

Rolling Action Plan 2017-2018 (Version 2)

Introduction

The goal of the Universities Australia Executive Women Group (UAEW) is to address issues relating to gender diversity and the underrepresentation of women in senior executive positions in universities, both academic and professional. UAEW addresses this sector-wide priority through providing strategic advice and recommendations; by collecting, collating and sharing information and good practice; and sponsoring and/or commissioning targeted investigations in relation to the challenges and opportunities for executive women within the Australian university sector. UAEW also disseminates good practice resources and toolkits to complement university-level initiatives for women in leadership, particularly with respect to women in executive leadership roles or career paths.

Engagement and communication are achieved through: regular updates via Universities Australia newsletters and publications; events which target both executive and aspiring women; social media platforms, such as LinkedIn and YouTube, where UAEW activities are promoted, including the *Mentors to Many* program; and the UAEW webpage on the UA website.

Research has shown that there is no single factor leading to an underrepresentation of women in senior management, rather it is the combination of a multitude of small male advantages, both internal and external to the workplace (Barrett & Barrett, 2013).

Although the first UAEW Action Plan was produced in 1999, this iteration has been developed since 2016. Since then, in consultation with Universities Australia, a Rolling Action Plan has been developed to reflect progress and updated priorities. In 2017-18, UAEW's focus has been on addressing three priority areas which demonstrably correlate with gender inequalities in universities:

- 1) Unconscious bias;
- 2) Recruitment best practices; and
- 3) Mentoring and Sponsorship.

Outcomes of the action plan include the creation of best-practice guides for universities (goals 1 and 2) to assist in addressing these issues. Already completed are an unconscious bias guide and a recruitment best practice guideline. In development is a sponsorship guide (to be launched in late 2018). The development of the guides refers to evidence-based recommendations and have been/will be developed to support universities in achieving a more diverse and inclusive workforce, as well as harmonising with other equity and diversity initiatives, for example, The SAGE Pilot of Athena SWAN in Australia.

The third goal of the action plan is to encourage mentoring and sponsorship of executives. This is being achieved through the development of our *Mentors to Many* video vignettes, and the sponsorship guide (with input from the Advisory Group).

Goal 1: Overcoming Unconscious Bias

Goal:

To create and disseminate best practice recommendations for recognising and overcoming unconscious gender bias in universities; particularly unconscious bias occurring during senior leadership recruitment.

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Current situation:

Unconscious bias refers to a naturally occurring bias of which we are unaware, and is triggered by our brain making quick judgments and assessments of people and situations. It is influenced by our background, cultural environment and personal experiences (Equality Challenge Unit, 2013). In the workplace, unconscious bias influence self-perception, professional rapport/relationships, organisational culture and recruitment.

While it is not possible to eliminate unconscious or implicit bias in the workplace, it is possible to address unconscious bias. Measures can be taken to ensure the most appropriate employees are in each position, that employees are treated equitably, and that employees are provided the greatest opportunity to perform and develop (including in how employees are selected for mentoring and sponsorship).

Achievements to date (June 2018):

- Developed online resource kit, 'Unconscious Bias Guidelines'.
- Presented and disseminated 'Unconscious Bias Guidelines' to universities through networking events.
- UAEW website showcases the 'Unconscious Bias Guidelines', and the guidelines have been promoted through UAEW LinkedIn group and UA newsletter.

In development

- Unconscious bias awareness skills and knowledge chapter within the upcoming sponsorship guide.

Goal 2: Best Practice Recruitment Guidelines for Executive Appointments

Goal:

To create best-practice guidelines for ensuring gender diversity and equality recruitment in senior executive recruitment in universities.

Current situation:

Research indicates there is a disproportionate under-representation of females in senior executive positions in universities (Strachan *et al.*, 2016), and decision-making processes on appointment remain one of the greatest obstacles to gender equity at this level. In addition to unconscious bias training, other practical methods which can assist in removing bias from the recruitment process, are, for example, acknowledging career interruptions and alternative career paths for women; explicit recognition of talent and potential; and transparent/documented decision-making.

The guidelines provide best practice insights into executive recruitment processes, including preparation, attraction, selection and appointment/integration, as well as checklists for industry use.

Achievements to date (June 2018):

- UAEW, in collaboration with Jo Fisher Executive, developed a comprehensive research-based, best-practice guideline for universities on how to achieve best senior executive recruitment outcomes, drawing on:
 - o gender equality/diversity specific executive recruitment research;
 - o research on executive recruitment practices in general; and
 - o industry practices for executive recruitment, focusing on success stories;

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- The recruitment best practice guidelines were refined after a national roundtable consultation attended by representatives from across the sector.
- The recruitment best practice guidelines were launched on 1 March 2018 at the Universities Australia Higher Education Conference.
- Initially 300 copies of the recruitment best practice guidelines were printed for distribution at the UA Higher Education Conference. However, high demand required a second print run of another 200 copies. We have since distributed hundreds of online copies to university human resources/people and culture departments, as well as equity and diversity consultants and our membership base.

Goal 3: Sponsorship and Mentorship Encouragement

Goals:

Two objectives are being met under this goal. The first relates to the UAEW Mentoring Program, which has become the *Mentors to Many* program. The *Mentors to Many* program provides video vignettes from current university senior executives to support current and future senior executive women, with advice that supports women in leadership development. The second is the development of a sponsorship guide, as per the recommendations of the UAEW Advisory Group.

Current situation:

An overrepresentation of males in senior executive positions in universities result in fewer senior females available to mentor. In addition, interpersonal barriers, such as lack of perceived similarity between male executives and aspiring women, may reduce likelihood of mentorship initiation from male senior executives. As a consequence, from the mentee perspective, women may be valued less as potential mentors (O'Brien, Biga, Kessler, & Allen, 2008).

Other significant gender differences in the emphasis of mentoring appear to be that female mentees receive greater psychosocial focus than career development, and that male mentors provide more career development mentoring while female mentors provide more psychosocial mentoring (O'Brien *et al.*, 2008).

For women, a gap exists between informal and formal mentoring, where women receive less coaching, role modelling, friendship and interaction. This gap does not necessarily occur for men (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Both informal and formal mentorship can also be less effective for women than men (Ibarra, Carter, & Silva, 2010).

UAEW previously partnered with the LH Martin Institute in a formal mentoring program, which ceased in 2011, however a paper was developed addressing issues women face in mentoring, to accompany the UAEW Mentoring Program and workshops (de Vries, 2011). In 2017-2018 UAEW developed a *Mentors to Many* video vignette series for senior executive women and for those aspiring to such roles. The online resources are advertised through multiple channels, e.g. LinkedIn, UAEW website, UA newsletter, UAEW YouTube channel, and networking events.

In addition to the *Mentors to Many* video vignettes, UAEW are developing a sponsorship guide.

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Achievements to date (June 2018):

- Over the 2017-2018 period (to May 2018), 10 *Mentors to Many* video vignettes have been developed. The material relates the experiences of
 - o Professor Jill Milroy, Dean of the School of Indigenous Studies, University of Western Australia, and
 - o Associate Professor Linley Lord of the Maureen Bickley Centre for Women in Leadership, Curtin Graduate School of Business.
 - o Professor Atilla Brungs of University of Technology Sydney (5 vignettes), and
 - o Professor John Dewar of La Trobe University (3 vignettes) (yet to be released)
- The following Vice-Chancellor's have committed to develop a series of *Mentors to Many* video vignettes for UAEW between May and December 2018, with the fortnightly rollout anticipated to extend into 2019:
 - o Professor Jane den Hollander, Professor Brenda Cherednichenko, Professor Beverley Oliver and Kerrie Parker of Deakin University
 - o Professor Helen Bartlett of Federation University Australia
 - o Professor Geraldine Mackenzie of the University of Southern Queensland
- In collaboration with Dr Jennifer de Vries, UAEW developed a 'Mentoring and Sponsorship' video resource in 2017

In development

- Taking advice from UAEW's Advisory Group, UAEW have commissioned Dr Jennifer de Vries to develop a Sponsorship Guide, due for release 22 October 2018.

Document History

UAEW Action Plan originally prepared by: Professor Geraldine McKenzie and Professor Jennelle Kydd (UAEW co-chairs 2015-2016) and Ms Alison Jackson (2016).

UAEW Rolling Action Plan 2017-2018: updated by Professor Marcia Devlin and Professor Kerri-Lee Krause (UAEW co-chairs, 2017-2018) and Ms Kim Findlay (August 2017)

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