21 (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2022).

National and international research details the types of and extent to which there are barriers that impact the support and progress of women at work (Huang, et al., 2018; Good, et al., 2015). It confirms that the barriers facing women in knowledge industries are similar to those facing women in the university sector.

This section acknowledges these realities and presents leading practice for gender-inclusivity in knowledge industries, as these industries offer new and innovative practices that could be transferred into the university sector. O'Connor, et al. (2020) noted that there are similarities between the academy and other knowledge sectors when it comes to the challenges and facilitators of women's access to senior positions and enacting change in a neo-liberal organisation. Notably, barriers such as masculine work culture (e.g. male networks and male sponsorship), stereotypes, gendered allocation of care, and masculine work patterns and expectations were identified in private and public sectors, mirroring similar barriers found in the university sector (O'Connor, et al., 2020). The gender-inclusive practices outlined in this section are supported through O'Connor, et al.'s (2020) findings whereby mentoring, sponsorship, networking, and role modelling are key enablers of women's progression and promotion.

Successful organisations use high quality data to understand the drivers of inequitable practices and targeted actions across the employee lifecycle. Efforts are almost always underpinned by a strong commitment from leaders who embed inclusive practice into the systems and values of their organisations and accompanied by an openness to experimentation and new ideas.

### IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women (Mallick, 2021; AIFS, 2020). In recognition of this fact, companies have increasingly embracing new programs to support women to return to the workplace, committing to being inclusive of individuals with resume gaps.

Returnship programs have been growing in popularity and provide an opportunity for organisations to tap into individuals with skills and maturity following a period out of the

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<sup>1</sup> WGEA classifies this as 40-60% females in leadership roles.

workforce (Mallick, 2021). Hubspot's Returner Program is a 20-week program offered twice a year, that comes with skills, training, support, and the potential for a full-time job (Mallick, 2021).

In Australia, Macquarie Group offers eligible candidates access to supports and training during the first 20 weeks of employment (Macquarie, 2022). The organisation offers a variety of flexible work arrangements with participant supports including one-on-one coaching for the first 20 weeks of employment, ongoing training through Macquarie's Learning and Development Program, a buddy from within the allocated business area, exposure to senior managers and support from the Family and Carers Employee Network (Macquarie, 2022).

### **Strengthening leadership organisation-wide**

Leaders need to demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting initiatives that contribute to improved gender diversity and inclusion outcomes (Good, et al., 2015; The Behavioural Insights Team, 2021). It is important to consider that while organisations can establish the policy basis for improving gender diversity and inclusion outcomes, additional action is needed from leaders to drive meaningful and sustained cultural change (Good, et al., 2015). Without this leadership, improved outcomes are unlikely (International Labour Office, Bureau for Employers' Activities, 2017; USAID, 2021; KPMG Australia, 2016). Similarly, sustained change is challenged where the leadership of a few 'committed individuals' is relied upon in the absence of institutionalised policies and procedures (Crawford & Kilby, 2011).

Inclusive leadership considers team members' differences and creates a culture of belonging for their employees (Ashikali, et al., 2020). As well as outwardly creating an inclusive culture, it is important for leaders to understand the benefits of fully embracing diversity and to build this into all that they do, from their everyday interactions to business strategy and decision-making. Benefits to inclusive leaders include better, more informed decision-making, greater communication with the organisation from 'the top', increased workplace flexibility and greater employee engagement (Ashikali, et al., 2020; McKinsey & Company, 2021).

Addressing structural sexism requires a concerted and sustained effort by leaders who help to embed equity and inclusion principles into the deepest levels of an organisation's values and culture. Australian Property Group, Mirvac has been ranked number one in the world for Equileap's Global Report on Gender Equality for 2022, leading a global field of 4,000 companies across 19 criteria (Mircvac, 2022). CEO and Managing Director, Susan Lloyd Hurwitz, has been hailed as a driving force behind this success, demonstrating personal leadership and commitment to lead the way in achieving gender diversity in her own organisation and across the property industry. Lloyd Hurwitz has made DEI a core ingredient in the design and execution of an organisation's business strategy and a key to its pursuit of sustainable and competitive advantage (Mircvac, 2022). Diversity and equity, they note, means putting people first, treating them with respect, supporting flexibility and enabling work life balance. Only with these factors in place, can Mirvac achieve its purpose of re-imaging urban life (Mircvac, 2022).

When organisations are led by people who truly embrace DEI with purpose and passion, people from disadvantaged groups have increased career opportunities and ability to thrive in a culture where they have a sense of belonging and feel engaged and validated for who they are (Anand, 2022).

## Strengthening accountability mechanisms

Research conducted by the United Kingdom's Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) has highlighted the importance of creating strong mechanisms to ensure that leaders are accountable for the diversity and inclusion outcomes in their teams (The Behavioural Insights Team, 2021).

As part of its broader commitment to DEI, Mirvac staff report regularly against a range of diversity and inclusion targets which include including gender equitable recruitment practices; ensuring a diverse pipeline of talent and successors; and monitoring promotion, recruitment, and turnover data for any sign of bias (Mircvac, 2022). Geoscience Australia has stipulated that leader's performance and progress will be assessed based on their active contribution to enhancing the organisations inclusion goals, building this into leader's performance agreements to embed into the fundamentals of a leader's role.

The Australian Public Service includes questions about diversity and inclusion into its annual employee engagement survey, prompting employees to reflect on opportunities to work on assignments that are important to their careers, the value placed on diverse opinions and perceptions of belonging and inclusion. With this data, each team has access to data which may be benchmarked across their organisation and the APS more broadly and are encouraged to facilitate a dialogue with their team to initiate improvement.

## Diversity Leads and Taskforces

Diversity leads and taskforces also play an important role in holding organisations accountable for inclusion efforts and outcomes. Having a diversity lead is also associated with better representation of women and minority groups in organisations (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). To ensure its diversity and inclusion strategy was meeting the needs of its people and focusing efforts at the issues of highest importance, Australian Property Development company, Stockland created a series of employee development groups (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2021 a).

The Parents and Carers Employee Advocacy Group was established in 2016. Meeting every month, the working group discussed ideas to maintain and improve the experience of carers (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2021 a). Such as a change in the definition of 'Carer' to include elder care in addition to parents caring for children (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2021 a). The working group was a catalyst for changes to parental leave benefits, including:

- Changes to long service leave ensuring individuals who took time out of the workforce were eligible for pro-rata long service leave on their 10-year anniversary
- Managers now have discretion to allow primary carers leave within 18 months of birth or adoption to encourage more males / secondary carers to take primary carers' leave
- A new parental leave benefit, parental Flex Options gives employers an option of one of three benefits when taking primary carers' leave:
  - Two additional weeks of paid parental leave
  - The employee's regular rate of superannuation paid during unpaid parental leave for a maximum of 36 weeks
  - A lump sum of AUD\$3,000 (gross amount) on return from parental leave (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2021 a).

To get the maximum benefit of diversity leads and taskforces, they should be able to review hiring, progression and talent management decisions and ask for justifications for them (The



Behavioural Insights Team, 2021). When people know their decisions may be reviewed by a senior manager or taskforce, they pay closer attention to the information they are basing their decisions on and make less biased decisions (The Behavioural Insights Team, 2021).

## Data driven approaches

Focused and data driven efforts to improve diversity and inclusion is critical when confronting problems resulting from systemic and unconscious bias (Bonet, 2016). Data helps organisations move beyond tick box exercises and allows for identification and honest appraisal of areas where they fall short (Bonet, 2016).

People analytics (the application of scientific and statistical methods to behavioural data) is improving people decisions and informing new designs to address gender inequality. Successful for profit and not for profit organisations such as Credit Suisse, Goldman Sachs, LinkedIn and Microsoft increasingly run their HR departments like they run their finance and marketing departments, replacing intuition, informal networks and traditional rules of thumb with quantifiable data and rigorous analysis (Bonet, 2016).

Technology giant, Google has been at the forefront of using large data to improve its people practices (Bonet, 2016). The 'People Operations' team (formerly HR) collects large amounts of personnel data and uses statistical insights from employee data to identify and optimise its procedures (Bonet, 2016). In 2015, the organisation used its data to unearth a 'parent trap' noting that young mothers more likely than the average Google employee to leave the organisation (Bonet, 2016). Insights prompted Google to introduce a new maternity and paternity leave plan, immediately increasing retention of its female staff (Bonet, 2016).

### Setting specific and ambitious goals

Successful organisations have ambitious, but realisable goals and targets which have been adapted to local dynamics (The Behavioural Insights Team, 2021). Targets are most successful when they are ambitious and clear, time bound and public, a practice which increases the likelihood that goals will be achieved (The Behavioural Insights Team, 2021).

In 2020, management consulting firm Accenture developed a methodology to ensure that equality remains a personal priority in its organisation and keep the focus on human beings, rather than tallies on a spreadsheet (Shook, 2021). As a starting point, Accenture embraced an 'analyse locally' approach, analysing local census and population data to develop goals and strategies which reflected the communities where their staff worked and lived (Shook, 2021). Had the organisation not conducted this analysis, its head of HR notes that its goals would have been seven points lower than those with which they ultimately landed (Shook, 2021).

Analysis also led the organisation to significantly alter its targets and strategies. To access a broader talent pool with increased representation, Accenture removed its bachelor's degree requirement in 48% of its roles and committed to growing its office locations in more diverse urban areas (Shook, 2021).

To ensure rigor and responsibility, Accenture weighted their goals against external benchmarks and asked its legal counsel and board members to endorse their approach (Shook, 2021). Goals and targets were then tested against the company's existing racial/ ethnic mix, attrition levels and recruiting trajectory to ensure a reasonable path to reaching them (Shook, 2021).

## Values and opportunities

Organisations still tend to value industrial metrics of success, including output, productivity, and male versions of success, which permeate through and can be exacerbated by the performance process. In 2013, Microsoft reshaped its performance rating and review process after feedback from staff that it was driving the wrong behaviours and outcomes, leading to unproductive internal competition. They replaced the system to focus on impact, including impact on others, contribution to their own success, their team the business and the customer (Frost & Kalman, 2017).

Recognising that male faculty members were spending less time on service activities and teaching, but more time on research, the Harvard Kennedy School (the School) introduced measures to compensate as many contributions to the School as possible (Bonet, 2016). The School adopted a 'point system' to measure faculty workload. A full-time faculty member workload is 100 points, with a margin of error of 10 per cent plus or minus. If faculty members contribute substantially more, the school compensates them more (Bonet, 2016). If a faculty member falls significantly short of workload expectations, explanations or adjustments in time and compensation is required (Bonet, 2016). Points are allocated for teaching and administrative tasks and faculty have substantial flexibility in how they meet their obligations (Bonet, 2016). Some chose to teach more than the minimal requirement; others give more time and effort to service or organisational leadership opportunities (Bonet, 2016). The point system incentivises individuals to deliver public good that benefits everyone. The flexibility allows them to trade off public activities they are not good at for tasks they are better at, helping everyone (Bonet, 2016).

## Recruitment and promotion

Recruitment and promotion are key areas of policy reform to improve gender diversity and inclusion outcomes. These processes are identified as key sites for targeted effort by organisations to achieve gender parity in the workplace, with poor processes resulting in fewer women being hired or promoted (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2017; The Behavioural Insights Team, 2021). Often, established recruitment and promotion processes frame desired candidate attributes or concepts of success in male-oriented language (The Behavioural Insights Team, 2021). Organisations are overcoming this barrier by removing gendered language in job or promotion criteria, either through specific training for managers and recruitment roles or by leveraging technology which identifies words or phrases that are perceived as male-oriented (Huang et al., 2018; Foley, Cooper et al., 2019). Some organisations are going a step further with their performance measurement and anonymising performance assessment and determining promotion outcomes based on work product or questionnaires alone (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2017).

Knowledge industries are increasingly restructuring recruitment processes to mitigate conscious and unconscious bias that may prejudice certain candidates (KPMG, 2016). The scale of these process changes varies across organisations, although they are generally comprised of:

- Reframing concepts of 'merit' and broadening the scope of acceptable candidate profiles to disrupt uninterrogated views of who is considered a successful candidate (McKinsey & Company, Workplace Gender Equality Agency, Business Council of Australia, 2017; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013; The Behavioural Insights Team, 2021)

- Ensuring recruitment or interview panels are gender diverse (Women on Boards, 2013; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013)
- Offering flexible working by default in job advertisements (The Behavioural Insights Team, 2021)
- Offering interviews to women applicants in the first instance (McKinsey & Company, Workplace Gender Equality Agency, Business Council of Australia, 2017; Foley, et al., 2019).

## Creating and sustaining supportive and flexible working conditions

Coming out of the pandemic, a growing number of organisations have announced their plan to embrace 'hybrid' work' in response to shifting perceptions around where, when and how work is completed. Research out of America suggests that the proclamations about flexible work may be oversimplifying the challenges that come with making flexibility core to the organisation's strategy and operations (Kossek, et al., 2021).

There is a growing concern that arrangements adopted by employers will harm women and those with health or family care responsibilities. Unstructured approaches, which incorporate a blend of unique accommodation and boundaryless work will not effectively empower employees to accommodate job and non-work demands (Kossek, et al., 2021). Expectations about where and when one works may shift without warning, as work seeps into off-hours and employees struggle to live predictable non-work lives (Kossek, et al., 2021).

In 2020, Microsoft found that when a large team moved to remote work, employees worked an average of four more hours a week, sent more messages at non-standard hours and spent more time in meetings. Realising that this was unsustainable, leaders encouraged teams to develop guidelines to ensure that both work and non-work time (clear cut shifts, daily breaks and dedicated solo work hours) were put into place (Kossek, et al., 2021).

Organisations such as LifeWorks (formerly Morneau Shepell) are addressing this challenge by developing clear written frameworks with principles that guide decision making about and expectations for flexibility (Kossek, et al., 2021). The organisations flexible working policies are clear about expectations and communicated widely with messaging that the goal of flexible working is to achieve equality. Employees are asked to document their planned versus actual work hours to foster work routines and increase transparency about when they are working and when they are not. Finally, they use clear metrics to evaluate employees on the quality of their work, not the timing or quantity (Kossek, et al., 2021).

Many solutions to improve working conditions for women are well-known, such as paid parental leave, flexible working hours, designated spaces for breast feeding and, increasingly, paid domestic violence leave (International Labour Office, Bureau for Employers' Activities, 2017). These policies present organisations with opportunities to demonstrate their commitment to gender diversity and inclusion in the workplace and to more fully enable women to participate.

### **Paid parental leave and flexible working arrangements**

Knowledge industries are encouraging both primary and secondary carers to embrace paid parental leave and flexible working arrangements as these workplace conditions are updated to apply equally to all employees (Fagg, et al., 2015; Diversity Council of Australia, 2021;

Hegewisch, 2009). Offering paid secondary carer's leave is also increasing across knowledge industries, creating conditions to redistribute caring responsibilities more equally between men and women, reducing the caring obligations of women and enabling them to participate more fully in the workforce (Baird, et al., 2021; Emslie & Wood, 2021). WGEA notes that employers who are leading the way in paid parental leave are those who offer gender-neutral parental which can be taken by either parents with no qualifying period (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2022). Leaders in the field are offering up to 26 weeks paid parental leave (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2022).

The *Fair Work Act 2009* (s.65) legally entitles certain employees the right to request flexible working arrangements, however many organisations are implementing policies which introduce further options and entitlements to their employees (Fair Work Ombudsman, 2021).<sup>2</sup> Particularly as Australia moves beyond the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the availability and accessibility of flexible working is a key strategy emerging to not only support women with caring responsibilities, but also create work environments that foster supportive, outcomes-driven cultures and have moved beyond presenteeism (Fagg, et al., 2015).

Research indicates that many of the barriers women currently face when returning from parental leave and/or working flexibly are best overcome when men and leaders are also seen to engage in these arrangements (Artabane, et al., 2017; Diversity Council of Australia, 2019; Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2017; Hegewisch, 2009; The Behavioural Insights Team, 2021). As these behaviours are consistently role modelled in organisations and both genders access the range of entitlements, the expectations for performance and visibility adapt and women, particularly mothers, are more likely to be afforded the same opportunities as their male colleagues and are given the supports to take them.

### **Domestic violence leave**

Domestic violence is experienced overwhelmingly by women (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2021b). In recognition of this, paid domestic violence leave is increasingly considered leading practice across knowledge-based industries (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2021b). Without adequate support, those who are experiencing domestic violence may leave the workforce, jeopardising future employment or career progression opportunities (International Labour Organization, 2020). In 2022, ten days paid family and domestic violence leave for full-time, part-time and casual employees was introduced into the Australian National Employment Standards, effective from February 1 2023 and from August 1, 2023, for small businesses.. As outlined in the 2020-2021 Employer Census, 51 percent of employers offer some paid domestic violence leave compared with 12 percent in 2015-2016 (WGEA, 2022).

Paid parental leave for both parents, flexible working arrangements and paid domestic violence leave are examples of leading practice for improving gender inclusion in the workplace. However, as part of holistic approach to removing barriers faced by women, they need to be complemented by additional practices.

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<sup>2</sup> Permanent employees and specific casual employees that are also disabled, have certain caring responsibilities are aged 55 years or older, or are experiencing domestic and family violence, are legally entitled to request flexible working arrangements.

## Providing mentoring and sponsorship

Mentoring is a reciprocal and collaborative relationship between mentor and mentee, with shared responsibility and accountability for helping the mentee work towards their career and life goals. Mentors characteristically provide their mentees with emotional and social support to enable personal growth (Catalyst, 2011; International Labour Office, Bureau for Employers' Activities, 2017; Advance Higher Education, 2020; Ang, 2018). Sponsoring is different to mentoring. Unlike a mentor, sponsors leverage their own personal capital by creating opportunities for their sponsee to develop and progress through their own personal networks, job openings, and by advocating for them in the workplace (McKinsey & Company, Workplace Gender Equality Agency, Business Council of Australia, 2017; Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2014; International Labour Office, Bureau for Employers' Activities, 2017; Ang, 2018; Accenture, 2020). When successful, mentoring and sponsorship initiatives can establish cross-divisional relationships between leaders and entry-level employees (Accenture, 2020).

Defining roles, establishing expectations and stating intended outcomes of a mentoring or sponsorship program is an important aspect of ensuring that participants remain engaged and benefit from the process (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2014; USAID, 2021; Advance Higher Education, 2020). The expectations of participants might vary, for example, where an organisation establishes a peer mentoring group instead of a one-on-one relationship (Women's Leadership Institute, 2017). Stating intended outcomes and goals is also useful for measuring a program's success and ensuring that it is beneficial (Phillips-Jones, 2003). It allows the participants to shape the focus of mentoring or sponsorship sessions and ensure they are used productively.

The process for partnering participants is critical to ensure that participants receive the maximum benefit (Queensland Government, 2020; International Labour Office, Bureau for Employers' Activities, 2017; Planning Institute of Australia, 2018; USAID, 2021). Questionnaires can be used to ensure that prospective participants are appropriately partnered according to their values, professional experience, interests and what they want to get from the program (Planning Institute of Australia, 2018). Sponsorship programs can fail where sponsors feel forced to advocate for people they don't know or don't feel are ready for leadership opportunities (Ibarra, 2019).

Longitudinal research has questioned the efficacy of mentoring as a strategy for advancing women's careers (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2014; Catalyst, 2011; Women's Leadership Institute, 2017). Even with consistent mentoring, women often do not progress to senior leadership positions to the same extent as their male colleagues (Catalyst, 2011; Dashper, 2019; Ibarra, 2019). Conversely, with a sponsor, women are more likely to be advocated for during critical career discussions and receive greater recognition by decision makers and evaluators in promotion decisions (Catalyst, 2011). Receiving endorsement from a sponsor, as opposed to a mentor, for a promotion or important project not only validates a woman's candidacy and ability to perform to the group, it also has been shown to increase their confidence as an individual and increase their ability to undertake self-promotion activities that benefit their career (McKinsey & Company, Workplace Gender Equality Agency, Business Council of Australia, 2017; Ang, 2018).

To support women to access high stakes assignments which are pre-requisites for leadership roles, organisations are implementing formal sponsorship programs. KPMG Australia's pilot 'Bird Walton program' brings (KPMG, 2018) together 24 of KPMG's high potential women with 24

male partners as their sponsors to experience a 6-month experience involving interactive workshops, coursework, and one-on-one mentoring sessions (KPMG, 2018).

The pilot program was evaluated by Deakin University in partnership with the Cairnmillar Institute with participants surveyed pre-program, at the program's conclusion and 6 months following (KPMG, 2018). The evaluation found that because of the program, KPMG's high potential women were performing with increased confidence and more actively progressing their career goals (KPMG, 2018) The women participants reported being more comfortable and confident in their unique potential, were more able to push boundaries and were utilising new networks – often strengthened by their sponsors to raise their profiles and increase organisational impact (KPMG, 2018).

The Program also delivered substantial shifts for the male partners involved. In becoming a sponsor, many experienced significant personal growth in the way they think and act, with many understanding for the first time the legacy they create for others (KPMG, 2018).

### **Supporting women in leadership**

Organisations striving for gender equity in the workplace implement strategies to help them to address visible and invisible bias in systems, process and practices which prevent women from advancing in their careers. For example, it is common for organisations to have gender parity or close to it in entry-level roles, only to see the percentage of women employees decrease as they progress (Chilazi, et al., 2021). This drop is primarily driven by gender disparities in promotion rates, not gender difference in hiring and retention (Chilazi, et al., 2021).

To address this challenge, Unilever adopted a Gender Proportionality Principle (GPP) (Chilazi, Bohnet, & Hauser, 2021). The GPP stipulates that a given level in an organisation should aim to reflect the gender composition of the level immediately below it. This upward trajectory is accelerating as this process also means greater visibility for existing female talent and the internal promotion process uses data as a check and balance for promotion decisions (Chilazi, et al., 2021). The Gender Proportionality Principle has contributed to the organisation achieving its goal of gender parity in managerial roles ahead of schedule in early 2020 (Chilazi, et al., 2021).

## **Conclusion**

Gender representation and inclusivity at Australian universities requires sustained investment to change current institutional, structural and intra-university expectations, norms, and cultures that are currently limiting the opportunities and outcomes for women in the sector. Moreover, providing the supports for women in the workplace to appropriately balance individual and familial responsibilities in ways that work for the individual are key to creating a holistic, inclusive culture.

The drivers of gender inequality are well-known and well-researched, particularly in the context of experiences and outcomes for women in academic roles, but less so for those in professional roles in universities. Further research into the experiences and outcomes for women in professional roles will be beneficial to designing and implementing gender inclusive practices at universities that are comprehensive and truly inclusive. Additionally, as the university sector matures in the DEI space and implements more gender inclusive practices, research into the

outcomes achieved and uptake of various measures should be undertaken to affirm which practices are applicable, fit-for-purpose, and achieve gender equity.

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