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Vice-Chancellor's **GENDER EQUALITY FUND** **Final Report 2017**

**Exploring Barriers and Facilitators to
Seeking Promotion: Level C and Above
Academics and Level B to Level C Academics**

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Exploring barriers and facilitators to seeking promotion: Level C and above academics and Level B to Level C academics

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Aim

The aim of this VC Equity Grant project was to explore barriers and facilitators, as perceived by academics (who are women) employed at Western Sydney University, who are, or have considered, applying for an academic promotion to Level C and above. This project focused on Level C and above academics and Level B academics who are currently employed in ongoing positions.

The main research questions:

1. What are the barriers to applying for a promotion?
2. What facilitates applying for a promotion?

To explore these issues five focus groups were offered to academics who are women.

The aim of running the focus groups was to illicit responses to research questions regarding perceived barriers to applying/obtaining senior academic positions at WSU. A secondary aim was to determine what support might assist/ overcome obstacles identified.

Recruitment of participants

Following approval from the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee (approval number H12298) a request seeking interested academics was promoted on the E-update Daily News on two occasions. This resulted in over 100 emailed responses but limited numbers of women agreeing to participate. Posters inviting participation in focus groups were then hand delivered or emailed to professional staff on reception to schools at Parramatta and other campuses. Following an excellent response Information sheets and consent forms were emailed to interested staff.

Focus groups were undertaken at Parramatta 29th August and 27th September (one for Level B and one for Level C and above) and Campbelltown 20th September and 12th September (one for Level B and one for Level C and above). Unfortunately, no one turned up for the Kingswood Penrith Campus focus group (Level C and above) mainly because 12th September was a day of Industrial Action although apologies were received also indicating illness in staff and/or children.

Refreshments were provided for participants. Two recorders were used with the consent of participants and fact sheets distributed regarding access to counselling services that included the Employee Assistance Program and an external provider as requested by HREC. There was no concerns or emotional distress reported by participants regarding the focus groups although a couple of participants expressed exhaustion regarding workloads during the focus groups.

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Total attendee numbers – 12

There were 7 Level C and above and 5 Level B academic participants. Although the numbers of participants were lower than anticipated the focus groups were lively, vibrant and the data obtained was rich and has provided insights in response to the research questions asked.

The focus groups varied in time from 40 minutes to 1 hour and 36 minutes.

Demographics

A few demographic questions were asked including age of academic, whether participants had children and if yes how many aged under 18, how many years in academia, how many years at WSU and what discipline. Participants specifically requested they not be identified so I have only provided a summary here given the limited numbers of participants.

| Age | Children yes/no | No of children under 18 | How many years in academia | How many years at WSU? | What is your discipline? |
|--------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 30- 59 years | 8 yes 7 no | 5 with children <18 years of age | 2 years – 30+ years | <1 to 30 years | 5 STEM; 7 Non-STEM |

Analysis of data

The research process was undertaken using a narrative inquiry framework with thematic analysis utilised to identify themes. A narrative inquiry approach formed the framework for information collection and interpretation of data in this project. Data was read and re-read several times with initial coding then final themes determined. NVivo 11 was used to assist with data management and provided visual representation of the themes. Cross-checking of themes was undertaken by Virginia Skinner who will also be a co-author in future publications.

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A summary of findings was emailed to each participant who requested this.

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The themes overlapped for both Level B and Level C and above although there were some differences that are noted when applicable.

Summary of the findings:

Participants were asked to identify what they saw as being a successful career at the beginning of each focus group:

What is a successful career?

Responses from academics:

Several Level C and above academics stated they enjoyed their current role and that a successful career also meant they could contribute to others including the University. For Level C and above this also meant more autonomy and choices regarding where they could go in their career.

“I've worked hard to get to where I am and I think that I guess if you've got a positive goal and you work towards it I think you can achieve it basically. I'm pretty positive, and I think you've got support from your Dean as well...I think you have to have that support from your head of school.”

“Well I think there's a lot that I'd like to give back to the University and that's always been the way I've worked. I believe that we commit that to our professional - give back to our profession, that's part of what you do as an academic.”

Level C and above - “I think making an impact, making a difference is definitely important for me...To society or whatever your field is, whatever your area of interest is...To the stakeholders in your field. I'm not talking about policy or whatever it is.... But yeah, to people in society.”

Level C and above - “I think being able to work on the problems that you think are important in your field, which means to some extent being able to self-direct your research and your teaching areas...If you think that a particular part of your field is where the difference is to be made then you probably want to work in that area.”

Level C and above - “I think a lot of the more metric driven indicators of careers are about getting you to the point where you can do that [choose what research/teaching you want to do]. Basically the higher ranked you are the more likely you are to be able to choose the areas that you work on rather than being told by somebody else what you need to do. The more resources and income and grants and so you have the more possibilities there are for you to do the work that you think matters and so on.”

A successful career included being happy in the role. Positive things about academic employment included the flexibility of the role – this was identified by both Level B and Level C and above focus group participants.

“And definitely enjoying what I'm doing day to day is much more important than anything else.”

“So, the flexibility in the way you organise your day to day work is fantastic. There's no expectation that you have to arrive at nine and stay until five. You can organise your work schedule around what your family needs. On any of the rare occasions when I have to say to my supervisor, no I can't make that meeting because there's nobody else to pick up the children, there's not an eyelid battered. ...There's no, never any problem surrounding that. So that's fantastic.”

“...I stay in it. I am really satisfied with the job itself, but I guess there's room for movement.”

“Successful career. Thriving in your position. Allowing to develop. Your work supporting you, so that you can thrive and development... Having a good work/life balance, where you can still thrive. What's a successful career? Being able - feeling motivated that you can get to the next step, to the next level up. Yeah, having a balance. The three areas that we have to focus on, governance, teaching and research, having a good spread and actually making a difference in all of those areas...”

Barriers to promotion

The main themes as perceived by participants to be barriers to promotion ranked in order of importance as identified by coding/thematic analysis:

1. Current workloads and huge expectations leave no energy to apply for promotion
2. The multi-pronged promotion process
3. Lack of mentoring and collaborative nurturing
4. Gate-keepers to promotion
5. Not being valued, recognised or acknowledged for current roles.
6. Always juggling decision making: Work vs Children
7. Collegiality NOT Competition – current competitive nature of promotion including awards and promotion
8. Grooming the rock-star: Inconsistent and biased mentoring towards promotion;
9. Don't want to risk happiness in their current role (by going for promotion where they may have to work a lot more hours and may have to do roles they do not enjoy)



Tree Map demonstrating themes compared by number of comments coded.

1. Current workloads and huge expectations leave no energy to apply for promotion

Several participants said they had ‘reached their limit’ or were too burnt out to apply for promotion. There was a lack of financial incentive for promotion – this was not seen as being worth the effort to seek promotion.

“I sometimes sit and reflect, and I think am I interested in going further than where I am now? Do I actually have the capacity to do that? I feel like so much of me is already invested at this level. I just don't know that I have any more to give.”

“I suppose the other thing you would think of is it worth all that trouble for...whatever increment you're going to get.....financially? It's hardly much, so do I just stay as a level B?”

“...already I'm working 15 hours a week for free. Is it I become a senior lecturer and suddenly I'm working 30 hours a week...for free? So technically I'm actually taking a pay cut to have this position?”

Some participants said they have given all they have to the current role and have nothing left to give to apply for promotion.

“I think that expectation is there, that if you're going to keep your job, if you're going to get the next job then you have to be working all the hours that god gives you...sacrifice your life essentially.”

“The metrics that the managers are working to in terms of workloads, productivity, promotion criteria, whatever are unrealistic...We cop it... The only way to meet that expectation and excel in all areas is to work a 70-hour week for however many years.”

“I work - I make sure I don't work more than a 50-hour week otherwise I get health consequences. Lately I've tried to keep it to about 45. The things that are always going to not happen are going to be applying for an award, writing up the papers, I just get my core business done and try to get little bits of other things done.”

“I'm probably - I'm not 70 every week, but I'm - you know, 60, 70. But when you go to those promotion information days and they sit there...and go, well, everyone knows you don't get promoted on a 35-hour week...”

“I think the major thing is your workload and timing allocation that prevents you from success or applying for promotion and going forward, because you've got the teaching, then you've got the marking, then there's no time to do the grants and the writing.”

“Level of stress, anxiety and the number of hours required to work like a balance in life. Maybe I'm just not ambitious enough. I want to do a great job and I want to move forward but...”

“I have no idea how to get from where I am to where they are because it seems impossible to get ahead and the competition that we're facing now as early career researchers, establishing a track record, all the metrics that go with it, it seems almost impossible. It's really daunting, to put it plainly.”

“You never catch up...You've never done enough. You've never submitted enough grant applications. You've never written enough journal articles. You haven't done enough research. You haven't got - and it's - you are never meeting the expectations that people have of you. That's how I feel. I feel like I am so behind...”

2. The multi-pronged promotion process

Most academics considered the promotion process to be onerous, unclear and somewhat open to interpretation. Several academics said they would need to step out of their current role that they are good at to do things the University considers more important towards promotion.

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Academics did not always feel they were acknowledged for the value and the effort they put into their current roles. To be acknowledged they must leave what they are good at and perform in roles the University considers worth a promotion.

Level C and above – “Not worth it [promotion]... Now that doesn't mean I'm not open to it, it doesn't mean that I can't, but I know it says for [more senior promotion] and what I would need to do to get that. At the moment ...I couldn't even keep reading the document. I would need to completely change - I would need to step down from being [in governance role] for starters and I know that but that's what I happen to be good at. It turns out that's what I'm very good at. This is where I'm making my huge impact. I've transformed a program...I would need - I've sort of - it's hard to think no this is what I'm really good at and I really value it. To be promoted I actually to leave that and do some other things that the University regards as important...”

“I just went for a promotion and put in X amount of extra hours to get there. I've just done it myself and I know how much time it took. I think it was more time than I've ever put on any grant or any other application...just for the paperwork.”

Level C – “when I was asking for promotion I had in my head a very set understanding of what I required to get promoted. I don't think that's the case anymore, I think there's a very - and for good things and for bad things there's been a broadening of what's acceptable... people say well they did this and they got through and I did that and I didn't get through, I don't understand. I think there's not the clarity that there might have been in years gone by...”

The requirements for the promotion process and the need to meet 3 levels of achievement – this was reported to be difficult to achieve;

“I think the promotion process and selection criteria is a barrier...Previously you had to show certain levels of achievement across at least two of the three criteria. Now, they want a well-rounded academic. However, we are a teaching focused university, but they will still in the back of their heads always put the focus on...on your research productivity...Then when they question your research productivity and you say it's because I've been doing all this teaching...it's, well, the teaching can take care of itself now. You should be research. But in what hour of what day...would you like me to do that?”

“Those administrative or those governance positions...you take them on to help to support your application for promotion for governance, yet they suck so much time out of your life that everything, teaching, research, relationships, gets put on the backburner, because the job descriptions are eight pages...Then you can't apply for anything else...”

Level C and above – “As I say I for whatever reason it [promotion] just overwhelms me at the moment and it stresses me and so I'm burned out and I'll take a break. At the moment it just

doesn't feel - the friends who have tried to tick all the boxes and move forward they're not sure it was worth it for their levels of stress.”

3. Lack of mentoring and collaborative nurturing

Participants said it was difficult to get out and find collaborative partners to undertake research and said more needed to be done in order to assist this process. Participants identified the need for women academics to support each other in a collaborative and supportive way. They also recognised there was a place for mentors that assist in providing support for the promotion process.

Some Level C and above academics acknowledged how they provide help to less senior colleagues in applying for promotions and the components of promotion such as Awards in a collaborative manner.

“I always do it in a collaborative way because I know I want to help a lot of people I want to be involved in lots of people's career progression. What I do is I opt people in, I pull other people in and go you help with this and you help with that and not only do it for one person, actually a range of people because I know I've only got that much energy and that much time.”

Participants said that we are not helping each other, not supporting each other as women academics – not offering ‘collaborative nurturing’.

“Actually, I think that's a barrier as well. That we're not...Helping each other...We're not supporting each other...through that process...You can't do it on your own...like, now, doing the application - yeah...There's no support, no motivation from others.”

Level C and above – “I think the university needs to start thinking about ways to incentivise that sort of collaborative nurturing.”

Several academics identified the need for promotion specific mentoring programs to assist academics who are women apply for promotion – this includes the provision of guidance and support in doing what it takes for promotion as well as the actual application process.

“I think with the promotion thing, we do have mentoring programs in the university, but there probably could be a promotion focused one where it's people that are genuinely going to help you through the promotion application. Not people that are happy to meet you and give you the advice of you're not ready, but someone that will sit down and properly work with you to get a strong application together. So like my friends that I'm talking about, they would be great on that program.”

“Perhaps if there's a better system of a mentoring strategy.... There could be a specific promotion mentoring.”

“Apparently there's another classification of helpers called the sponsor I was told. So you have mentors....and then apparently people can also act as your sponsor...So their roles are slightly different, but ultimately they are someone that assists you through your goals and helps you to achieve...”

“I would be just happy having a culture that encouraged rather than...put down...because there are definitely more people that said to me, no, don't apply for it yet. Hold back and a lot of them, as I said, were female...”

“Maybe they need to consider each person on an individual basis and then decide who they can connect them within a team to collaborate. I know they had the speed mentoring session... ..thing. I was never a part of it, but I don't know if that worked. I don't know where it is at.”

Level C and above – “There's the mentoring program, which the university runs, which is really beneficial and that's really what helped me to be confident enough to go for a promotion because I would go and talk to my mentor who would look at what I've got and go, are you mad? Of course, you should go.”

Level C and above – “So it's almost like we need that community of women, a community of women that are there to support other women because only other women can relate to what you've just said and go, oh my god, I can absolutely imagine how that would be, to be blocked out when you're the person leading this thing. So that sort of feels like that's a thing that's needed for academics, is other women to support each other.”

Level C and above – “So it needs to be particular type of mentor who's actually interested in nurturing the ones coming up....and not protective of their territory.”

4. Gate-keepers to promotion

Several academics felt that the Dean and /or their Supervisor acted as gatekeepers to promotion by not supporting them in applying for promotion and preventing them from succeeding or refusing to sign off their applications.

“...when you apply for your promotions or whatever, you can be told you're not good enough. Not for the right reasons, but just - so it just depends on - I don't know whether there's power in relationships, but I think that can be a barrier as well, is where you're not liked by the Dean, so, no, you're not going to get that senior lecturer position, because you stood up and spoke for workload ...”

“...I think standing up for your rights can also be an obstacle...If I stand up, I'm not going to be liked, so I'm not going to get that promotion, whereas if I take it lying down, I'm stressing myself out and that's another ...vicious cycle.”

“...there's no benefit to me applying within the university, within the school. The Dean won't allow it anyway, because I tried. I consulted and [Dean] said, no, ... wouldn't even consider it. Another academic in our school did it without consultation. They gave it to interview and she got absolutely torn apart...”

“...our SFTs and your SFUs essentially now get attached to the promotion when you submit, but it - every year we have to do our Compass review. Again, it depends on... the relationship you have with your supervisor, so if you have a great relationship and you're doing well otherwise, they're not even going to look at that...students are students...But if you've already got a negative relationship with the person who's your manager, then, yes, they will look at that and go, well, this student has said that you're not pulling your weight...so it will be, I think, very manager dependent and that will depend on the relationship that you have.”

Academics stated that the Dean was not always aware of what academic staff are doing and there was a lack of recognition even when the academic demonstrated to the Dean what they have achieved. The Dean and/or your supervision must approve promotion applications - seen by Level B and Level C and above as one person making that decision which is not always based on the qualifications and/or experience you have but whether you are on their radar for promotion ...or not. Sometimes academics reported that they have more experience and qualifications than another academic who gets the promotion but there is no support for you to be promoted.

“I said, look, I was planning on going up for promotion this year and [she/he] expressed horror and surprise and was like, you can't possibly be ready for that. You can't be going up to level [academic level]. That doesn't make any sense. But then when [Dean] did my performance review and looked at my CV [Dean] was like, oh my god, I'm so sorry, you are absolutely ready for level [higher academic level]. In fact, you fit all the criteria for level [higher level than that wanting to apply for] – sorry...you fit all the criteria for level [senior academic level] already. There's no chance that I wouldn't support you. You should go for promotion.”

“ [Dean] said, look, you do tick all the boxes but I just have a gut feeling that maybe you're not ready.”

“It seems so unfair that it's down to one person, and really to go for promotion you need that person's support.” [talking about lack of support from Dean]

“It's about whether you're ready. But the thing, the flaw here is that it's that one person. One person is giving you that feedback and you can go away from that meeting feeling quite demoralised and feeling like, what was I thinking? Maybe I'm not ready. Until you see the other person's [application for promotion] and then you go, well, hang on. “

Level C and above – “...my manager said to me, well, obviously the bar is a lot higher than we had realised. You will need to figure out what you need to work on for next year. Then when I

looked at [other person approved to apply for promotion] CV and realised that I was already exceeding that in every way I thought, well, it's not about that.'

"...That's another negative thing I think, is that people can be hand picking the people that they want to push and then other people who have got similar abilities, if they don't - it can be a discipline thing sometimes, if they're not in the discipline that they want to push."

"I had this conversation with the Dean about promotion. So I wanted to go up for promotion this year and so I met with the Dean to ask if [she/he] would support me in that and [she/ he] basically said no."

5. Not being valued, recognised or acknowledged for current roles.

Several academics said that the expectations you will work at a higher level and not be remunerated for it were off-putting regarding applying for promotions. Academics said there was no acknowledgement of how hard they are currently working.

"Whether you're actually getting the promotions at the - I mean, the whole promotion process it's a bit ridiculous, isn't it? You should be tapped on the shoulder and said, hey, well done. You've done a great job, instead of having to already be working at the level that you're going for..."

"Just - sometimes I wish that our SFTs were actually read by someone who was in a position to give us that recognition... Who's actually reading them and going, you know what? This person is consistently doing an amazing job. They deserve some recognition."

"I mean, even the school awards were – developed their own award..., because everyone was complaining about the university ones, where you had to tap yourself on the shoulder and write your own award and this one was going to be different, because you got nominated by someone. No, you don't...You get nominated by someone and then they say, but here's the application...You write it...You write it yourself...I'll just sign it, so it's exactly the same thing. I just feel like the pressure...it shouldn't be up to us to keep going, 'Hey I'm doing a great job over here'."

What does recognition mean; "Recognition by your peers, by your juniors, senior staff really, your management. I think that's what we came to in terms of recognition for your achievements for the quality work you contribute, the quantity of what you contribute, the broad base everything. Right? Recognition of your professional investment in the institution or in the profession whatever it is."

"It's about how well you are valued. Even you could be the tea lady and if you did a great job and people valued what you did you'd be happy doing that."

“I'd say that you do it for the recognition, that's one of the things, to be respected by your peers. I do not believe that in this institution that they value their [senior staff] at all. You might get listened to when it suits them, not because you have a voice and you've got experience.”

“I can honestly tell you that I get more respect when I go overseas than I do here.”

“I don't care where you are in the pecking order; I don't think any of us feel valued.”

“We are a cog in a machine and if tomorrow we break down they'll get another cog in to fix it. There's no - value is one word but it's probably not the right word. “

“That intrinsic feeling of worth, that what you do is valued, is felt as though as if it's a contribution to the University and they see that that's a good thing. Whereas I don't think I might - I do work 12-hour days and it's just always well why can't you do this, we need this done. We need that stat. It's like what is it and I've just worked seven days straight like this.”

“...that's what is breaking people. I've got a colleague this morning on the phone in tears because she didn't win an award.... It stood out how much she needed that. ...she obviously needed to hear that all of her weekends meant. She's obviously needing something back and she's not getting it. I feel like what I do is valued, it's just not enough, that's how I feel.”

Level C and above “I feel like that's almost what's become a bit lost with the people that I speak to, that the culture of not enough is on their shoulders every day, that they can't just walk into their work and go I'm valued, I'm doing a great job. Every one of them ... [their school] they feel like they're not doing enough.”

6. Always juggling decision making: Work vs Children

Some academics found it difficult to juggle both work and children and perceived they were disadvantaged and unable to meet the criteria for promotion.

“Barriers to career progression include “the natural challenges of juggling motherhood with working. Even in terms of things that look good on the CV like international conferences and doing fellowships at international universities or all kinds of international travel, even domestic conferences are a challenge. Any type of conference involvement is a challenge for me, but particularly international.”

If an academic takes children to a conference, then she still needs to find and pay for childcare and pay for transport - very expensive for international conferences but need to go to these for collaboration in order to aid promotion.

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Re decision making whether to take children to international conferences or not: "...do I take them and fork out money or do I leave them and put stress on them or do I not go and miss the opportunity towards career progression."

Academics who have worked elsewhere reported that some employers pay a 'per diem' or set amount for academics to attend conferences rather than the current 'over scrutinized' system where it is very time consuming and difficult to obtain refunds - the per diem amount can then be used to subsidise costs of taking children to conferences. Academics do not expect WSU to pay the full costs but having an amount towards to cost of taking children would really assist.

"You're not spending any more than other people would. But you end up going to the supermarket and cooking your meals as opposed to eating out. Which is what you would do if you were on your own."

Some participants really struggled juggling work and minding children and it was perceived the University provided no leeway for women who have children and want to meet the promotion criteria ...

"I had my [child] super sick a couple of weeks ago and I was literally - he was in bed, massive fevers, waking up, you know, Mummy, Mummy, Mummy, and I'm literally sitting on the bed all day with my laptop, because I couldn't actually afford to take a day of carer's leave..."

"Mum, are you ever going to get off that computer? What does Mum do? Mum just sits at a computer all the time."

"I think the attitude that that [to have a child] was a decision that we consciously made and therefore we should deal with it and find a way to overcome it ourselves, I think we need to get out of that mentality."

WSU does not have adequate childcare for staff – there is the perception that students are given priority over staff for childcare places at WSU.

"Two weeks of school holidays in the middle of teaching semester."

"Yeah. It's an absolute nightmare. "

"Yeah. Where are the school holiday programs being run on campus, so that we can bring them to work..."

Yeah, that's a good point...and know that they're having an adventure on the day and that we're contactable..."

For some academics' children facilitated their application for promotion to obtain the additional income:

“...I'm happy being in academia. I wouldn't be happy being a full-time clinician. But then I feel the pressure then to make it worthwhile, if you know what I mean. So if I stayed at the level I'm at it's not going to be worthwhile. I've got to provide for my family.”

7. Collegiality NOT Competition – current competitive nature of promotion including awards and promotion

There was a strong perception that the current promotion process encourages competition rather than working together to achieve mutual goals. This included the promotion process as well as collaborating on research and publications.

“Unfortunately, there are people that try and - not block you necessarily, but there's people that aren't always supportive to help you with that progression as well, be that for various different reasons. It might be because their workload is slammed and they're thinking, well, why should you get to progress, if I can't with what I'm doing? So there is a bit of that...”

“So in terms of what would be needed, I think it really comes down to the culture within your school... We say hi and we're, on the face of it going, yeah, let's work together, but when push comes to shove, we're so close to our - keep everything close to our chest. We do not want to share and we do not seem to want to go out of our way to help each other to make these milestones. Why aren't we all helping each other out? I'll take your classes. I'll help you with marking. I'll help you with this? Because then the person that you help then get - essentially gets freed up to come back and pay it forward and help someone else. We're all so worried about what everyone else is doing that's better than what we're doing that we should be...”

Level C and above –“ So there's very little incentive to cross-collaborate, so it's hard to - if you belong to one theme it's like, I need to put all my efforts into this theme because my manager is in this theme and they want me to work in this theme and if I'm doing some work in another theme it doesn't count to this and so there's all these silos....This university loves this divide and conquer thing, right. Getting everyone competing... They're all competing against each other for resources, which totally 'dis-incentives' collaboration.”

8. Grooming the rock-star: Inconsistent and biased mentoring towards promotion;

There was a perception by several academics that some staff are more valued than other staff and are given additional support and opportunities for both School and University Awards and promotions. Some academics suggested that the Dean/supervisor decided who would be supported for promotion and everyone else was refused the opportunity even if that Academic felt they had the same or better qualifications that the person promoted.

There were also several comments regarding favouritism and being groomed for the Awards and the Promotions processes – some academics were being mentored and assisted while others doing their work are getting ignored and they reported there is little incentive to bother applying for rewards or promotion.

“I know that relationships can be barriers, because obviously if you're not best mates or not liked, because you stood up for something that was going to happen and you didn't like it and you talked against it, then you can be victimised...”

[Re promotion] ...” It was just sort of like, what's your hurry? The thing was - so [she/he] said, look, I'm going to support - I'm supporting somebody else this year. We'll see how [she/he] goes and then we'll see what happens with you next year....”

“I think this is the very thing that is a barrier - that's the worst part about talking to someone about whether you should go for promotion. That person has decided they're supporting someone and so anyone that comes to them after that, well, I'm already supporting this one, and it's not about that, it's not about that.”

“The other topic that comes up ...quite a bit is little cliques of rock stars who seem to have tremendous levels of support and recognition and they're almost being groomed by senior staff... I can watch this happening in front of my eyes. Some of it is exciting and motivating and some of it's really having a terrible effect on everyone else's motivation because they feel like there are these favourites, they feel like there's these rock stars. Now, you've always had the academic rock stars and the issues that go hand-in-hand with that. At the moment it feels like there's a couple of little cliques and I call them cliques because they don't really want to work with anyone else.”

“ [re some academics being mentored for promotion] ...it's just added another level to already feeling like not valued et cetera. It's like a bit of a slap in the face that there's just this constant success. They're the people basically being mentored directly by above.”

9. Don't want to risk happiness in their current role

Some academics did not want to take the risk of applying for a promotion and then not enjoy their career any more. Remaining happy in their career was more important than applying for more senior roles.

“I think a successful career is one where you're happy. That's really important to me. I don't have that goal to - I've got to be a professor to be successful in my career. I just have to be doing work that I'm really committed to, passionate about and feel happy. “

“...I don't want to be pushing myself to the point where I hate everything that I'm doing. I want to enjoy everything that I'm doing and just be going at a pace that feels comfortable.”

“Look, it would be great to progress through the levels. But, more important to me is that I'm enjoying what I'm doing. I do see often that when people go up to higher levels they get more administrative responsibilities and are perhaps less able to be quite so hands on with research

and things like that. So I absolutely love the situation that I'm in at the moment where I can be very hands on with research. So yeah, put it this way I wouldn't want to sacrifice job satisfaction or enjoying what I'm doing on a daily basis simply for the level, the rank."

"But I think what I want to do is to be at that point where I think, okay, enough is enough. I really am going to stop. I can't do this. It's got to the point where I'm not happy, because I'm not unhappy. I'm just like ugh."

Minor theme – Bias is alive and well

This theme needs to be noted as historically this has been an issue for women and should not still be occurring:

Bias - [re not being supported for promotion because of being a woman and having a CALD background]"I think unconscious bias is definitely alive and well... Yeah, and that's sort of stuff that you can talk to people about but no one can actually know what that's like or even maybe other people wouldn't even notice that that's happening. It's only when you're on the receiving end of that that you can - and it's almost invisible then because you're the only person experiencing it, isn't it?"

"I had a [name of] project... that was quite a big deal, it was shown [place] and so on and I worked on it with a guy who I hired [title] and every time we two are in the room talking to people about it - it's my project, I got the funding for it, I designed it...he did some of the later design and tweaked some of the [work]...They talked to him....But when we were in the room they talked to him about it, even though they know that's the background."

Facilitators for promotion

- as identified by research participants:

There were some good supervisors, Deans and mentors who provided support and encouragement to academics to apply for promotion.

Level C and above acknowledged their role including mentoring and supervising less senior academic staff in the promotion process. They also acknowledged feeling more valued generally than less senior academics.

Possible options for improving opportunities for women to be promoted:

Encourage more collegiality rather than competition – working together in schools to assist each other apply for promotion.

Enhancing the culture of the University and the Schools for Collegiality not competition, the need for collaboration and mentoring for women seeking promotion, managers to be trained as leaders.

Mentoring programs specifically providing support and assistance for women who wish to seek promotion should be available. Current mentoring programs available need to be enhanced and better advertised and targeted for women seeking promotion.

“I think with the promotion thing, we do have mentoring programs in the university, but there probably could be a promotion focused one where it's people that are genuinely going to help you through the promotion application. Not people that are happy to meet you and give you the advice of you're not ready, but someone that will sit down and properly work with you to get a strong application together...”

Level C and above focus group participants suggested the administrative/governance roles taken on by academics to enhance career promotion should be rotated. This would assist with promotion and succession planning and alleviate some academics being stuck in roles they did not enjoy or for some staff who refuse to leave specific roles.

“The thing is too that in our university we do not follow the same sort of pathways that other universities do where it is somebody's job - like if you're at senior level you can expect to be Dean or Head of the School for a two-year stint, that's - or a year. That is expected and it is well and truly - it's in the rules and regulations. You know you're doing it for a year and after a year you're going to give it up, you're not going to be trapped in that role.”

“When they're talking about exactly that, that it is a rotating, like two-years term and that's it. You know you can't - whilst people here I think that security of sometimes they [are known] so they actually hold that role and refuse to give it up or else it becomes a poisoned chalice that senior staff who are in a more autonomous role refuse to take it. If you know that it is rotating... Then you're going to have your turn...If everyone knows that's the fair way it goes.”

Enhanced support for women academics who have children specifically with increased childcare services and additional income or a 'per diem' set amount for women in academia who want to attend conferences with their children.

Enhancing the clarity for the promotion process and ensuring that all academics are provided with support and assistance by their Dean and/or Supervisor to apply for promotion. This process needs to be audited to ensure there is equity and no bias in decision making regarding who is ready for promotion.

Outputs/Impact

The data transcription was delayed by the transcribing company (Pacific Transcription) so analysis could not be undertaken until November 2017.

Being new to WSU I found meeting academic staff on different campuses in different fields a wonderful opportunity for future collaborative projects.

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The opportunities provided by the focus groups cannot be measured however participants expressed the need for additional forums to discuss issues regarding promotion and said that the focus groups were beneficial.

2018 - A publication will be written utilising the literature with Virginia Skinner as co-author. Findings from the current literature will be sought and compared to findings in this research project.

2018 - A presentation to the Dean will be undertaken and a presentation to a relevant conference

There are potential opportunities for future collaboration and research regarding findings from this research.

Limitations

The participation rate in focus groups was lower than expected. This was for several reasons provided by academics including Industrial action, childcare issues, sick children, illness in academics, 'busy'.

Only academics who were women were invited to participate. Separate focus groups for men could not be undertaken given the time and financial constraints.

Five focus groups were offered on the three main campuses face to face only due to time and financial constraints. Zoom and telephone interviews were not offered, although they were requested by several staff. Unfortunately, there were not enough participants to identify differences between the STEM and non-STEM areas regarding barriers and facilitators to applying/obtaining promotions.

The Future

Possible options include updated policies regarding the process of promotion to ensure there is no bias toward some academic staff members and that the process is clear and transparent. The current work of academics who are women needs to be acknowledged not just when they receive awards or promotions.

I will apply for future grant opportunities should they arise that are relevant to the findings in this research. This may include extending the scope of the seeding grant to include interviews with successful senior academics and professional staff across other schools and at other Universities in addition to senior management staff in the private sector. Comparisons across the sectors can then be explored providing further opportunities to enhance our knowledge regarding barriers and facilitators to promotion to more senior positions for staff who are academics or professional staff members.

A mixed method research project that includes all academics including women, men and transgender to explore additional reasons why academics do or do not seek promotion in

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academia is a further option for future research. This could include a Quantitative survey asking all academic staff for possible reasons in a ranked order why they are not seeking promotion (for example Likert scale – based on findings from this project rank in order from 1 main reason to 5 not important reasons why you have not sought promotion) and add a section for open ended comments after each quantitative question.

It would also be useful to collaborate and interview Deans/Supervisors to determine how they see their role as providing support to academics and if this is part of the probation process or if they see themselves as gatekeepers to promotion (as suggested by several participants in this current grant).

Future research would include collecting demographics i.e. gender, children, academic level, time in academia, area of expertise (STEM or non-STEM). Open ended question at the end “Is there anything else you would like to add?” Is there anything we missed?”

We would need to ensure confidentiality/anonymity was assured. This could also include ongoing and casual/contracted academics. Ideally there would be larger numbers of participants including STEM academics. Recruiting participants and using social media including Yammer and Facebook should attract higher numbers and offering zoom and/or telephone interviews would also increase the numbers of participants.