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Development and Evaluation of a combined <u>E</u>xecutive and <u>P</u>eer mentoring <u>I</u>ntervention to support <u>C</u>areer Development for women at Western – the EPIC pilot program

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Executive Summary

This project set out to design and implement a new career progression mentoring program for women currently in Level A, B and C positions. Our project had 2 stages to achieve this: development and evaluation of an innovative mentoring program including peer alliances (support from colleagues of the same academic level), peer mentoring (support from colleagues who are an academic level above) and executive level mentoring for Level B and C women within the Health and Wellbeing cluster; and development and delivery of a longitudinal University wide survey to evaluate support mechanisms and barriers to career development, which could inform the areas of support that will be important to target within a mentoring program and in other future strategies. The EPIC-Collaboration mentoring program was launched across the Health and Wellbeing cluster in February 2022, with 25 women within 6 groups (6 executive and 7 peer mentors) participating in the program. A midway workshop took place in August and final workshop in November. A preliminary longitudinal survey was successfully administered in November 2021, receiving 42 responses from women in fixed term or permanent academic roles Health and Wellbeing cluster, with 15 completing the follow up survey in November/December 2022. The preliminary feedback from women was positive. Survey responses indicated work stress had become more manageable with increased knowledge around promotions, and more perceived support for career development. Qualitative data overall indicated the program was well received and had benefits to participants, with those who took part feeling more supported for promotion and in general in their roles.

Recommendations and Next Steps

→ The revised (Appendix 3) EPIC longitudinal survey to explore support mechanisms and barriers to career development should be administered university-wide, annually, to identify changes in outcomes over time and to pinpoint important areas for targeting support for academics in future. Further development of the survey may be involved in order to broaden the target audience and scope.

→ Expand the EPIC survey to include questions exploring well-being of EMCRs in line with Research Australia's wellbeing survey, to allow comparison of Western Syd Uni's EMCRs with other universities and to examine changes in well-being over time as a result of initiatives to support women.

→ Expansion of the EPIC mentoring program to other clusters as well as to casual academic staff across the University. This will require nominated leads supported by resources and materials for consistent and effective delivery of the program. Women who have previously participated in the EPIC mentoring program could implement the program in subsequent years, providing a sustainable and scalable model. A central coordinator to allocate women to groups and adjust as necessary throughout their journey, coordinate workshops and distribute and collate ongoing evaluation data would be required to support the program ongoing.

→ Invest in sustainable supporting resources. This may include EPIC videos and 2022 group videos to communicate the objectives and benefits of the program, as well as materials to support workshops/events and resources for mentors/mentees.

There are several recommendations that may inform success of any future deliveries of the EPIC program:

→ Executive mentors become executive sponsors to facilitate both internal and external opportunities and to reduce contradictory information being provided by them and the peer mentors.

→ Ensure groups are from different schools/disciplines where feasible

→ Identifying ways to facilitate the type of organic connection found with the original EPIC group or to match individuals in other ways

→ Make the goals of the program clearer and provide example goals that groups can aim towards

→ Underline the importance of collaboration/sponsorship/advocacy and not just mentoring

→ Provide guidance along with reassurance that groups will have different processes and outcomes.

Background

Across the Australian university sector, current promotion and career support offered to women employed at academic levels A, B and C is limited (Kahn 2012; Peetz, Strachan & Troup 2014). While Western Sydney University (Western) reports that 58% of level B academics are women, only 36% of level E academics are women, highlighting the issue of academic progression and retention in women. Francis and Stulz (2020) explored barriers and facilitators affecting the promotion of academic women at Western as well as the need for formal mentoring programs for women academics specifically within Western. While university wide mentoring programs currently exist, especially for women in governance roles, there was a need to offer structured, holistic, career support to assist all level A, B and C women in strategic planning for long term career development.

The 2020 My Voice Staff Engagement Survey data indicated that level A-C academics scored poorest in areas including wellbeing and work/life balance. Currently, Melbourne University facilitated through Research Australia, are leading a national survey of early to mid-career academics to explore these areas further (Western will have university level data reported back to them). Given heightened caregiver responsibilities, coupled with the prominence of women in governance and 'housework' of academia type positions plus emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, the aftereffects of excessive workloads could continue to stagnate the progression of careers of women in academia and widen the existing gaps between men and women.

To address these gaps the EPIC Collaboration (EPIC-C) program was carried out over two phases. Phase 1 evaluated a pilot executive and peer mentoring intervention aimed at assisting career progression through holistic support among female academics in level A-C positions at Western. While one of the project aims was support individuals through the promotion process, it's peer alliance type structure also aimed to drive a shift in culture towards collaborative and holistic career development. Existing university resources mainly cater for those ready to apply for promotion. This project aimed to support women in career development practices, such as benchmarking progress, identifying growth areas, developing leadership skills, and connecting with relevant people and opportunities. To achieve this, the program focused on facilitating the development of a culture of peer support and empowerment for women at Western.

Phase 2 will involve the refinement and roll out of a survey to measure wellbeing, work/life balance, and career support/progression across the university with the intention for longitudinal data collection to evaluate changes in culture and support over time. This survey will be informed by the findings reported from the pilot mentoring program, alongside the findings for EMCA women from the national survey led by Melbourne university and in consultation with an EPIC advisory group comprising level C, D, and E academics. This survey will then be administered on an annual basis to track the impacts of Western's strategies to support women in level A-C positions.

To summarise, the EPIC-C program aimed to evaluate:

a) The effect of the EPIC-C program on the career development practices, support mechanisms, and ability to overcome barriers for progression for the women taking part;

b) The feasibility of implementing the program more widely across the University through exploring: program reach, engagement, implementation and maintenance.

This report shows the findings of Phase 1 of the evaluation.

Methods

Recruitment

The program was promoted by the Health and Medicine Cluster Deans and Directors of specific Schools and Institutes, as well as Human Resources (HR). A link to the baseline survey was sent via email to potential participants from all Schools and Institutes. Based on their responses to eligibility questions, they may have received an invitation to participate in the mentoring program through an EOI form. It is important to note that the mentoring program was only open to the Health & Medicine Cluster in this initial pilot stage. Participants received a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) through the baseline survey as a consent block and had the opportunity to have their questions answered before giving their consent. Participants had up to two weeks to consider their participation.

The EPIC-C Program

Participants (peers in level A-C positions) attended meetings with both an executive staff mentor (e.g., a Distinguished Professor), and a peer mentor (e.g., a level C academic to mentor a level B group). Mentors provided ongoing career support and mentorship to small teams (n = 6 groups; ranging from 3-6 peers), who remained together as an alliance for the duration of the pilot (10 months). The frequency of the meetings was determined within each individual alliance group. Peers were also encouraged to provide additional ongoing support outside of the meetings, following the EPIC Research Group approach. The exact format of the mentoring meetings was determined by the participants and informed by existing Western promotion materials and other resources. At the start of the program, peers were invited to attend (in person or online) a structured welcome event as well as a mid-way point workshop and end of year celebration event facilitated by the original EPIC group driving this project.

Regarding ethical considerations for the pilot intervention, to ensure that all participants had equal opportunities to access the peer support groups, they were assigned to the groups by the project team based on their home campus as best as possible and also their academic level. If a participant felt uncomfortable with another member of their allocated group, they could request a move to another group without having to provide any explanation. Peers were informed to ensure strict confidentiality with all participants signing a form indicating that they agree to keep discussions confidential as part of the PIS. Access to Western resources for the program were equally available to all participants via a university vUWS site and direct email of resources to peers. There was no expectation made as part of the program that peers were to apply for promotion with the primary goal of the program to provide career support with the potential for promotion at a time of their choosing.

Program Evaluation

This executive and peer support mentoring program was tested in a pre-post study using a mixed methods evaluation approach which incorporated a pre-post program survey (administered online, Appendix 1) and qualitative post-program semi-structured focus groups. This approach was selected as the questionnaire data provided empirical data on efficacy in relation to measures of wellbeing and career support (pre and post program). The qualitative discussions added rich contextual data to triangulate these survey results (post intervention) to assess feasibility and acceptability as well as provide opportunity to explore appropriateness of the survey. Additionally, qualitative focus groups were also conducted to capture women's perceptions and experiences of being an ally (i.e. peer mentee), peer mentor or executive mentor in the program, challenges experienced during the program, and suggestions for improving it.

Qualitative Evaluation: Focus Groups and Interviews

Recruitment for focus groups and individual interviews occurred via email to all participants who took part in EPIC-C as allies, peer mentors, and executive mentors. Research Assistant SP conducted the focus groups and individual interviews. SP (she/her) has a Masters of Public Health and over five years of experience in leading qualitative group discussions of a wide range of people including professionals, culturally and linguistically diverse community members, and parent groups. The participants did not know SP prior to the discussions as SP was brought onto this project at its midterm and did not have any prior relationships with any of the focus group/interview attendees.

An interview schedule (Appendix 2) guided the focus group and individual interview semi-structured discussions. This was used for the purpose of evaluating the components of the program that were perceived successful/unsuccessful, the barriers and facilitators to being involved in the program and ways of improving the program into the future, to explore feasibility and acceptability. Focus groups were 60 minutes and individual interviews 25 minutes in duration.

Focus groups were recorded and transcribed using Zoom. SP reviewed the Zoom transcriptions against the recorded sessions to ensure verbatim transcription. After transcripts were de-identified through pseudonym use, an inductive reflexive thematic analysis was conducted (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Data saturation was defined as the point where no new emergent main themes were identified from the data. Themes were derived from the data using QSR International NVivo 12 Software. SP coded the data and a coding tree was constructed.

Quantitative Evaluation: Longitudinal Survey

A preliminary longitudinal survey (Appendix 1) was administered to female academics (levels A, B, C and D) in fixed term or permanent roles in the Health and Wellbeing cluster in November 2021. The longitudinal survey collected demographic data and included a self-reported questionnaire which explored personal barriers and facilitators to promotion (Appendix 3). N = 42 women responded to the survey, with these results reported in a previous preliminary report. The same longitudinal survey was sent via an email link to all participants of the 2022 EPIC-C program. All responses were grouped into semi-binary categories (agree, neutral, disagree). Results from the follow up survey were then

compared to the baseline results from the preliminary survey administration through a non-parametric Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed rank test using GraphPad Prism V 9.2.0.

Results

The program was operational from February - November 2022. Upon initial recruitment, 30 women expressed interest in the program as an ally and 25 went on to join the program who were allocated into 6 groups. Of these participants, 21 allies attended the first event, 13 attended the mid-way event, and 15 attended the final event. Additionally, eight peer mentors and six executive mentors joined the program.

Focus Group Results

Sixty percent of participants (n = 15) took part in the focus groups. Overall, two focus groups were conducted for the allies (n = 11), one focus group was conducted with peer mentors (n = 3), and a final interview was undertaken with an executive mentor. While over half of women within the program were not able to join the qualitative discussions due to scheduling conflicts, no participants withdrew from program itself. The main themes resulting from the focus groups and interview were: facilitators of the program, barriers to implementing the program, reasons for joining the program, outcomes (which included new relationship development) and benefits of the program.

Facilitators of the program

Subthemes within the main theme of facilitators of the program (the aspects which facilitated the model to function well) included the peer support structure and feeling connected with other peers plus senior mentors, a sense of encouragement from newly formed networks through the program and having a mix of academics from across Schools and Institutes.

Mentors explained benefits of engaging in peer support, realising that it is a two-way street of mutual enrichment. While mentors provided guidance and expertise to others, they equally valued the diverse perspectives and experiences shared by their mentees. This reciprocal environment offers the exchange of knowledge and a platform for self-reflection, helping them to refine their skills and adapt to changing circumstances.

"…felt like that was something that was unique to this opportunity. I thought there was, there would be benefits in finding other people who had managed challenges that were popping up the similar level or that could understand." (Ally Group 1:P6)

"Peer support is really important because it's more reciprocal" (Peer Mentor Group: P2)

Allies discovered the peer support mechanism of connection, aligning with those at comparable hierarchical levels within the academic structure.

"Fight for our position, basically, a lot of the time and so it was good to be connected with people on the same level, we had the same goals, and we were all triggered by the same things" (Ally Group 1:P2)

"it is nice to see what goes on outside the School. We are in the same university, but making those connections and having that communication and seeing what people are doing and not doing and what work they are given, so that you are not potentially making the same patterns, but if there is an easy way to do that." (Ally Group 2: P2)

"I'm curious about other experiences and I see other women around our organisation and I see they have really hard profiles, and they are doing really great work and is there something else I could be doing or should be doing? And hearing other people's perspectives instead of having the blinkers on within our School. I've definitely had that experience in that group." (Ally Group 2: P2)

" it was nice to sort of make those connections a bit more broadly across the university." (Ally Group: P1)

Engaging with senior and executive mentors offered a uniquely fulfilling and enriching experience for allies in this peer group environment. Working with seniors allowed for the exchange of diverse perspectives, fostering a dynamic learning environment. It provided an opportunity for the executive and senior mentors to guide and support allies in their academic endeavors.

"However, I did really find a connection. What's that called, with like the intermediate person, so the person who ran the session. I've actually really struck off a bit of a friendship and collaborative space with that person. And that was really awesome and that that person has been really supportive very helpful to kind of learn from her experience to, you know, and just to have that advocate for you to give advice hear advice from. (Ally Group 1:P5)

"Interesting initially I know when I've turned on some of my screens and people like [name redacted] was there and I was like oh my god, what am I going to say? But I think, because the groups are so small, so you can't hide, either... like oh I don't know, why wouldn't you interact. But actually they do make...us feel that we could ask questions and still you know be quite open and actually I ran into my executive at a conference the other week and so that was a good opportunity to meet face to face." (Ally Group 2:P3)

Additionally, both mentors and allies found using peer support to troubleshoot issues associated with applying for promotion was advantageous, as well as for emotional support and a sense of encouragement throughout the program. Employing peer support groups to address challenges related to seeking a promotion proved beneficial for both mentors and allies. This approach not only enhanced their chances of advancement but also provided valuable emotional support.

"You know what those challenges were, and we could collectively try and think of solutions to them...I also agree with the things around finding like-minded women and other people who can

champion you and tell you when you're having moments of doubt that…you should be here and that you are worthy and that you are a fantastic person…" (Ally Group 1:P6)

The allies and mentors enjoyed the mix of peers from different Schools and Institutions in the EPIC program. There was an easy exchange of ideas and support as they shared their unique experiences and perspectives. The diverse group not only widened their social circles but also fostered a collaborative environment where innovative ideas and solutions could be fostered and exceeded the boundaries of their own Schools.

" So this seemed like another way to, to, to have that kind of peer mentoring and it was great to have that with our with our little team, with people from all different sort of levels and academic…backgrounds and successes and I think that was really useful" (Ally Group 1:P3)

"(Being) able to expand networks and perspectives with mix of academics: I definitely think that that is a huge benefit of being part of this program because not everyone is from within my School, we have people from different schools and it was really great to link in with people from different campuses and different parts of the uni, who I wouldn't have ever come across really before." (Ally Group 1:P4)

"And there was an element of it being because we were from different Schools. Sometimes we could say yes that's also happening in my School, or that's also happening in this part of the University. And we could see those similarities, but it was helpful not being from all the same School because then it wasn't like, you know, talking to your colleagues about what was happening within that School. It gave us a different sounding board, a different place to be able to say, no, this is more about me and the support that I need, rather than it being a commentary on what was happening within politics within the School." (Ally Group 1:P6)

Barriers to implementation of program

Conversely, there were barriers and challenges to implementing the model including the inability to duplicate the 'original' EPIC group, misalignment of the executive mentor's guidance with the values of some of the groups and a fragmented mixture of ally peers.

" I was expecting to develop this close tight knit friendship…hearing the initial EPIC story about how it worked. But then I feel like our sessions were a little bit fragmented in that not everybody could attend every session so you are only talking to somebody different each time, which is a good thing that you get to know each other, but also it didn't necessarily lend itself to all having this group connection as a whole." (Ally Group 1:P5)

" I think the other people in the group thought about those relationships that were really positive relationships. But will they be relationships that I sustain or they sustain as well? I'm actually not sure. Part of me is thinking, possibly not because even, like it has been a bit disconnected a little bit disjointed design." (Ally Group 2:P1)

Attempting to replicate these organic connections as seen in the 'original' EPIC group but in a different context proved to be challenging, as individual personalities, preferences, and social dynamics within each group can vary significantly.

"So I think that might depend on the group dynamic, like how you know we were interested in what each other we're doing, but like in say research our research interests were disparate, like they didn't necessarily align so that that wasn't there, that natural transition for something like that to happen." (Ally Group 2: P1)

"I think it's tricky too, I don't know if people can kind of select into these groups or not. I don't know if I got this wrong but the way that I kind of saw the EPIC group is they're kind of awesome foursome group they had going. They were friends and you know that they…decided that you know…they wanted to kind of help support each other's research career which is wonderful and I think sometimes it kind of has to have that organic element or a part where you're naturally kind of drawn to each other as well…because you work well together, because you have common interests. Yeah, so I think sometimes just putting 4 random people together, isn't necessarily going to mean that they're going to, you know, become great collaborators" (Peer Mentor Group:P2)

"But, um, we tried to kind of make it work. And it just didn't organically happen, and then we realize how hard we were pushing, and it just wasn't working. So I feel like, yeah, that would be great in principle. In practice it's very difficult with cross organizational collaborations, which is the strength of our team…in terms of the mentorship perspective, but not the collaboration perspective." (Ally Group 1:P2)

The ever-changing environment in which the EPIC groups (both past and present) operate added another layer of complexity to the challenge. External factors such as shifts in leadership or alterations in the availability of resources can significantly impact dynamics.

"I think the point is that original group. Certainly I found that really positive…just hearing the positive influence that of a peer support, how beneficial that was, and I definitely agree that that might have been a unique experience, but also I feel like the climate has changed a lot in terms of what the academic position looks like now…we can't replicate what was, and I think we need to be conscious of that because the academic environment has changed between the last two years."
(Ally Group 1: P5)

Divergence in beliefs between senior mentors' beliefs differing from that of the allies also caused some division within one of the groups as well as disconnect by executive mentors around the need for job satisfaction.

"And so there was sort of some beliefs that seemed to be different between the goals of the program and the goals of the mentors, at times. And so I think that it might be necessary for the EPIC team to consider, who the best mentors are moving forward. To be able to provide both views, but find where the value should sit for the program itself. And for the mentors that would best support that, depending on where it falls." (Ally Group 1:P6)

"Mostly I'd say...what (the) senior mentor was talking about in terms of think about what you want your career to look like and then think about ways to kind of get there Not in terms of what level you want to be working at in terms of promotion, but think about, you know, what would you want to be doing...how do you want to be doing it and who do you want to be doing it with. And they're the things that are going to contribute mostly to job satisfaction. And then you can kind of, you know, tackling promotion and things along the way. But there's no point kind of being promoted to level D, (if) that job just doesn't suit you in terms of the way it's made up. So yeah, making sure that academic careers suit our values I think is wisdom." (Peer Mentor Group: P2)

Some EPIC groups faced challenges with a fragmented mix of individuals due to sporadic attendance, and a lack of clarity regarding the way forward where there was disconnect between members, hindering cohesion and progress.

"But it's hard to do that simply straight away, you know...We had five people in our group...If we had three of us we probably could really figure out, you know, what that should be, but five people - it was too many directions." (Ally Group 1:P6)

"So I think that might depend on the group dynamic. Like how, you know, we were interested in what each other were doing but like, in say research or research interests, were disparate. Like they didn't necessarily align so that that wasn't there, that natural transition for something like that to happen." (Ally Group 2:P1)

Reasons for joining EPIC-C

Motivations to join the program by respondents included being personally invited, alignment of the program to personal beliefs, pushing oneself out of their comfort zone, expanding internal networks internally, re-engaging with others at the university after COVID-19 restrictions and because they were newly employed at Western.

Representatives from the ally group, executive mentor and the peer mentors all cited being invited to join EPIC by friends, colleagues and the EPIC organising committee.

"And I'd like to think I was invited to do so because I either recognised or understood, or both, the needs and the ambitions of the group." (Executive mentor: P1)

"I was invited to join by a peer at our school." (Ally Group 1:P7)

"I saw the advert, didn't respond and then was contacted by a couple of the leads to say that it might be useful if I did." (Peer Mentor Group:P3)

Certain individuals from the ally group and the peer mentor group stated they chose to become part of the EPIC program due to the alignment of the program with their personal beliefs including giving back to others, paying it forward and offering newer academics a more supportive career path.

"And to you see how generous people are with their time. And yeah, I've been a beneficiary of that my whole time at Western Sydney so for me I just (think) that's a really important thing to be able to replicate for other people, that it shouldn't just be you taking all the time." (Ally 2 Group:P2)

"I've been in academia now across four different institutions for a number of years, and remember how hard it is to start out, and how little support there is and how easy it is to go down the wrong path or start processes that maybe aren't supportive of a work life balance or any of those kinds of things. I didn't necessarily have a lot of support when I was starting out so there was a motivation to provide that support to others." (Peer Mentor Group:P3)

"So, having all of that experience you know so fresh in my mind, like means... I was able to pass on all that amazing experience that I had with my mentors. And I haven't participated in any formal mentoring programs before, but the incredible support that I had with my PhD. you know, one of my co supervisors is now my mentor and collaborator. Seeing those relationships and how they were so formative and beneficial to my experience and track record. I wanted to be able to pass that back out to people in need." (Peer Mentor Group:P1)

In the ally group, it was also mentioned they joined with the intention of challenging themselves and stepping beyond their comfort zones.

"I think for me, coming into a level A role...I was wanting to step outside of my comfort zone and challenge myself a little bit, knowing that I wasn't going to really make any progress unless I did that, and not really knowing how to go about forming connections and networking. And I guess, in that collaborative space. I thought that might be a helpful place to start and an initial first step for me just to step outside of my comfort zone and to join something like that. So it was a bit of a challenge to myself I think" (Ally Group 1:P6)

Other individuals became members of EPIC with the goal of broadening their internal networks.

"I think it was just such a great networking opportunity that was really lacking in in the university... especially given the positions that I've been in are not the typical mode and I was well aware of that. And I was fully expecting not to get to continue and was so glad to get to keep doing it and to get to meet people and get support and it was a really strange and nice feeling for a change." (Ally Group 1:P5)

Additionally, EPIC was seen to create a support system that extended beyond their own School or Institute, encouraging individuals to seek advice and share experiences to those both within and outside of their School or Institution.

"I definitely think that that is a huge benefit of being part of this program, because not everyone is from within my School we have people from different Schools and it was really great to link in with

people from different campuses and different parts of the Uni, who I wouldn't have ever come across, really before. (Ally Group 1:P4)

"For a School, particularly because we are [redacted], and we do communicate well, it is nice to see what goes on outside the School. We are in the same university, but making those connections and having that communication and seeing what people are doing and not doing and what work they are given, so that you are not potentially not making the same patterns, but if there is an easy way to do that. A lot of it for me was making those connections. Really, that is really important." (Ally Group 2:P2)

One member of the ally group joined EPIC to enhance their social interactions following the COVID lockdown.

"I actually started on the first day of the lockdown so I'd never actually been on campus since studying and a colleague in my program was one of the kind of beginning champions of EPIC and had spoken so highly of it and I started as a way in which to make connections with likeminded powerhouse females at Western…because I think it's important to have those female friendships in a male dominated world. And I just thought it would be a great opportunity to make some friends…as well as make connections that I haven't done so yet." (Ally Group 1:P1)

In addition to those who lost connection due to COVID restriction, there were also additional members of the ally group that joined EPIC because they were newly employed at Western. While increasing social interactions was a primary motivating factor, allies were also interested in the peer support framework of EPIC and the opportunity to increase networks and collaboration outside of their School.

"I was new to the institution, looking to make some new connections across the university, but my previous experiences in other mentoring programs was very kind of senior mentor/junior mentee, and I was interested in this program of peer mentoring." (Ally Group 1:P2)

"It was about the connection and understanding and about how other people do things. I am relatively new to Western, been here, just over a year. This opportunity came up and we were still in lockdown and this was a good opportunity for me to connect with people, not just within my department" (Ally Group 2:P1)

Outcomes and benefits of the program

Overall, the majority of allies and peer mentors felt there were many positive aspects to the EPIC program. A shared feeling of camaraderie of the highs and lows of early academia could be felt within EPIC groups and participants felt groups helped them to feel connected and to reduce feelings of isolation. These connections also facilitated access to existing resources that were being leveraged.

"...it [EPIC] made me feel a lot more connected, it gave me some colleagues that I knew that I could have a whinge to, and that they would hear that whinge, and also remind me of my internal and external resources."(Ally Group 1:P6)

Significantly, some participating allies felt they had genuine supporters for the first time due to taking part in the EPIC program, with one ally for example saying:

"I've never felt so championed by the women...like the women who were in that group just championed me and my view of myself and my place at the University. And that's something that was only able to happen because we had formed this group and a place of sharing." (Ally Group 1:P6)

Some allies also reported the benefits of sharing their own knowledge with each other. Knowledge sharing included application process experience, grant application, expert knowledge, governance, and leadership. The mixture of people from different disciplines and Schools/Institutes within groups, as well as academic level through the allocation of executive and peer mentors, was reported as a benefit that helped break down silos and isolation.

"I definitely came on as a mentee, but because of the group dynamic ...you had some elements of mentorship. [I] can tell them about things ...so you had an opportunity to give back as well as also gain knowledge from more senior people in your group as well, so it was a nice mix." (Ally Group 2:P1)

More specifically, some allies found the program supportive for working towards and preparing promotion applications. Some of these allies also valued the opportunity to be supporters of other allies.

"Your benefiting in terms of being given things. I think that opportunity to give back to other people like ... providing that mentorship, because, you know, I am looking at going for a level C internal promotion next year, so, with some of that mentorship that I was able to provide to others who were in our group, I can actually incorporate some of those things that wasn't, you know the formula. I wasn't a formal mentor, but you know that you contributed to other people's career development as well not just you benefiting. So, I think that's a really important element of it." (Ally Group 2:P1)

Executive mentors, peer mentors and allies all reported enjoyable discussions in which they could share their knowledge and experiences around work philosophy with their groups.

"So, you know, rather than being so black and white and rigid about...the building blocks to academic career. We were really kind of trying to...open our eyes up to different possibilities. And really, we kept coming back to values and what we want, what's going to be an enriching and satisfying career for us, and it doesn't have to look like the cookie cutter academic career." (Peer Mentor Group:P2)

"I think what resonated with me mostly…was what (the) senior mentor was talking about in terms of think about what you want your career to look like and then think about ways to kind of get there. So not in terms of what level you want to be working at in terms of promotion but think about, you know, what would you want to be doing, you know, and how do you want to be doing and who do you want to be doing with." (Peer Mentor Group:P2)

Overall, most peer mentors and allies noted that EPIC-C was excellent for supporting their career for several reasons. The significance of having peer support was a prominent sub-theme. In relation to supporting careers, encouragement through the peer support networks was particularly important, as it related to allies and mentors feeling the EPIC-C program provided a platform for both giving and receiving encouragement.

"…finding like-minded women and other people who can champion you and tell you when you're having moments of doubt that know you should be here and that you are worthy and that you are a fantastic person." (Ally Group 1:P6)

"…you just get the camaraderie and sort of female supportive energy was really, at a time of stress, certainly a helpful thing." (Ally Group 1:P7)

Longitudinal Survey Results

Demographic information collected via the baseline survey (*n* = 42) and endpoint survey (*n* = 15) can be found in Table 1. Baseline data responses include participants who did not submit an EOI to take part in the mentoring program, however all EPIC-C participants (*n* = 25) completed the baseline survey. All respondents to the endpoint survey (*n* = 15) were EPIC-C participants. Demographics collected at both timepoints included gender, age, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) status, disability status, caregiver status, School or Institute, academic level, and employment status.

Table 1. Demographic information collected via the baseline survey (*n* = 42) and endpoint survey (*n* = 15), presented as raw numbers and percentage of total response.

	Baseline (%)	Endpoint (%)
Gender		
Female	41 (97.62)	15 (100.00)
Other/Prefer Not to Say	1 (2.38)	0 (0.00)
Years of Age		
23 to 35	12 (28.57)	8 (53.33)
36 to 45	8 (19.05)	4 (26.67)
46 to 55	17 (40.48)	2 (13.33)
56 to 65	4 (9.52)	1 (6.67)
Identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or CALD		
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander	1 (2.38)	1 (6.67)

CALD	9 (21.43)	3 (20.00)
Disability Status		
Disability – Workplace Adjustment	4 (9.52)	2 (13.33)
Disability – No Adjustment	9 (21.43)	2 (13.33)
Caregiver Status		
Sole Carer	2 (4.76)	0 (0.00)
Equal or Co-Carer	14 (33.33)	4 (26.67)
Primary Carer	14 (33.33)	7 (46.67)
Secondary or Non-Primary Carer	2 (4.76)	0 (0.00)
Not a Carer	8 (19.05)	2 (13.33)
School or Institute		
School of Health Sciences	13 (30.95)	6 (40.00)
School of Medicine	8 (19.05)	3 (20.00)
School of Nursing and Midwifery	9 (21.43)	2 (13.33)
School of Psychology	3 (7.14)	2 (13.33)
School of Science	1 (2.38)	1 (6.67)
School of Social Sciences	1 (2.38)	0 (0.00)
NICM Health Research Institute	3 (7.14)	1 (6.67)
Translational Health Research Institute	4 (9.52)	0 (0.00)
Academic Level		
Level A	5 (11.90)	1 (6.67)
Level B	23 (54.76)	12 (80.00)
Level C	14 (33.33)	2 (13.33)
Employment Status		
Permanent Full Time	27 (64.29)	8 (53.33)
Permanent Part Time	7 (16.67)	4 (26.67)
Fixed Term Full Time	4 (9.52)	1 (6.67)
Fixed Term Part Time	4 (9.52)	2 (13.33)

The survey administered at baseline and at program endpoint included a series of self-reported questions which explored personal barriers and facilitators to promotion. Statistical analyses via a non-parametric Wilcoxon matched pairs signed rank test did not indicate any significant changes in responses across baseline and endpoint (p > 0.9999). Responses exploring personal barriers and facilitators to promotion across baseline and endpoint are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Responses exploring personal barriers and facilitators to promotion across baseline (*n* = 42) and endpoint (*n* = 15), presented as raw numbers and percentage of total response.

Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
My work relationships and friendships are supportive and rewarding			
Baseline	35 (83.33)	5 (11.90)	2 (4.76)
Endpoint	13 (92.85)	1 (7.14)	0 (0.00)
I prioritise my personal needs over my work requirements			
Baseline	7 (16.67)	12 (28.57)	23 (54.77)
Endpoint	3 (21.43)	5 (35.71)	6 (42.85)
I often reflect on my career achievements			
Baseline	20 (47.62)	11 (26.19)	11 (26.19)
Endpoint	8 (57.14)	1 (7.14)	5 (35.71)
I aim to make improvements in my life, including work-related changes			
Baseline	38 (90.48)	4 (9.52)	0 (0.00)
Endpoint	13 (92.85)	1 (7.14)	0 (0.00)
My current workload is reasonable			
Baseline	9 (21.43)	8 (19.05)	25 (58.85)
Endpoint	6 (42.86)	2 (14.29)	6 (42.86)
I balance home and work responsibilities well			
Baseline	9 (21.43)	16 (38.10)	17 (40.48)
Endpoint	6 (42.86)	4 (28.57)	4 (28.57)
I am able to keep my work stress at an acceptable level			
Baseline	8 (19.05)	16 (38.10)	18 (42.85)
Endpoint	6 (42.86)	4 (28.57)	4 (28.57)
I have a clear understanding of what is required of me during the process of applying for promotion			
Baseline	11 (26.19)	6 (14.29)	25 (59.53)
Endpoint	7 (53.84)	2 (15.38)	4 (30.77)
Collaboration in teaching and research is encouraged among my colleagues			
Baseline	24 (57.14)	13 (30.95)	5 (11.90)
Endpoint	7 (53.84)	5 (38.46)	1 (7.69)
Gaining promotion and additional responsibilities would make me enjoy my job less			
Baseline	2 (4.76)	11 (26.19)	29 (69.05)
Endpoint	1 (7.69)	4 (30.77)	8 (61.54)
Ongoing mentoring would motivate me to seek promotion			
Baseline	36 (85.71)	5 (11.90)	1 (2.38)
Endpoint	12 (92.31)	0 (0.00)	1 (7.69)
I have a colleague who I consider to be a sponsor or advocate for me			

Baseline	19 (45.24)	10 (23.81)	13 (30.95)
Endpoint	10 (76.93)	2 (15.38)	1 (7.69)
I have a clear understanding of the threshold of achievement required for me to be promoted to the next level			
Baseline	9 (21.43)	6 (14.29)	27 (64.28)
Endpoint	4 (30.77)	1 (7.69)	8 (61.54)
My career aspirations are achievable			
Baseline	26 (61.91)	16 (28.10)	0 (0.00)
Endpoint	9 (69.23)	3 (23.08)	1 (7.69)
I am offered sufficient support for my career development at the University			
Baseline	8 (19.05)	20 (47.62)	14 (33.33)
Endpoint	6 (46.15)	3 (23.08)	4 (30.77)

Despite being statistically non-significant (likely due to small sample size), there were some notable changes in responses across baseline and endpoint, which potentially could be attributed to participation in EPIC-C. At baseline, 83.33 % of respondents reported that their work relationships are supportive and rewarding, compared to 92.85 % at endpoint. There was also an increase in respondents who reported their workload was reasonable and that they were able to balance home and work responsibilities; with 21.43 % agreeing at baseline, compared to 42.86 % at endpoint. There was a 23.81 % increase in participants who reported being able to manage their work stress at an acceptable level.

Importantly, there was a large increase in the number of respondents who reported having a clear understanding of what is required during the process of applying for promotion (26.19 % at baseline, compared to 53.84 % at endpoint. Only 45.24 % of respondents reported having a colleague who they consider to be a sponsor or advocate for them, compared to 76.93 % at endpoint. Finally, only 19.05 % of respondents at baseline reported that they are offered sufficient support for their career development by the University. The number of participants who reported receiving sufficient career support increased to 46.15 % post-intervention.

Discussion

The objective of the EPIC-C program was to support career progression in women at levels A-C in the health cluster at Western. Outcome data indicate EPIC-C has significant promise as a vehicle to boost ally and peer career support. Both the quantitative and qualitative data demonstrated that most of the women who took part felt supported through being able to share their experiences with others in their group. It was evident that engagement among allies themselves, as well as with senior and executive mentors offered a uniquely fulfilling and enriching experience for allies in this peer group environment. Working with others, including with senior staff, can allow for the exchange of diverse perspectives, fostering a dynamic learning environment. Expanding internal social networks

can also provide numerous other benefits, fostering personal and professional growth. For example, a broad network can offer ample networking opportunities, which in turn can lead to valuable connections to advance teaching and research ideas as well as provide governance opportunities all of which can lead to career enrichment. Significantly, allies taking part felt they had genuine supporters for the first time, with this type of support essential to help individuals feel part of the broader University eco-system.

Allocating members to groups with a mixture of disciplines/schools wherever possible appears to have facilitated this supportive environment, as indicated in the quantitative and qualitative data. This may have been due to a reduced perception of 'competition', which may have increased the supportive feel of the group. This beneficial aspect was also qualitatively reported to help break down isolation/silos, which is significant given improving a reducing social isolation can have a positive impact on wellbeing, which in turn can improve self-esteem and a sense of autonomy. This finding is supported by the quantitative data, which showed women who took part felt less stressed and were able to balance their careers more effectively with their personal lives. Most importantly, some of these allies who took part also valued the opportunity to be supporters of other allies, the original EPIC way.

Despite the overall positivity for the EPIC program, some challenges and barriers were faced during the program implementation. This included unclear expectations, where both allies and peer mentors sometimes felt unclear over what the overall goals of the program were, and what the purpose of their group was. First, while there was appreciation for the 'original' EPIC group, it was difficult to replicate it and assumptions were made about how similar the group functioning and dynamics could or should be. The qualitative data showed that this could in part be attributed to a combination of factors revolving around the intricacies of interpersonal relationships, organisational dynamics, and the fluid nature of the environment in which the group operated. The challenge may also have stemmed from the failure to establish the same level of friendships and organic connections that occurred in the original group. The initial EPIC group likely benefited from a unique combination of personalities, shared interests, and compatible communication styles, fostering a strong sense of camaraderie and trust among its members. The presence of a fragmented mixture of people within the artificially generated groups in this program created a dynamic where individuals may not have found common ground, leading to potential misunderstandings, communication gaps, and a lack of shared purpose. Identifying ways to facilitate the type of organic connection found with the original EPIC group is an important consideration for any future iterations of the program.

In addition, duplicating the success of the initial EPIC group likely requires a nuanced understanding of the factors that contributed to their achievements. It would involve not only addressing the underlying interpersonal dynamics, but also fostering collaboration, and adaptation to the ever-changing context in which the group operated. Greater understanding amongst participants of EPIC as opportunity for collaboration, mentoring, sponsoring, and/or advocating for one another could also be made clearer in future programs as some of the mentors and allies cited that the lack of collaboration hindered the formation of a cohesive and effective EPIC group. The ever-changing environment in which the EPIC groups (both past and present) operate added a further layer of

complexity to the challenge of becoming a cohesive group. Lastly, external factors such as shifts in leadership or alterations in the availability of resources can significantly impact dynamics. Adapting to these changes requires a certain level of flexibility and resilience, and if subsequent groups are unable to navigate these shifts effectively, it can further hinder their ability to duplicate the success of the original EPIC group.

Adding to these challenges was the unclear path forward for the EPIC groups. A lack of defined goals, objectives, or a strategic plan left some members feeling uncertain about their purpose and direction. This ambiguity could have contributed to a sense of frustration and disengagement among both new and existing members, as they may have struggled to understand how their efforts contribute to the overall success of the group. This again underlines the importance of being explicit about expectations and suggested group goals at the start of the program.

Limitations

This was only a small program with only a small number of participants who completed the follow-up survey. Further, given both the baseline and follow survey were anonymous, we were unable to match responses, limiting conclusive interpretation of success (or otherwise) of the program via the quantitative data. While there were some differences comparing the longitudinal survey from June 2022 and the final survey in December 2022 such as an increase in wellbeing and work life balance, the respondents from the final 2022 survey are all Level B. The earlier survey was inclusive of Levels A, B, and C. This difference might account for some of the differences seen in the results. Nonetheless, the qualitative data obtained through focus groups provided the opportunity to evaluate the effect of this pilot program on the career development practices and support mechanisms for the women taking part. The evidence suggests that the objectives were achieved, and there are key learnings from which this program can be taken forward and expanded.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 EPIC Longitudinal Survey

Q1 Evaluation and Development of Executive and Peer Intervention for Career Development - Piloting a combined peer and executive mentor support program for women at Western

Project Summary:

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring academic promotion for female academics, as well as wellbeing across the Health & Medicine Cluster at Western.

This program aims to assist with holistic career progression, including promotion, among women who are level A, B, or C academics at Western. The program has two objectives and phases: 1) To deliver and evaluate a pilot executive and peer mentoring program within the Health and Medicine Cluster; and 2) To longitudinally evaluate support mechanisms and barriers to career development among academic level A, B, or C women across the broader University.

How is the study being paid for? The study is being paid for through a grant received as part of the Vice-Chancellor's Gender Equality Fund.

What will I be asked to do? As part of Phase 1, you will be asked to undertake a self-reported questionnaire which explores personal barriers and facilitators to promotion. At the end of the baseline questionnaire, your interest and eligibility for the peer and executive mentor groups will be assessed. If you express interest and eligibility for this aspect of the project, you will be provided with further information shortly.

Phase 2 will consist of undertaking a self-reported questionnaire which will be delivered longitudinally on an annual basis. The questionnaire will assess changes in barriers and facilitators to career progression, explore levels of participation in career development opportunities, and understand the impact of this programme on female academics' career progression.

How much of my time will I need to give? The questionnaires are expected to require approximately ten minutes to complete, while the EOI form will require approximately fifteen minutes to complete if you are asked to do so. Participants will be asked to complete the surveys when it is feasible to do so, whether it be inside or outside of work hours. You may complete the surveys in multiple sittings across two weeks.

What benefits will I, and/or the broader community, receive for participating? The proposed project will provide structured support to assist all level B and C women in evidence gathering, framing and writing of their promotion applications, which incorporates both peer and executive level support. This will strengthen retention practices by promoting gender inclusive and participatory decision-making, thus improving and promoting gender equality and diversity at Western.

Will the study involve any risk or discomfort for me? If so, what will be done to rectify it? It is not anticipated that participation in this project will cause harm to participants. Some participants will be sharing experiences which may have been negative and where they may have received a lack of support at the time. We will advise you to let us know if any of the questions asked trigger a response which causes distress for the

participant. Distressed participants may contact Lifeline for free on 13 11 14. Confidentiality is guaranteed and will be protected at all times. If you feel any distress from participating in the study, you can talk to the research team or contact the Employee Assistance Program which can be accessed 24 hours a day for 7 days a week. Emergency support can be accessed via 1900 81 87 28. We may also encourage you to seek assistance that day from your general practitioner.

The recruitment method will involve staff and senior management from Western. We recognise the involvement of senior managers may present some discomfort for you. During the design process, the research team has identified and taken the appropriate steps to minimise this discomfort. The longitudinal survey is designed to collect anonymous information, and we will not be asking for any identifying information during this phase of the study. We will, however, be asking general demographic questions, such as your gender. If you're feeling insure, we encourage you to discuss your participation with a colleague or friend who can support you in your decision to participate.

In future aspects of the project where identifying information will be collected, such as during the peer and executive mentoring program, we have taken appropriate steps to minimise the risk of harm. This will be described to you shortly if you are found to be eligible for the program.

How do you intend to publish or disseminate the results? It is anticipated that the results of this research project will be published and/or presented in a variety of forums. In any publication and/or presentation, information will be provided in such a way that the participant cannot be identified, except with your permission.

Will the data and information that I have provided be disposed of? Please be assured that only the researchers will have access to the raw data you provide. However, your data may be used in other related projects for an extended period of time, such as in the establishment of similar programs in the coming years. Please note that minimum retention period for data collection is five years post publication. The data and information you have provided will then be securely disposed of.

Can I withdraw from the study? Participation is entirely voluntary, and you are not obliged to be involved. If you do participate you can withdraw at any time without giving reason and without affecting your relationships with the organisers or Western Sydney University. If you choose to withdraw, all personal and identifying information will be disposed of. However, due to the anonymous nature of the longitudinal surveys, it will be impossible to identify and delete your response.

Can I tell other people about the study? Yes, you can tell other people about the study by providing them the study's research assistant's details (stacie.powell@westernsydney.edu.au) to discuss their participation in the project and obtain a link to the baseline questionnaire. Alternatively, you are able to disseminate the baseline questionnaire.

What if I require further information? Please contact Stacie Powell (stacie.powell@westernsydney.edu.au) should you wish to discuss the research further before deciding whether or not to participate.

What if I have a complaint? If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through Research Engagement, Development and Innovation (REDI) on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 or email humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome. If you agree to participate

in this study, you may be asked to sign the Participant Consent Form. The information sheet is for you to keep and the consent form is retained by the researcher/s.

This study has been approved by the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. The Approval number is H[14655].

Q12   I   hereby   consent   to   participate   in   the   above-named   research   project.
I   acknowledge   that:
•   I have read the participant information sheet (or where appropriate, have had it read to me) and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information and my involvement in the project with the researcher/s •   The procedures required for the project and the time involved have been explained to me, and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.

I consent to: undertaking a series of self-reported questionnaires as part of a two-phase project, and aggregate de-identified survey findings being presented to the University and via academic journals and conferences.

I consent for my data and information provided to be used in this project and other related projects for an extended period of time. I understand that my involvement is confidential, and that the information gained during the study may be published and stored for other research use but no information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.

I understand that my participation in this study will have no effect on my relationship with the researcher/s, and any organisations involved, now or in the future. I understand that I am required to respect the confidentiality   of   the   personal   information   shared   by   fellow   participants.

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

End of Block: Participant Information Sheet

Start of Block: Demographics

Display This Question:

If I hereby consent to participate in the above-named research project. I acknowledge that: • I... = Yes

Q14 How do you describe your gender?

○ Woman/female (1)

○ Man/male (2)

○ Non-binary/gender queer/gender fluid (3)

○ I use a different term (please specify) (4) _____

○ Prefer not to say (5)

Q15 What is your age group?

○ Under 25 (1)

○ 23 - 35 (2)

○ 36 - 45 (3)

○ 46 - 55 (4)

○ 55 - 65 (5)

○ >66 (6)

○ Prefer not to say (7)

Q16 Do you identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Prefer not to say (3)

Q17 Do you identify as of a culturally or linguistically diverse background?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Prefer not to say (3)

Q18 Do you have a disability or chronic medical condition?

○ Yes, requiring workplace adjustment (1)

○ Yes, but not requiring workplace adjustment (5)

○ No (6)

○ Prefer not to say (7)

Q22 Which of the following best describes your carer status? Caregiving may refer to the care of children, older adults, or people with disabilities, for example.

◯ Sole Carer (1)

◯ Equal or Co-Carer (4)

◯ Primary Carer (5)

◯ Secondary or Non-Primary Carer (6)

◯ I am not a caregiver (8)

◯ Other (please specify) _____ (7)

Q15 Please select your School or Institute

○ School of Business (1)

○ School of Education (2)

○ School of Engineering, Design and Built Environment (4)

○ School of Health Sciences (3)

○ School of Humanities and Communication Arts (5)

○ School of Law (6)

○ School of Medicine (7)

○ School of Nursing and Midwifery (8)

○ School of Psychology (9)

○ School of Science (10)

○ School of Social Sciences (11)

○ Graduate Research School (12)

○ Australia-China Institute for Arts and Culture (13)

○ Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment (20)

○ Institute for Culture and Society (21)

○ NICM Health Research Institute (22)

○ The MARCS Institute (23)

○ Translational Health Research Institute (24)

Q21 What is your current academic level:

○ A (1)

○ B (2)

○ C (3)

○ D (4)

Q23 Is your current employment:

○ Permanent full time (1)

○ Permanent part time (2)

○ Fixed term full time (3)

○ Fixed term part time (4)

End of Block: Demographics

Start of Block: Wellbeing & Work/Life Balance

Q3 The following statements concern wellbeing and work/life balance. Please enter the most suitable response for each question.

If you have additional thoughts to share, please note that there will be an opportunity for this at the end of the survey.

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
My work relationships/friendships are supportive and rewarding (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I prioritise my personal needs over my work requirements (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I often reflect on my career achievements (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I aim to make improvements in my life, including work-related changes (4)	○	○	○	○	○
My current workload is reasonable (5)	○	○	○	○	○
I balance home and work responsibilities well (6)	○	○	○	○	○
I am able to keep my work stress at an acceptable level (7)	○	○	○	○	○

End of Block: Wellbeing & Work/Life Balance

Start of Block: Barriers & Facilitators to Academic Promotion

Display This Question:

If I hereby consent to participate in the above-named research project. I acknowledge that: • I... = Yes

Q4 The following statements aim to elicit your view on barriers and facilitators to academic promotion. Please enter the most suitable response for each question.

If you have any additional thoughts to share, please note that there will be an opportunity for this at the end of the survey.

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
I have a clear understanding of what is required of me during the process of applying for promotion (2)	○	○	○	○	○
Collaboration in teaching and research is encouraged among my colleagues (3)	○	○	○	○	○
Gaining promotion and additional responsibilities would make me enjoy my job less (6)	○	○	○	○	○
Ongoing mentoring would motivate me to seek promotion (9)	○	○	○	○	○
I have a colleague who I consider to be a sponsor or advocate for me (10)	○	○	○	○	○
I have a clear understanding of the threshold of achievement required for me to be promoted to the next level (12)	○	○	○	○	○
My career aspirations are achievable (13)	○	○	○	○	○
I am offered sufficient support for my career development at the University (14)	○	○	○	○	○

Q12 When are you planning to apply for promotion?

○ Within the next 12 months. (1)

○ Within 2-3 years. (2)

○ Within 4-5 years. (3)

○ I don't plan to apply for promotion, or I am not actively seeking promotion in the near future. (4)

○ I have just applied for promotion. (5)

Q5 What are some of the reasons that are impacting on your decision to apply for promotion? Please select all that apply.

☐ I don't want or am hesitant to take on additional work responsibilities. (2)

☐ I don't want to go through the process of applying for promotion. (3)

☐ I value my work/life balance at the moment. (4)

☐ I prefer and am comfortable in my current role. (5)

☐ The additional responsibilities associated with gaining promotion would compromise my ability to balance my home/family duties. (6)

☐ I am on a fixed-term contract. (8)

☐ It is difficult to dedicate the time required to prepare the application. (10)

☐ I don't feel adequately prepared to apply for promotion. (11)

☐ I don't feel adequately accomplished to apply for promotion. (12)

☐ There is a lack of career mentorship. (13)

☐ There is a lack of support from my supervisor(s). (14)

☐ There is a lack of support from my School or Institute. (15)

☐ I have had an unsuccessful application in a previous round. (16)

☐ COVID-19 related challenges. (17)

☐ Part-time workers are not supported/encouraged to apply for promotion. (21)

☐   The promotions process is intimidating. (22)

☐   Other (9) _____

Page Break ———————————————————————————————

Display This Question:

> If I hereby consent to participate in the above-named research project. I acknowledge that: • I... = Yes

Q6 In your view, are there any additional barriers or facilitators to applying for promotion we may have missed, or do you have any other thoughts you would like to share?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

End of Block: Barriers & Facilitators to Academic Promotion

Start of Block: EOI Form

Display This Question:

> If I hereby consent to participate in the above-named research project. I acknowledge that: • I... = Yes

Q7 Would you be interested in participating in an executive and peer-mentoring program aimed at supporting people who self-identify as women or non-binary people to apply for academic promotion?

○   Yes (1)

○   No (2)

○   I would like some further information before I decide. (5)

Q22 Thank you for your interest and for taking the time to complete this survey. Please feel free to contact research assistant Joelle Metri (j.metri@westernsydney.edu.au) for further information about the program.

If any of the topics or questions in this survey have raised any concerns for you, please consider seeking support via the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP can be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Emergency support can be accessed via 1800 81 87 28.

Q9 If you are not interested in participating, please indicate why below.

◯ I don't have time to participate. (1)

◯ I'm not interested in seeking promotion. (2)

◯ I don't think it would help me. (3)

◯ My School or Institute already provides a mentoring program. (5)

◯ I don't think I meet the inclusion criteria. (6)

◯ Other (4) _____

Q19 Thank you for your interest in our peer and executive mentoring strategy. Currently, this program is limited to those who self-identify as women or non-binary people employed at academic levels A, B, or C within the Health and Medicine Cluster at Western Sydney University. Do you meet this criteria?

Please note that the Health and Medicine Cluster encompasses to the School of Health Sciences, School of Medicine, School of Nursing & Midwifery, School of Psychology, the NICM Health research Institute, and the Translational Health Research Institute.

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q20 Thank you again for your interest in our peer and executive mentoring strategy. Below is a link to the program's Expression of Interest form. We look forward to hearing from you.

https://surveyswesternsydney.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eVCtKnh753uAJls

If any of the topics or questions in this survey have raised any concerns for you, please consider seeking support via the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP can be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Emergency support can be accessed via 1800 81 87 28.

Q21 Thank you again for your interest in our peer and executive mentoring strategy. Moving forward, we aim to expand this program to all interested female academics.

If any of the topics or questions in this survey have raised any concerns for you, please consider seeking support via the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP can be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Emergency support can be accessed via 1800 81 87 28.

End of Block: EOI Form

Appendix 2 Focus group/interview schedule

Question Number	Question
1	Can you tell me about your main reasons for joining the program?
2	Have you been involved in a mentoring program (or similar) before? If so, how does this program compare?
3	Can you tell us about your relationship with others in the program?
4	Has the program helped you feel more connected or supported in any way? If so, how?
5	How do you think the program may contribute to supporting your career?
6	What was the best piece of practical advice you received as a result of your participation?
7	In what ways has the program enhanced your own mentorship capabilities?
8	Which aspects of the program did you enjoy the most?
9	In your experience, which suggestions do you have to improve the program?
10	Would you recommend this program to your colleagues?
	Additional questions for mentee groups:
	The University currently offers Researcher Development Grants including Women's Fellowships, ECR Fellowships, Career Interruption Grants and DAP/APA Support.
	Are you aware of any grants offered by other Universities (or even outside of the University sector) that provide different ways to support women in their research?
	Are there any schemes that you think are particularly effective and should be offered at Western?

Appendix 3 Revised Longitudinal Survey

This survey revised following feedback and discussion with Professor Kerry Robinson, Professor Kate Huppatz and Dr Peter Bansel as well as questions added from a survey developed for female academics levels A-C.

Blue highlighted: changes made based on reference group feedback

Yellow highlighted: changes/additions from 'academic women A-C' survey.

The EPIC Collaboration - Longitudinal Survey

Start of Block: Demographics

Q1 What was your sex recorded at birth?

○ Male

○ Female

○ Non-binary sex

○ Not stated

Q2 How do you describe your gender? [Gender refers to current gender, which may be different to sex recorded at birth and may be different to what is indicated on legal documents.]

- ○ Woman or female
- ○ Man or male
- ○ Non-binary
- ○ I use a different term (please specify) _____
- ○ Prefer not to answer

Q3 What is your sexuality? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ Straight (heterosexual)
- ☐ Gay
- ☐ Lesbian
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Pansexual
- ☐ Asexual
- ☐ Queer
- ☐ I use a different term (please specify) _____
- ☐ Don't know / questioning
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

Q4 What is your age group?

○ Under 25

○ 23 - 35

○ 36 - 45

○ 46 - 55

○ 55 - 65

○ >66

○ Prefer not to say

Q5 Do you identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Prefer not to say

Q6 Do you identify as of a culturally or linguistically diverse (CALD) background? [CALD people may identify solely as Australian, identify solely as another culture, or identify with multiple cultural identities.]

○ Yes

○ No

○ Prefer not to say

Q7 Do you have a disability or chronic medical condition?

○ Yes, requiring workplace adjustment

○ Yes, but not requiring workplace adjustment

○ No

○ Prefer not to say

Q8 Please indicate your parent and/or carer status (select all that apply)

☐ I am not a parent or carer

☐ Parent for pre-school child(ren)

☐ Parent for primary school-aged child(ren)

☐ Parent for secondary school-aged child(ren)

☐ Carer (e.g. for elderly person(s), or person(s) with a chronic medical condition or disability)

☐ Carer for person(s) not described above

☐ Other (Please specify)

☐ Prefer not to say

Q9 Please select your School or Institute

○ School of Business

○ School of Education

○ School of Engineering, Design and Built Environment

○ School of Health Sciences

○ School of Humanities and Communication Arts

○ School of Law

○ School of Medicine

○ School of Nursing and Midwifery

○ School of Psychology

○ School of Science

○ School of Social Sciences

○ Graduate Research School

○ Australia-China Institute for Arts and Culture

○ Hawkesbury Institute for the Environment

○ Institute for Culture and Society

○ NICM Health Research Institute

○ The MARCS Institute

○ Translational Health Research Institute

Q10 What is your current academic level:

○ A

○ B

○ C

○ D

Q11 Is your current employment:

○ Permanent full time

○ Permanent part time

○ Fixed term full time

○ Fixed term part time

Q12 Have you received mentoring in the past 5 years? Please select the most relevant response.

○ No, I have not been mentored in the last 5 years

○ Yes, I have been mentored as part of a formal mentoring program

○ Yes, I have been mentored but not as part of a formal mentoring program

○ Yes, I have been mentored both informally and as part of a formal mentoring program

End of Block: Demographics

Q13 The following statements concern wellbeing and work/life balance. Please enter the most suitable response for each question. If you have additional thoughts to share, please note that there will be an opportunity for this at the end of the survey.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My work relationships/friendships are supportive and rewarding	○	○	○	○	○
I prioritise my personal needs over my work requirements	○	○	○	○	○
I often reflect on my career achievements	○	○	○	○	○
I aim to make improvements in my life, including work-related changes	○	○	○	○	○
My current workload is reasonable	○	○	○	○	○
I balance home and work responsibilities well	○	○	○	○	○
I am able to keep my work stress at an acceptable level	○	○	○	○	○

Barriers and Facilitators to Academic Promotion

Q14 The following statements aim to elicit your views on barriers and facilitators to academic promotion. Please enter the most suitable response for each question. If you have any additional thoughts to share, please note that there will be an opportunity for this at the end of the survey.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have a clear understanding of what is required of me during the process of applying for promotion	○	○	○	○	○
Collaboration in teaching and research is encouraged among my colleagues	○	○	○	○	○
Gaining promotion and additional responsibilities would make me enjoy my job less	○	○	○	○	○
I have access to a mentor who could support an application for promotion	○	○	○	○	○
I have a colleague who I consider to be a sponsor or advocate for me	○	○	○	○	○
I have a clear understanding of the threshold of achievement required for me to be promoted to the next level	○	○	○	○	○
My career aspirations are achievable	○	○	○	○	○
I am offered sufficient support for my career development at the University	○	○	○	○	○

Q15 If applicable, when was your last promotion at Western Sydney University?

○ Within the last 12 months

○ 1-2 years ago

○ 3-4 years ago

○ 4+ years ago

Q16 When are you planning to apply for promotion?

○ I have recently applied for promotion

○ Within the next 12 months.

○ Within 1-3 years.

○ Within 4-5 years.

○ I anticipate that it will be 5+ years before I apply for promotion

○ I don't plan to apply for promotion

○ I am uncertain about when I will apply for promotion

○ Other _____

Q17 Which of the following do you consider to be barriers to you applying for promotion? Please select all that apply. If none of these apply to you, you can indicate different barriers ('other') or select the final option.

- [ ] I am on a fixed-term contract.

- [ ] It is difficult to dedicate the time required to prepare the application.

- [ ] I need assistance developing my narrative

- [ ] I need help to assemble my CV and documentation

- [ ] I don't feel adequately prepared to apply for promotion.

- [ ] I need stronger governance experience

- [ ] I do not feel my research profile is competitive

- [ ] I do not feel my teaching portfolio is strong enough

- [ ] There is a lack of career mentorship.

- [ ] There is a lack of support from my supervisor(s).

- [ ] My Dean does not support my application

- [ ] I have a complex or non-traditional track record/professional history

- [ ] Ongoing COVID-19 related challenges.

- [ ] Other _____

- [ ] None of these apply to me

Q18 Which of the following reasons/beliefs, if any, affect your motivation to apply for promotion?

☐   I do not want or am hesitant to take on additional work responsibilities.

☐   I don't want to go through the process of applying for promotion.

☐   I value my work/life balance at the moment.

☐   I prefer and am comfortable in my current role.

☐   The additional responsibilities associated with gaining promotion would compromise my ability to balance my home/family duties.

☐   I have had an unsuccessful application in a previous round.

☐   I believe that part-time workers are not supported/encouraged to apply for promotion.

☐   The promotions process is intimidating.

☐   I don't feel confident or struggle with imposter syndrome when I think about applying for promotion

☐   I fear being unsuccessful in my promotion application

☐   Other _____

Q19 Which of the following, if any, do you consider to be primary motivations for you to apply for promotion? Please select up to 3 key motivators.

☐   I would like to gain recognition for the work I have been doing/ impact I have had

☐   I see people around me getting promoted and it encourages/inspires me to apply

☐   I have ambitions of reaching a particular academic level

☐   I am driven to get promoted to increase the number of women at higher levels in the University

☐   I am spurred on to apply for promotion because I want to be a role model for others

☐   I am motivated by the financial gain that comes with promotion

☐   I would like the opportunity to take on more leadership roles or responsibilities

☐   Other _____

Page Break ——————————————————————————————

Q20 In your view, are there any additional barriers or facilitators to applying for promotion, or do you have any other thoughts you would like to share?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

End of Block: Barriers & Facilitators to Academic Promotion

Start of Block: EPIC-C

Development opportunities

Q21 The Researcher Development Awards currently include the following. Which of these were you were previously aware of, and which have you previously applied for? Where relevant, please indicate whether you were successful in your application. Tick all that apply More information here: https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/research/researchers/researcher_development/researcher_development_awards2

	Aware of (1)	Applied (2)	Successful (3)
ECR Fellowships ($15k) (1)	☐	☐	☐
Women's Fellowships ($30k) (2)	☐	☐	☐
Career Interruption ($10k) (3)	☐	☐	☐
APA/DAP Support ($10k) (4)	☐	☐	☐

	Did not participate (1)	1 - Would not recommend (2)	2 (3)	3 (4)	4 (5)	5 - Would highly recommend (6)
Academic Mentoring Program (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Inspire Leadership Program (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Academic Development Program (ADP) (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○
School-based mentoring (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○
Other (please state) (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○

_____

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

○ Not applicable (3)

What are the key barriers/challenges you have experienced and to what extent have they affected the development of your research portfolio?

	Not applicable to me (1)	Not affected (2)	Somewhat affected (3)	Strongly Affected (4)
Parent and/or carer responsibilities	○	○	○	○
Career disruptions (e.g. parental leave)	○	○	○	○
Access to a mentor	○	○	○	○
Lack of sponsorship from senior colleagues	○	○	○	○
Teaching load	○	○	○	○
Time spent performing governance roles	○	○	○	○
Access to training or leadership development	○	○	○	○
Capacity or support to attend conferences	○	○	○	○
Difficulty securing research funding	○	○	○	○
Providing pastoral care for students and/or staff	○	○	○	○
Lack of clarity around your research direction/focus	○	○	○	○
Employment status (e.g. history of casual or fixed term contracts, lack of ongoing position)	○	○	○	○

Q26 Are you aware of researcher development grants/awards at other universities (or outside of the sector) that provide support to women? If so, please comment on how useful this type of support is and why?

Q27 Do you have any additional comments you would like to make regarding wellbeing and work/life balance, academic promotion or development opportunities?

_____

Q28 Have you previously participated in the EPIC-C (Executive and Peer Intervention for Career Development – Piloting a combined peer and executive mentor support program for women at Western) mentorship program?

○ Yes, as a MENTEE

○ Yes, as a MENTOR

○ Yes, as an EXECUTIVE MENTOR

○ No

Q29 What year did you participate in the program?

_____

End of Block: EPIC-C

Start of Block: EOI Form

Q30 Would you be interested in participating in an executive and peer-mentoring program aimed at supporting people who self-identify as women or non-binary people to apply for academic promotion?

○ Yes

○ No

○ I would like some further information before I decide.

Q31 Thank you for your interest and for taking the time to complete this survey. Please feel free to contact research assistant Joelle Metri j.metri@westernsydney.edu.au for further information about the program.

If any of the topics or questions in this survey have raised any concerns for you, please consider seeking support via the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP can be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Emergency support can be accessed via 1800 81 87 28

Q32 If you are not interested in participating, please indicate why below.

○ I don't have time to participate.

○ I'm not interested in seeking promotion.

○ I don't think it would help me.

○ My School or Institute already provides a mentoring program.

○ I don't think I meet the inclusion criteria.

○ Other _____

Thank you again for your interest in our peer and executive mentoring strategy. Below is a link to the program's Expression of Interest form. We look forward to hearing from you.

If any of the topics or questions in this survey have raised any concerns for you, please consider seeking support via the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). The EAP can be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Emergency support can be accessed via 1800 81 87 28

End of Block: EOI Form