

Women and promotion at JCU: Report on findings from Employee Experience Survey and women's promotion focus groups



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February 2025

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Key recommendations

1. Sustained impact or performance:
 - a. Reconsider the need for a linear assessment of performance over time, as this does not reflect working realities nor appropriately account for ROPE and ongoing primary carer responsibilities.
2. Timeframes:
 - a. Greater consistency in annual scheduling of promotions period.
 - b. Longer open application period.
3. Criteria implementation and transparency:
 - a. Panel training or membership that provides insight into ROPE and Discipline.
 - b. Clear *formalized* feedback to applicants on how criteria are and are not met.
4. Support infrastructure:
 - a. Supervisor training to support applicants (e.g. workload allowances).
 - b. Formalize peer and mentor support network.
5. Performance Development Plans:
 - a. Supervisor training to support career development and portfolio preparation.
 - b. Quality evaluation to ensure all JCU staff receive appropriate advice and support through PDP process.

Introduction

This document reports on findings from the Employee Experience Survey 2023 and focus groups conducted with women at JCU regarding the 2023 academic promotions process. Its purpose is to evaluate, from the perspective of women at JCU, the effectiveness of the new promotion process in supporting their ability to evidence career achievements and progress in their career pathway. The report explores women's perceptions of the new promotions process and the impact they perceived it had on the quality of their promotion application and their experience of the promotions process.

Two questions concerning the 2023 academic promotion round were added to the 2023 Employee Experience Survey. These questions elicited 647 distinct responses.

In total, 16 women participated across three focus groups and three one-on-one interviews. Of these participants, 13 had been successful in their application for promotion and three had been unsuccessful. Eight participants had been through the old promotion process, with the remaining six participants applying for promotion for the first time at JCU. Participants represented applicants mostly from B to C or C to D promotion applications.

Overall, women reported that though the new format was an improvement to the previous format, this was less of a concern. The major concerns and negative impacts were experience via *how* applications were assessed and *how* feedback was provided. Analysis of women's responses indicates that it is the accumulation of multiple factors that result in a systemic disadvantage for women in timely progression through academic promotion processes and not any one factor.

Background

Statistically, there are no meaningful gender differences in promotion success at JCU. The University's application for Athena Swan accreditation in 2020 identified promotion as one of four priority areas, nonetheless, noting its bearing on academic progression and retention and the disparity between women and men at senior levels.¹ Women consulted during preparation of the 2020 application reported taking longer before they feel ready to apply for promotion, waiting to be tapped on the shoulder, or giving up in the face of what they perceive as onerous and competitive processes. Issues they identified included:

- A prioritization of individual research performance that limited awareness of other promotion pathways and which required women to compromise their values through behaviour they considered indulgent, selfish and competitive.
- Reliance on quantitative measures of teaching quality (i.e. student evaluations) that are known to disadvantage women and that make the Teaching-Specialist pathway, for those women interested, more difficult.
- The devaluing of work that supports collegiality including pastoral care, mentoring, and responsiveness to students. The burden of pastoral care fell particularly hard, they believed, on Indigenous women.
- Inconsistency in how promotion panels interpret equity data and information about career interruptions included in promotion applications.
- Complex and bureaucratic procedures and documents.

The Athena Swan application also noted that, between 2013 and 2019, men made up two-thirds of promotion panels and compliance with requirements to undertake compulsory equity training had been inconsistent.

¹ Athena SWAN Institution Application: Bronze Award. James Cook University. 2020.

Modelling subsequently undertaken by Prof. Lisa Kewley on behalf of JCU found that promotion rates between Levels A, B and C over the period 2015-2020 were similar for women and men and similar to the national average for STEMM disciplines.² However, male promotion rates from Level C to D fell below the national average and promotion rates from Level D to E for both women and men were three times lower than the national average. Unless both promotion and retention rates among women at JCU improve the fraction at Level E will stagnate at around 20% until 2050 and beyond. Women were found, moreover, to be leaving JCU in higher numbers than men at all academic levels (with the exception of Level C), a phenomenon associated nationally with a lack of senior women role models and skepticism among women regarding their own prospects for promotion into senior positions.

The action plan embedded in JCU's 2020 Athena Swan application committed the University to:

- Revision of Academic Promotion Policy and Procedures to include a change in focus from individual achievement to collegiality and demonstration of university values.
- Improve promotion data collection, storage and monitoring.
- Develop consistent principles for measuring Research Opportunity and Performance Evidence (ROPE), ensure that Promotions Panels report on how they have accounted for individual contexts, and monitor the impacts on promotion outcomes over time.
- Strengthen Performance Development Process, incorporating long-term casual staff, to discuss career progression outside of formal promotion.
- Revise selection criteria for Promotion Panel members.
- Ensure adequate training for Promotion Panel members and line managers.

Changes to the Academic Promotion Policy and Procedure introduced in 2023 sought to, among other things:

- Simplify the process through an online application linked to pre-existing data sources.
- Draw explicitly on Performance Development Plan (PDP) discussions.
- Allow for more flexibility in making a case for promotion via non-traditional academic pathways through the inclusion of impact narratives.

Employee Experience Survey 2023

The Employee Experience Survey 2023 asked at least four questions with direct relevance to potential candidates' readiness to apply for promotion and ability to demonstrate sustained performance over a period of time (see Figure 1).

Over one third of all staff disagreed with the statement that their manager had shown a genuine interest in their career aspirations and the same number disagreed with the statement they are genuinely supported in making use of flexible working arrangements. Nearly two-thirds do not believe there are good career opportunities for them at JCU.

Approximately a half of all employees felt able to accomplish all they need to in normal working hours. This was the only question for which there was a meaningful difference between women and men, with 57% of women and 45% of men responding positively.

Employees reporting a non-binary, unspecified or other identity had lower levels of agreement across most questions.

² Kewley, L. 2020. JCU Workforce Models. Kewley Consulting, Canberra.

^ Collapse all Factors

		Overall James Cook Univ...	Female	Male	Not Specified	Let me describe	Non-binary
Responses	1.4K	842	427	52	19	18	
My manager (or another manager) has shown a genuine interest in my career aspirations	63%	64	66	44	63	17	
I believe there are good career opportunities for me at James Cook University	41%	43	41	27	32	17	
We are genuinely supported if we choose to make use of flexible working arrangements	63%	63	64	63	63	33	
Most days, I can accomplish all I need to during my normal working hours	52%	57	45	40	47	39	

Figure 1. Employee Experience Survey 2023 results for all JCU staff by gender.

In addition, two open-ended questions were included asking: (1) how respondents believed recent changes to the academic promotion processes would benefit themselves and others; and (2) what would encourage them and others to apply for promotion.

How will recent changes to the academic promotion processes benefit you and others?

Responses elicited by the first question ranged from optimism to scepticism about the potential benefits of the new promotion process. Importantly, many comments reflected uncertainty and/or a lack of awareness about recent changes and their implementation. Promotion criteria and processes remain opaque to a large number of academic staff.

Positive commentary focused on:

- **Less burdensome processes** and broader criteria allowing applicants more time to focus on articulating their achievements and contributions to the University.
- Creating a more **inclusive and meritocratic environment** that allows for a more holistic view of achievements and thus provides greater opportunity for career advancement.
- **Optimism** that those on non-traditional career paths and/or in disciplines which place less emphasis on journal metrics can be successful in achieving promotion.
- Better alignment with the aspiration to be a **civic university** that prioritises student and community impact over conventional measures of academic prestige.
- Clarification of **expectations** and the provision of information that helps academics improve their profile and case for promotion.

Others raised concerns about:

- The **short timeframe for applications** which can disadvantage applicants and make it difficult to seek clarity and guidance within that timeframe.
- The **clarity of requirements and criteria** for promotion that, for some respondents, have become vaguer despite streamlining of the process.

- **Transparency** of the promotion process and criteria which some felt were not clearly communicated.
- The **increased workload** associated with the need to articulate impact statements which some respondents found time-consuming and burdensome on top of existing teaching and research workloads.
- The **complexity of the process** and the adequacy of **support** to help people navigate the new system.
- **Inconsistent and unhelpful feedback** from reviewers which did not always align with the promotion criteria.
- Whether criteria continued to favour research over teaching and some disciplines over others, with particular implications for those in **non-traditional academic roles** or with unconventional career paths.

Additional analysis of closed survey questions is recommended. Specifically:

- My manager (or someone in management) has shown a genuine interest in my career aspirations
- I am making good progress in my career and development goals at JCU.
- I believe there are good career opportunities for me at JCU

What else would encourage you or others to apply for promotion?

Increasing promotion application rates at JCU is, as noted above, critical to addressing the gender gap in senior academic appointments. When asked what would encourage more promotion applications, respondents raised:

- **Support and encouragement from leaders** including proactive discussion about promotion pathways, recognition of non-traditional pathways, and encouragement from managers.
- **Recognition and appreciation** of contributions, both within the University and in the broader academic community, including teaching excellence, service, and non-traditional academic outputs.
- **Clear and regular processes** including fixed yearly rounds, explicit guidelines and criteria for promotion, clarification of benchmarks, clear communication from line managers, and timely PDPs.
- **Transparency and fairness** of the promotions process through Promotion Committee and line manager accountability, openness and feedback at each stage of the process, and more interaction with the Committee.
- **Professional development and mentoring** to help staff prepare for promotions including training in ROPE and impact statements and support for Early Career to build portfolios.
- **Work-life balance and job security** inclusive of flexible work arrangements, job security, and a balanced workload to allow staff to focus on their professional development and promotion goals.
- **Organizational culture** that values shared decision-making, transformative leadership, and genuine concern for staff well-being.

Focus group and interview results

What did women think about the new promotion application form?

What worked well?

Overall, women mostly agreed that the new format was an improvement from the previous format as it was more flexible and simplified. Many women reported that the new format was better able to capture their non-traditional academic career. Finally, many women found, overall, writing the narrative was a positive experience and resulted in satisfaction or pride when reflecting on their work.

Better Fit for Non-Traditional Career

Participant: I think it kind of gave me a way to show what I've done and I think the previous form that I had as an example didn't really quite fit with what I'm doing. So my research is a lot in the clinical space and I do a lot of work there and I don't always get publications out of that. So if you look at it, there's a lot of management that I, you know, the skills I've really acquired, I'm sorry obtained there, but I couldn't really use that in the previous application very well. And over here I could just, you know, give examples of what I what I did... I feel like they appreciated it probably more than in the original version.

What was challenging?

Women discussed the challenges of the new format stemmed from specific skillsets that are required to write the application effectively. For example, that it was difficult for some to find their narrative and difficult to create visualizations that sufficiently captured evidence. Women noted that the style of application favoured those with grant writing experience. Without these skills, it was difficult to include all components of evidence that was required for the applications. However, overall, the biggest challenge for women was the additional workload and time required to complete the application, with all women reporting extensive personal time was used to work on the application.

Personal Time Required to Complete Application

Participant: But yeah, it was still a lot of work like like....So I said like it was like weekends and evenings because obviously it wasn't part of like I already have so much to do during a day that I can't get it done. I feel so....Yeah, it was definitely stuff that I did in my own time.

Participant: the deadline is...way too short yeah. So for people that [are] taking care of the children and so on, it would be really hard to finish all that in time. So yeah, it's not enough.

What can be improved?

Women discussed that though the new format was an improvement to the old format, the workload and requirements to complete the application could be further simplified. The promotion application would be improved by provisions of **acknowledgement of basic role completion** that does not require narrative support (e.g. course coordination). Furthermore, reduction of repetition of data and outputs by more purposefully **integrating research and staff profiles (e.g. GECO) in the assessment** of the application rather than constructing narratives around these outputs. This would then leave the narrative component simplified to discuss contributions that are not evidenced by outputs in the staff profiles.

Better Use of Online Sources or Staff Profiles

Participant: From my experience, I think as long as we update as academic, ...we have new publication, we get new funding, we want to publish on the website and then in the application ... we still can sort of use narratives to say some confidential things like some grant there...So we just need to like add those information in and yeah that that should be I guess all available for the for the panel to assess.

Women discussed in depth the need for more **transparent, efficient, and effective communications** and **timeframes for promotion** rounds to reduce workloads and enhance planning. For instance, women reported that consistency in yearly promotion round periods (e.g. promotions would occur consistently in the same month each year) would provide more throughout the year to prepare for promotion, therefore reducing on workload burden and work in personal time during the promotion period. Women also thought more time from the opening to the closing of the round was needed to better support women in reviewing workshops, supporting resources, sourcing mentors and reviewers. Finally, women acknowledged that there is no common “slow time” in the year that would suit everyone but that the current time period is a busy period for both teaching (e.g. placements) and research (e.g. conference busy period). Therefore, it was suggested that different period be considered or that multiple promotion rounds occur during the year.

Participant: It also came at a terrible time ... my discipline has their conferences, their international conferences at that time. So I've found myself juggling a number of things not well, so I actually really struggled with putting that together and trying to reconcile, sort of, the different ask of that.

Participant: ... I didn't think that that was very good, at least from my perspective, because I know, you know, everyone's different responsibilities and responsibilities have happened at different times. So I think the timelines just, ... didn't work for me, but I also thought it was short.

What did women think about the support available?

What worked well?

The quality of support women received was variable. Some women found the workshops and supporting materials helpful, whilst others did not. For those that found the workshops and materials helpful, they noted that the workshops were very useful in informing how to interpret and use the supporting materials. Women also found the Women's Promotion workshop inspiring, with senior women academics providing useful advice and encouragement. Finally, women reported on supervisor support being pivotal to their decision to apply for promotion. However, again, the quality of support received was variable.

Women's Workshop Inspirational

Participant: Maybe, but I was probably quite overdue to actually do a promotion process and last year was the first year I'd gone back full time after having children, and I found especially the seminar that they held for women with some of the more senior JCU female staff was really encouraging and probably at that point where I was like, Oh my God, this is up to a lot of workload to apply and should I go?

Supervisor Support

Participant: yeah, probably wouldn't have applied if it hadn't been for her. Kind of actively pushing me and encouraging me, so I'm like, I'm glad I did.

What was challenging?

Women who found the materials/workshops unhelpful, reported inconsistency in advice provided via workshop and materials or that the exemplars were not useful if a person did not have experience in producing a narrative.

Workshop and Material Consistency

Participant: So I didn't like the narratives that were provided as examples. I thought that they weren't good, so I didn't follow that format, but as a result of that, I think it took me a long time to get started because I didn't really [know] where to start.

Participant: I think they put out this new form without necessarily doing enough into the back-end support for it in terms of exemplars, frequently asked questions.

As noted, quality of supervisor support was variable. Women discussed in depth the usefulness of the PDP process was entirely dependent on the consistency, quality and experience of the manager/supervisor. The quality of the PDP process is impacted by the lack of handover to new management/supervisor staff with these new supervisors not having sufficient knowledge on the career progression of their staff. PDPs were seen to be used punitively, with staff being denied access to opportunities when these arise as the specified opportunity was not identified in PDPs. Overall, the majority of women did not perceive PDPs as useful to shaping or facilitating promotion.

PDP Dependent on Supervisor Quality and Experience

Participant: Yeah, it all depends on your manager, doesn't it? like PDPs can range from less than useless to really informative, and it depends on the experience your line manager, their interest and investment in them as an individual, their understanding of how to help you sort of consider the things you need to build towards promotion. Ohh I'd had both, been at [either end] of that spectrum. So I would say there's no guarantee that the PDP would do that. And umm, finding a mentor who can specifically work with you towards [the application] would be a better guarantee.

PDP Punitive or Gatekeeping

Participant: so I had never seen the PDP used as anything other than like let's tick this box... I applied this past year for [program] training for handful of women. So I said "OK, I wanna apply for that.". And the feedback that I've got actually was ohh this wasn't in the PDP it was... you know it sounds great that you want to do this training, but there isn't sort [allowance for it in the PDP] and I said ohh OK, like, that's great feedback. That's more feedback than I've gotten from anything that I've applied for at JCU ever. But I didn't understand that this was a document that was going to be [gatekeeping?] - right - and used in a way that, like, wasn't going to support. So now I have a different vision of what the PDP could be or should be. But again, it depends on who you're filling that out with, and if you even have the understanding that that is a tool that's going to be referenced for something.

What can be improved?

Women reported that better support could be provided through both **mentor and peer networks**, yet these were difficult to access. Therefore, a more formative means to identifying mentor and peer support networks would be beneficial. **More flexibility or repeat workshop** deliveries would also be helpful given that some women could not attend due to other teaching and research responsibilities. Finally, more **training for supervisors** on how to support staff intending to apply for promotion is needed. Part of this training for supervisors would be on how to provide constructive feedback to applicants on their applications and how to appropriately **realign workloads to free up applicants' time** during the intensive application writing period.

Mentor Access

Participant: And yeah, I think it's quite helpful if they can try to like to keep this workshop going and also introduce some new elements. Umm yeah, and getting some more experienced like mentors on women, academic women.

That would be very helpful. Yeah, I think mentoring is a very important thing and I don't think that [at] JCU there [are] the mentoring programs ... available in this area.

Supervisor Support

Participant: "Send me a draft by this date", and like, followed up and asked me and gave me feedback on my draft and so it really, instead rather than just saying like, "oh yeah, you should be applying for it", she kind of really followed me, often made me, made me prioritize it, cause it's something that I would never have prioritized. And I hadn't been prioritizing.

Participant: Like you know, if there was something like, OK, you really, we really think you should be going for promotion, so we're going to give you six hours of casual teaching support or marking support, or admin support. Like I don't know, just any little thing that would actually make it slightly easier to get something off your plate so that it's not your night and your weekend that you're taking up.

What did women think about the process of how applications were assessed and outcomes reported?

What worked well?

Women often reflected that the application form itself, and the writing of the application, was generally satisfactory. However, women overwhelmingly reported that how applications are assessed and how outcomes of applications are reported needs much improvement.

Participant: The format of the application - yes. The process, the stuff around it, the way it has been enacted/implemented is very poor, is very yeah, I would say the application content, I think that is better than the [old] one in terms of being able to demonstrate create the narrative about impact. But all the stuff around it...[no].

What was challenging?

How criteria were implemented was of great concern to women. Women found that there was generally a lack of justification for how criteria were or were not met. Some women were called to interviews to provide further justification for their application. However, women were not provided with any feedback as to what gaps needed to be addressed or what questions panels would ask at the interview. Women found that what was sought from panels were more in line with the previous promotion format. This is consistent with other women's reports that they found an inconsistency between the new format requirements but the application of old format criteria. Women also noted that not everyone was asked to interview and that there was a lack of rationale for who was asked to interview and who was not. In some cases, it was noted that people received an interview only due to luck that they were known to someone and therefore that person advocated for the applicant to receive an interview.

Lack of Feedback on Criteria

Participant: I feel that this feedback provided by the panel was quite unclear and so it's just, I think, like [an] announcement of the outcome. So what we received, it's a letter which is a template .. telling us it's successful or unsuccessful. So both round of application I got the same letter so it didn't change actually and it well if it's unsuccessful outcome I feel it's very difficult to find out which criteria we didn't achieve and that also ... it's very unclear message about our scores in the application process.

Lack of Clarity for Interview

Participant: but it....Yeah, that's going through that interview process and not really knowing... eventually put together [points] that's like, OK, this is what impact has happened on this year, but I really have to think about that and ask a lot of mentors and what should I be doing here? There's no guidance on it, so on one hand I was grateful for the opportunity to be able to do that and that the process was successful.

Though women appreciated the opportunity to articulate impact on their application, women generally reported that it was unclear how or if ROPE was evaluated on applications. Some women assumed ROPE was accounted for through calculated time adjustments whilst others felt it was only understood through the interview process. Some women were more firm in their perspective that ROPE is not understood by panel members, with some women perceiving being penalised for time on maternity leave. Some of these concerns were related to the idea of "sustained impact" needing to be demonstrated. Many women discussed how writing a ROPE statement is difficult as any impact needs to be offset by statements of having met criteria anyway. Some women felt they were perceived to be "whinging" if they articulated the extent of their ROPE impact.

Complexity of ROPE

Yeah, I think that's, that's true. And there was some things in mind that I was like ohh should I say that? Like you were just saying, like, can't really go to international conferences. Can't really do any long field work field trips

anymore like that. Definitely impacts on my career, but are they gonna see that as like ohh, she's being honest and this is why the past five years she's maybe not being as productive as she could. Or are they gonna say like ohh well.... she's got some limitations and not really a great future prospect or something you know. Is it gonna be seen negatively or positively?

Sustained Impact

Participant: So I did get a bit of a heads up that the process was going to take a little bit longer, but interestingly the two things that came up in my interview was that they wanted to know about my sustained demonstration and my time was mentioned.

Participants: Uh, well, I understand that we need to demonstrate the sustainability of the performance, but I guess it's a question of whether we place the length of service time above performance or the other way around. Because if you don't promote [an] applicant just because they're sitting on the position for a certain time and they've already made the performance, that's unfair to me.

Finally, women also talk about the lack of consistency with panels contacting referees. Many women commented that the lack of communication with referees put professional relationships in jeopardy.

Participants: And the two who were approached were done so nearly four weeks after the original... so yeah, I found that very embarrassing. Because you do, you put yourself out there. You're trying to identify someone who is sufficiently removed from your circle, but who knows enough about your work to be able to speak to you, and it takes personal ...social capital. You're spending social capital to ask for those things, so that was frustrating.

What can be improved?

Criteria Implementation:

A major concern from participants was surrounding lack of clarity and the arbitrariness of the minimum two-year time frame for promotion, which was closely tied to queries and feedback on the need to demonstrate sustained impact or performance. Though women reported perceiving to be performing at or well above criteria, panel feedback often fell on to needing to see the performance sustained over time. The timeframe, and the perception that time is a good indicator of performance, needs to be reviewed, particularly when considering past job experience and expertise is not taken into account. **Through a gender equity lens, this perception of sustained impact directly disadvantages those with career disruptions and primary carer responsibilities.** To facilitate appropriate application of criteria to academic levels, women reported the usefulness of benchmarking criteria and application requirements with other universities.

Benchmarking with Other Universities

Participants: ..., see what happens in other places in other universities, while we don't have to compare ourselves with Group of Eight, but we do need to do some benchmarking and see, for example, the question about whether we place performance over the length of service time, or the other way around, and see what other universities are dealing with these challenges. I think it's quite important. As far as I know, umm, very few universities ... still using length of service time, to well, to use this as a one of the important criteria to assess applications.

Participant: but I would say that, umm, at a theoretical level, absolutely imperative that we understand what's required of the different levels and other universities, particularly regional universities...

Women discussed the importance of **detailed and quality feedback** to be provided to applicants, indicating how they did and did not meet criteria. This would better inform women on how to improve and be successful in application in future. This also is particularly important for applicants who are not successful, with women expressing concern for burnout and hopelessness following an unsuccessful application. As a part of the feedback process, standard instructions relating to appeals procedure should also be communicated given that some women were unaware that outcomes could be appealed.

Support for Unsuccessful Applicants

Participant: I think in terms of, if people are unsuccessful, there needs to ... a lot more [feedback], any place. So thank you for sharing with us and I know there's a couple of people in my group that were just burnt really bad. No, you know, to the almost the point of all, why bother?

Participant: I just made that decision to myself that I wouldn't spend that ... outside time, umm, reapplying ... because I would probably get knocked back again.

Clarity on Appeals Process

Participant: So at least the several Australian universities I got friends in, they said that in the announcement letter they also indicated what the rights of applicants, like, you can make an appeal if you're not happy with the outcome or with the details of feedback. If you have questions, you can always have the right to provide feedback to the panel. But we were not given this information at JCU and I actually didn't know we can appeal.

Women discussed **panels need greater transparency** to ensure diversity of experience. For instance, women discussed not just gender parity on panels but specifically that panel members should include those who have experienced career disruptions. Women also discussed that given academic quality is very dependent on discipline, panel members should include those with discipline or related discipline knowledge. If the demographic (gender, ROPE, college) of panel membership is transparent and communicated to applicants, then this would ease dissatisfaction amongst applicants, improving the integrity of the process. Finally, **more extensive training is needed for panel members** to adequately evaluate ROPE. Part of this is a shift away from only considering acute career disruptions as the only major impact on women. For instance, women discussed that impacts to their career progression have been more pronounced during the schooling years of their children, but often ROPE evaluations are looking for discrete time impacts (e.g. maternity leave).

Panel Membership Transparency

Participant: Also what's the gender breakdown [on the panels]? I'd be very interested to know...because I think there's a paper-based understanding of ROPE, and then there's an experiential understanding of ROPE. And that's different. And that's why we have gender parity in recruitment panels. And in all sorts of things so that the experiential knowledge is also brought to bear.

Training to Understand Cumulative ROPE Impacts

Participant: And it wasn't so much when they were little, it was when they got to school-age, and then they started doing activities and you have to take them places cause they couldn't really get there themselves. My husband started travelling a lot for work so I was practically doing all that, and it did impact how much research I was able to do. Once it's impacted your CV, it takes a long time to move past that cause you miss that starting, missing out on funding, because your CV doesn't look good enough. I did comment on one NHMRC application I had four kids and they said, well bully, for you. Didn't get the grant. So it was tokenistic.

Systemic Barriers and Impact on Women

Many women discussed being on their current level for a long time before applying for promotion. One of the main barriers to women progressing through their career may be the compounding effect of the previous discussed themes ROPE, criteria implementation, and “sustained impact” queries. These themes should also be considered alongside women discussing workload allocations that are not valued in promotion, including teamwork. Together, these themes provide a picture for how women are systematically disadvantaged or discouraged from applying for and progressing through promotion.

Participant: [he said] “Before I start, I have to acknowledge the phenomenal workload that you've got.” And he just said that a couple of times and I thought, well, there you go. So, but if they can't see, that's what I'm saying about you need somebody that understands the context of the department or the division that that

you're looking to promote from within. You know, and I don't think I had any idea about what we do and how pressured we've been and what I've given.

Participant: I always want to say we as a team have done this, so we've achieved this, because you don't do anything on your own, particularly in research, you don't get on your own. And if you haven't got good partners, good colleagues, you're not going to achieve anything.

Participant: Yeah, I had quite a while as an A, well with a Level B almost a Level C and then we came here and I had to go back to Level A and took me a few years to get back Level B. They didn't even take my PhD into account when they employed me. It wasn't clear in the contract.

Finally, the impact of the promotion process on employee wellbeing needs to be considered. Despite many women reporting that the reflection process to produce the narrative resulted in feelings of pride or satisfaction, the women still reported that, overall, the experience of applying for promotion was **stressful, frustrating and exhausting**. Much of this psychological and emotional impact is linked to the lack of communication for timelines or timeline delays, and the lack of feedback for how criteria are or are not met. Women also reported a key barrier for applying for promotion was the **fear of being excluded** from the next year's promotion round if they were unsuccessful. Women also reported a barrier for applying was the concern over **job security** given the financial state of the university. That is, women perceived the potential of making their position vulnerable if they were promoted to a higher and therefore more financially costly position for the university.

Stressful; Fearful of Exclusion in Next Round

Participant: That's, but yes, maybe challenging is a better word than exhausting. It's, it's draining, trying to think of how, because you're going to get more chances to state your case, if you don't pull up, only 500 words or whatever if you don't handle your case well, you got to wait another year. So that's a lot of pressure.

Job Security

Participant: I'm sure there's people that wouldn't worry about that, but I find it difficult not to worry. What's my job security like if you'll get too expensive? And of course you get more expensive as you get more senior you wonder if you're then gonna be the target. And then get rid of you and bring in someone cheaper.