

Work & Careers in Australian Universities: Executive Summary

Gender and Employment Equity: Strategies for Advancement in Australian Universities

Universities in Australia have undergone significant changes in the past decade and little is known about the impact of these changes on staff characteristics and experience, especially among professional and general staff. The Work and Careers in Australian Universities Survey was undertaken as part of the ARC Linkage Grant, Gender and Employment Equity: Strategies for Advancement in Australian Universities. The overall aim of the project is to advance understanding of existing gender inequalities in Australian universities which remain despite extensive gender equity policies.

The Work and Careers in Australian Universities Survey was administered to staff in 19 universities from August to December 2011. In total 21,994 employees participated in the study providing useable data, representing an overall response rate of 27%. Three survey instruments were used and response rates for each of the groups were: academic staff 35% (n=8393); professional/general staff 32% (n=10683); and somewhat lower for sessional teaching staff 12% (n=2918), due mostly to the difficulty in making contact with this part of the university workforce.

The Chief Investigators are Professor Glenda Strachan (Griffith University), Professor Gillian Whitehouse (University of Queensland), Professor David Peetz (Griffith University), Assoc. Professor Janis Bailey (Griffith University) & Dr Kaye Broadbent (Griffith University).

The Research Partners are Universities Australia Executive Women (UAEW), National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU), UniSuper.

More information on the project and the full report for the Work & Careers in Australian Universities: Report on Employee Survey can be obtained at the following website address

University workers: Who are they?

A majority of participants in the study are women (61%) and 39% men, with larger numbers of women among the professional workers (70% women and 30% men), sessional teaching staff (57% women and 43% men) and almost equal proportions of women and men among academics (51% women and 49% men). These figures are consistent with Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) statistic on university staff.

The university workforce is older than many other industry workforces. This is particularly the case among the academic staff (42% over 50 years), compared with 23% among sessional teaching staff. Among the professional/general staff 35% are aged over 50 years.

Although the majority of university workers are born in Australia (68% among professional/general staff, 60% among sessional teaching staff and 58% among academic staff) a greater proportion of academic staff are born outside of Australia (42%).

A significant proportion of university staff are employed on fixed-term contracts or casual hourly paid contracts. Almost half (44%) of the academic staff are on fixed-term contracts, as are 28% of professional/general staff. By definition, all sessional teaching staff are on casual contracts. In total numbers, this represents almost 10,000 respondents.

Work and Family

Almost half the university employees have caring responsibilities, higher among academics (49%) and professional staff (43%) than among sessional staff (28%) who are younger. These responsibilities include caring for older adults (14% among professional and academic staff, 8% among sessional staff). Women are more likely than men to be the main person responsible for caring for dependent children. This difference is greater among sessional teaching staff (63% of women, 10% of men), than professional/general staff (49% of women, 5% of men) or academic staff (46% of women, 4% of men).

For both general and academic staff, the proportion of women who have had to work part-time because of caring responsibilities is five to six times the proportion of men (general staff: 18% of women compared to 3% of men; academic staff: 20% of women compared to 4% of men). Also, the proportion of women stating that they missed opportunities to apply for career advancement due to caring responsibilities is double the proportion of men (general staff: 12% of women compared to 6% of men; academic staff: 13% of women compared to 7% of men).

Key Findings for Professional/General Staff

An ongoing pattern of gender segregation was observed among professional/general staff. Greater proportions of women than men are at HEW 4 and HEW 5 levels (36 % of women and 20% of men), with lower proportions for HEW 8 and above (23 % of women compared to 37% of men). Women are present in higher concentrations in faculties and schools doing administrative and clerical work whereas men are in greater numbers within information services and technology and facilities management.

Men are more likely than women to occupy management positions (23% of men and 16% of women) and are more likely to supervise staff and manage a budget. Just over one third of the men (37%) earn more than \$78,000 per annum compared with one-fifth (19%) of the women. Over four-fifths of staff have a degree, with 37% having a Bachelor degree, 42% having a post-graduate qualification and 5% a PhD.

Overall, professional/general staff are satisfied with their jobs and their balance between work and home life. The majority of staff (80%) report there is a less than 50% chance they will leave their job voluntarily. Most want to remain within the sector, only 15% of staff (equal proportions of men and women) report they would like to work outside the university sector.

However, just over a third report that their job classification was lower than it should be. Less than half of the professional/general staff had applied for promotion in the last five years. Among those who had applied, the majority are successful on at least one occasion that they make an application for promotion. While more than

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half (59%) reported receiving help from supervisors in advancing their careers, assistance from senior staff and staff at their level was less than this. Although about one half of respondents felt that help received from supervisors in applying for promotion, guidance in performance reviews, and level of support to gain qualifications or attend training had been helpful to advance their career, there was about a proportion of respondents (15-23%) who had not received help in career development. Only 13% had been involved in a formal mentoring scheme and among these people one quarter found that this had been of little benefit. Together these findings suggest that attention is needed in the programs for professional development.

In terms of career prospects, there are distinct differences between what professional/general staff would like to do in the next 5 years and what they expect they will be doing. Over half (54%) would ideally like to be in a higher position at their current university, with slight differences among men and women in those who want a higher managerial position (30% of men, 24% of women) and a higher level non-managerial position (24% of men, 30% of women). However, only one third are confident that they will achieve this (36% of women and 32% of men).

Key Findings for Academic Staff

A pattern of gender segregation exists for academic staff. Women are concentrated in greater numbers in Medicine and Health (34%), Humanities, Arts & Social Science (22%), Science (23%). In contrast, men are in Science (46%), Medicine and Health (18%), Humanities, Arts & Social Science (18%). The proportion of women and men who are at Level C (Senior Lecturer) is the same, but at professorial levels men predominate: At Level D (Associate Professor), 14% of men compared to 9% of women; at Level E (Professor) 15% of men compared to 7% of women. One-fifth of women (21%) earn over \$104,000 per annum compared with almost two-fifths (38%) of men.

Four-fifths of staff have a PhD. Half the academic staff describe their roles as teaching and research (55%), 11% are teaching focused and 34% are research focused. Overall 26% of respondents held a research position such as a research fellow or post-doctoral fellowship. Among the academic sample terms of employment were only marginally more likely to be continuing (56%) with the remainder (44%) holding fixed-term contracts.

The majority of academic staff work full-time (76% of women and 91 % of men), and over half report working more than 50 hours per week. Two-fifths of the part-time workers report that they work over 30 hours per week.

Almost half (49%) of academics feel that research expectations upon them are unrealistic and one third that teaching expectations are unrealistic. Academics report spending more time on service and administration than their contract states and less time on research that is expected of them. About half of the respondents felt that expectations for research outputs have gone up in the last two years. Almost two thirds want to spend less time on administration and service activities than they do, and a similar proportion want to spend more time on research.

In the past 5 years, two-fifths of academic staff had applied for promotion or for a higher level through a competitive selection process. Of these staff, over three-quarters had been successful on at least one occasion.

Overall three-fifths of academics report that within the last five years they have received some to a lot of help from their supervisors and other academics at their university to advance their career. Yet less than one half to about one-third report that the level of support from supervisors, guidance in performance reviews, opportunities for leadership development and access to internal research funding have been helpful in career advancement. Although two-thirds of academics involved in a formal mentoring program had found it was beneficial in some way, only one quarter of the academic sample had been involved in a formal mentoring scheme in the last 5 years. Together these findings warrant further investigation into the professional development requirements needed for this group of university workers.

Almost three-quarters (69%) of academic staff are satisfied with their jobs overall and only 8% report a greater than 80% chance they will leave their job voluntarily.

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Key Findings for Sessional Teaching Staff

There is less discipline concentration among sessional teaching staff than among continuing and fixed-term academics. While female sessional staff are fewer in numbers in Science relative to men (27 % of women and 44 % of men) they are dispersed across Humanities, Arts & Social Science (32%), Science (27%), and Medicine and Health (27%). In contrast, men are primarily in Science (44%), Humanities, Arts & Social Science (23%) and Law & Business (17%). Among sessional teaching staff 17% have a PhD and half of the respondents are currently studying to obtain a postgraduate qualification.

In 2011 half of the sessional staff had obtained between 1 and 24 weeks of work. Approximately two-fifths (42%) had a current contract of 12 weeks or less. One-fifth of respondents worked at more than one institution. Half had gained work directly through a contact at a university, and only 8% had responded to an advertisement. The majority of these workers have been employed for less than 5 years with their current employer, including over one third (38%) who had been employed for less than 1 year. For those who had obtained a PhD (n= 459) 40% had been in sessional contract work for between 3 and 10 years.

While almost two thirds (62%) of the sessional staff undertake their preparation at home, 76% reported they had access to a workspace, computer and phone where they were teaching. However, only 57% reported having suitable space for student consultation. One third had received no induction or professional development, and attendance at staff meetings, committee meetings and meetings about the course they were teaching were most likely to be unpaid. Less than half (41%) obtained financial support to carry out their research.

One half of respondents (54%) report that casual work was the only work they could obtain. Just over one third (37%) obtained their main income from sessional employment, while a further one third had a university scholarship as their main source of income. Slightly more than one quarter (28%) felt they had only a 5-50% chance of more work in 2012.

Three-quarters of respondents agreed that casual work suits their circumstance, although when asked about the future only 11% wanted to remain as sessional academics. Over half (54%) would like a continuing academic position, although less than one third expect that they will be able to obtain this in the future.

Discrimination and Harassment

Between 11% and 14% of university workers said that within the current organisation the attitude towards people of their age had been problem for them. A very small group (3% to 4%) reported that there was a problem related to attitudes to people of their ethnic background. More women than men reported problems with attitudes towards people with family responsibilities. Academic women reported the greatest incidence of problems towards people of my gender (19%) and people with family responsibilities' (18%) compared with 4% and 9% for academic men.

Reports of harassment in the workplace in the past 5 years were most common among professional and academic staff, with almost one third (31%) of professional staff and (29%) of academic staff reporting such events. Fewer reports were recorded among sessional teaching staff (13%). Among those who had experienced incidents about two-fifths had considered taking a formal case and reported that the incident had an adverse impact on their career.

Retirement

The main source of income in retirement for academic and professional/general staff is Unisuper (60% academic staff and 52% professional/general staff), compared to 18% of sessional staff. As they move towards retirement, many university staff would like to change the extent or nature of their work. Among the professional/general staff, most would like to continue working as they currently do (67%), or reduce the number of days worked in the week (53%). In contrast two-fifths of academic staff would like to reduce the days they work in a week (43%) and about a quarter (26%) would like to change the type or mix of work they were currently doing. Among sessional staff, the greatest proportion would like to continue working (37%), with another 27% opting for reduced work days in the week. Across all groups of university workers the most common reason for not being able to work in the preferred way as they move to retirement was that they would not be able to afford to do this.

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