



UNIVERSITIES AUSTRALIA EXECUTIVE WOMEN

WOMEN AND AWARDS

MESSAGE FROM THE CO-CHAIRS



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Universities Australia Executive Women (UAEW) is a national group sponsored by Universities Australia. It provides strategic advice and high-level guidance for Australian universities, their governing bodies, associated organisations and state and territory-based networks to improve the representation of women at executive levels of university leadership and governance.

The work of UAEW builds on the longstanding work of individual institutions, as well as sector-level strategic initiatives, including the Science in Australia Gender Equality (SAGE) initiative and Universities Australia's respect and equality program.

The issue of women's underrepresentation in senior

leadership roles is complex and requires actions on many fronts. Awards can be a powerful tool to acknowledge the contributions of Australian women, place their achievements on record, and advance the individual careers of talented women.

However, while women's receipt of awards and prizes has increased over the years, men continue to win a higher proportion of awards and prize money than expected based on their representation in the workforce and among nominees.

This resource provides helpful tips to improve gender equality in the awards system, including the nomination process within universities. It is particularly relevant to Vice-Chancellors, managers and supervisors,

and chairs and members of nomination and awarding panels. It complements earlier UAEW publications, including Sponsorship: Creating Career Opportunities for Women in Higher Education (2018), which addresses sponsorship practices in universities.

While all forms of diversity – including gender identity, age, ethnicity, disability, race, sexual orientation and religion – are important, this resource focuses specifically on promoting gender equality.

We hope this resource will highlight the unconscious bias that exists within our current awards system and contribute to improving recognition and representation of women in senior executive academic and professional roles.



Once I got the award, people looked to me and listened. It gives kudos and recognition that you have something to say. The award gave me a different feeling with my peers... I felt like I was part of the club.

– Professor Simone Taffe



Gender inequality in the awards system

Awards are a vital way of conferring recognition and prestige on academics and professionals; bringing attention to social issues, advancements and discoveries; and acknowledging wider contributions to the community. In academia and professional services alike, awards are important for career advancement and appointment to executive positions.

Studies from around the world and in Australia have consistently shown that women do not receive awards at the same rate as men. This remains true across disciplines and industries from sports to literature to the sciences.

It is true for Nobel Prizes as well as awards given by discipline-specific academic societies. The disparity comes in many forms. It includes receiving a lower proportion of awards relative to the number of women in the same industry, receiving awards but with less monetary value compared to men, and receiving less prestigious awards.

Gender inequality in the awards system begins with fewer nominations for women.

Both men and women nominate men in greater numbers for an award. Women are also less likely to be a nominator.

As nominating institutions, universities play a critical role in challenging gender bias in the award system. However, the award nomination process in some universities is often informal and discretionary. Typically, university leaders are asked to identify potential nominees, and one person is chosen from the shortlist by a senior leader. These decisions can be open to unchecked and unconscious bias, assumptions and gendered stereotypes.

What is unconscious bias?

Unconscious biases are underlying attitudes, assumptions and stereotypes about a person or situation. It includes:

- Affinity bias, or a sense of connection with people who are similar to you. For example, male leaders may have a tendency to sponsor and mentor other men with similar career histories for leadership opportunities.
- Gender stereotypes about women's or men's competencies, attributes and ambitions. For example, some people may believe that it is more important for men's careers to be recognised by awards, or that women do not value awards in the same way as men.
- Women professional and academic staff may also have unconscious gender biases about their own capabilities and opportunities, relative to their male colleagues, that may discourage them from seeking out certain career opportunities. Strengthening sponsorship practices and institutional support during the application process – and making these visible and expected – can encourage women to put themselves forward.

Achieving gender equality in the awards system is not just about changing the nomination process, it is about changing our culture, beliefs and attitudes about women.



People are now more likely to listen to what I say. You know, I was shouting about stuff for years and years and then, suddenly, I got these prizes and people started paying attention.

– Professor Jenny Graves



Tips and strategies to improve gender equality in awards

Achieving gender equality in the awards process is both an individual and institutional responsibility. Actions can be taken at all levels to improve women's representation in the award system including the nomination process. These suggestions can also apply to universities' internal award systems, at a faculty level, or within a team. They should be adopted as part of a broader range of interventions to promote gender equality.

What can institutions do?

Commit, plan and communicate

- Recognise award applications as an important and legitimate work activity that enhances the careers of individual women and contributes to the pursuit of excellence in universities.
- Engage university community members in the conversation – including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability and women who experience multiple forms of discrimination.
- Consider including awards as part of the institution's gender equality and diversity strategy, and communicate this internally and externally.
- Commit to improving the representation of women in awards and prizes through the university's nomination process and allocate resources for this work.
- Review current cultural values and data to identify gaps in the current situation and identify potential areas for development.
- Involve a broad range of staff at all levels to help create a critical mass and ensure that leaders have the support they need to make the case for change.

Set and embed expectations

- Publicly champion women award recipients and nominees, and the importance of diversity.
- Set clear expectations that all members of nomination and selection committees are expected to advocate for diversity, rather than it being the sole responsibility of members from underrepresented groups.
- Consider establishing alternative processes for award nominations, such as advertising opportunities more widely and calling for expressions of interest.
- Make awards and prizes a part of staff development conversations.
- Strengthen and raise awareness of support services and guidance for award applications. This can encourage women to put themselves forward.

Track outcomes and review progress

- Track progress.
- Communicate progress and future actions to the university community, including data where available, and engage members of the community in conversations about the equitable representation of women.
- Renew commitment and actions.



I was nominated for the Prime Minister's Prize by a very senior woman colleague. It would not have occurred to me to seek nomination otherwise.

– Professor Jenny Graves



What can university leaders and nominating panel members do?

Engage and reflect

- Consider:
 - » How do I make decisions about who to nominate?
 - » Do I nominate people from underrepresented groups – such as women or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff?
 - » Do I provide follow-up support and guidance to those I nominate?
 - » Do I provide constructive feedback and advice to those who miss out, and encourage them to reapply when they are ready?

Champion and advocate

- Acknowledge how being nominated or winning an award has helped your own career and share your own experiences.
- Make the nomination process visible, and encourage people to put themselves forward.
- If you are in any kind of supervisory or leadership role, consider what you can do to boost the visibility and careers of people in your team.

Strengthen and role model inclusive practices

- Challenge unfair and inequitable practices and outcomes.
- Diversify your networks to include people who may be different to you.
- Undertake unconscious bias training.

What can individuals do?

Observe and reflect

- Ask colleagues about the impact of awards on their careers, and start a conversation about the importance and impact of awards and prizes.
- Seek feedback from a diverse group of people, and be open to constructive comments and suggestions from others about how to enhance your case going forward.

Identify opportunities

- Identify opportunities for relevant awards and prizes in your field and build these into your career plan. Ask to be considered for awards, and put yourself forward.
- Increase your visibility and join professional bodies and discipline groups.

Champion and advocate

- If you are in any kind of supervisory or leadership role – consider what you can do to boost the visibility and careers of people in your team.
- Encourage and support people around you to put themselves forward for awards.



If any of the criteria was vague, the university learning and teaching group were able to explain it and make it clear... People really need someone who can explain how to apply. You need key people to encourage you and give you confidence.

– Professor Simone Taffe



About structural barriers

This resource focuses on the nomination process as it is where universities are best placed to directly influence the recognition of women in awards. However, nominations are only one part of the awards system, and it is important to recognise the role of awarding bodies in addressing structural barriers in the design and management of awards.

Awarding bodies can consider:

- Allowing and encouraging self-nominations, instead of relying on third-party nominations. Women tend to be better represented overall in awards that allow self-nominations. Relying on third-party nominations can amplify the impact of women's exclusion from sponsorship and informal nomination processes.
- Establishing specific and transparent award titles and merit criteria and guidance to limit the potential for biased decisions.
- A deliberate focus on inclusivity, diversity and collaboration as opposed to an individualised approach to recognition. As an example, the Australian Museum Eureka Prize has a higher representation of women amongst its prize recipients, permits teams of unlimited sizes as well as organisations, and focuses on the success of the work unit as a whole.