

THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Study of achievement relative to opportunity

The impact of a non-linear career on
achievement

Prepared by Equity and Diversity for the
Vice Chancellor's Equity and Diversity Advisory Committee

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Achievement relative to opportunity: the impact of a non-linear career on career positioning and achievement

This paper reports the findings of a study on the impact of non-linear careers carried out by the UWA Equity and Diversity unit as part of a broader consideration of how achievement relative to opportunity can be embedded in practice in UWA's policies and processes. A more detailed background is set out in section 1. The methodology used for this study is described in section 2 and outcomes are reported in section 3.

Section 3.1 reports findings on the impact of non-linearity on career progression while findings specific to promotion are looked at in section 3.2. Conclusions and recommendations are presented at the end of both sections and are set out, together with key points, in the Executive Summary that follows below.

The study included both academic and professional staff. However, it was not possible to draw conclusions about the impact of non-linearity on promotion in respect of professional staff as most of the matters discussed were generally applicable to all professional staff. With the exception of findings on career support, where non-linearity is relevant for professional staff, section 3.2 therefore covers academic staff only.

The study aimed to take a broad view of non-linearity, encompassing factors such as migration, illness and divergent careers and including men as well as women. However, it became clear during the course of the interviews that, for this cohort, child-rearing has been the major factor inhibiting progression for those with non-linear careers. The weakness inherent in the constitution of the cohort is discussed in section 3.2 (Methodology). While this study suggests that interventions supporting the careers of women who are primary child carers will be beneficial to the university, there are indications here and elsewhere that men are increasingly prioritising involvement in their children's lives and it is, therefore, recommended that further work be done to capture the impact of non-linearity for this generation of men.

Executive Summary, Key Points and Recommendations

The study reported here was undertaken in response to discussions in the Go8 universities about the implementation of the principles of achievement relative to opportunity (AR2O) which have been incorporated into some Go8 University policies but which are not yet fully embedded in practice and processes. This study is also timely given changes at the national level in higher education policy. For example, the Australian Research Council has replaced 'track record' with the concept of 'research opportunity and performance evidence' (ROPE) as a way of taking into account constraints faced by some grant applicants, such as teaching load or career interruptions.

In addition, a 2011 consultation paper intended to inform the development of the Australian Government's research workforce strategy, noted the need for a

targeted focus on the 'impact of career breaks and transitions on determinants of career progression, such as attainment of research grants and fellowship awards'.¹

Key points

Non-linear careers, which are the subject of the study, are those which, for a variety of reasons do not follow the traditional trajectory of an academic or professional career.

Career impact occurs when factors that distract an individual from his or her work come into play. The impact of these factors is widely thought to be increasing as men as well as women take responsibility for child-rearing and, for the baby boomer generation, often elder care simultaneously, as younger generations take a more informal approach to early career than their older colleagues and, in some areas, as the availability of secure early career job opportunities decreases.

When individual academic careers are thus inhibited, not only is the individual unable to achieve his or her potential but the research output of the School and the university is affected. There is an identifiable risk that early to mid-career researchers, who were recruited on the basis of their outstanding potential, are lost to productive research.

To investigate the impact of this increase in non-linearity, interviews were conducted with 29 UWA male and female employees (20 academic and 9 professional staff).

Summary of findings

- While both women and men can have non-linear careers, the factors that inhibit career appear more complex for women in this cohort than they are for the men. Child-rearing responsibilities are often compounded by other factors derived from the continued practice of women taking primary responsibility for domestic life. Younger generations of men show signs of wanting more involvement with their families, as is the case with two interviewees in this study, suggesting that this is becoming an issue more relevant to both genders through generational change. The skewing of our sample towards more junior women and more senior men means that we have been unable to test this and a further small study of men at an earlier career and life stage is indicated.
- Those with whom they work may not be aware of the complexity of women's lives (and those of some men), having little idea of what their colleagues are dealing with on top of work each day. Requests for part-time working, flexibility and carer's leave are usually met and appreciated. However, there is unlikely to be any accompanying discussion of career support, enabling the individual to reach his or her potential. The university's current procedures do not seem to make explicit provision for this kind of discussion and some staff and their supervisors may, for variety of reasons, be steering clear of them.

¹ Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research: Meeting Australia's Research Needs. Canberra 2011

- Those concerned are clear about the impact of their non-linear careers and are well able to articulate the inhibiting factors compared with colleagues whose career is more linear. Despite the gender and age skew in our sample, their narratives demonstrate that there are issues of equity that could be addressed through the application of AR2O principles.
- For many academic staff, a non-linear career in which child-rearing features results in a loss of research activity. Workload models usually mean that, when this happens, teaching duties increase. Although the cause of the dip is temporary (its length varying with the individual), there appears to be no means within the model by which a woman (or a man) in this situation can be brought back to full research activity when the time is right. This not only affects an individual's career and inhibits the achievement of the potential that was the basis for his or her appointment: any return on the university's investment in parental leave is also inhibited.
- A particular feature for older professional staff who have come late to a career in higher education, is that their earlier experiences and their future potential may be written off by those who don't know the circumstances lying behind a late start and resulting low pay level relative to age.
- There is a clear perception that, in the university's academic promotion criteria, teaching is assessed less vigorously than research and that this is linked, in part, to the difficulty of identifying more sophisticated criteria for high quality contributions to teaching.
- Academics with non-linear careers clearly perceive disadvantage in promotion compared with those with more linear careers and this is linked in particular to the role of women (and some men) in child-rearing.
- Interviewees who felt able to put forward ideas for change stressed the need to be treated as individuals rather than being compared with others whose time and opportunity for research may be greater.
- There are UWA staff whose research interests may enable them to contribute to an understanding of how conflicting home and work pressures reduce research activity and who may, therefore, be able to help with embedding AR2O principles within the university's processes.
- A minority of interviewees would be content with a teaching career if teaching contribution was to be better recognised in promotion criteria. However, the majority of interviewees whose research output was currently reduced as a result of child-rearing were anxious to get the support they need to return to more active research when that is practicable.
- Career development for academic staff is most helpful when it is specifically targeted rather than generalised and when there is a tangible result that supports career progression.

- The Leadership Development for Women programme is clearly a phenomenal success and, judging by the outcomes that women told us about, represents excellent value for money for the university.

Recommendations

1. *A further small study should be conducted, enabling the views of men at earlier career and life stages to be incorporated into these findings; this may nuance the recommendations made to date but they are unlikely to be affected wholesale and, where appropriate, discussions around implementing AR2O principles could continue now rather be subject to further delay.*
2. *Human Resources might revisit the PDR, and consider within the PAR process, means of stimulating: i) discussion of past experience, for example in the context of skills and knowledge transferable from earlier working life or life outside work and ii) career support discussions in the context of opportunity to achieve.*
3. *Discussions already underway in the Workload Committee might include consideration of a variety of means by which women and men whose child-rearing responsibilities are a primary cause of a loss of research activity can be encouraged and supported to (i) maintain a research profile, albeit at a lower level than previously, while undertaking more teaching duties than previously and (ii) be given assistance to return to full research activity when the time is right for them to take it up again. Care should be taken to ensure that staff in comparable situations for whom child-rearing is not the main issue are treated equally.*
4. *Staff who are passionate about teaching need to be able to see how they can translate that passion into measurable success for the university and their own careers.*
5. *The Academic Promotions Committee might consider the development of criteria that can offer a more nuanced assessment of levels of teaching achievement commensurate with the research-based criteria.*
6. *In light of the comments received about AR2O being there in policy but not in practice, the Committee might consider the means by which the achievements of those whose scope for research is currently limited can best be expressed, perhaps through a template which enables quality of work and therefore demonstrable potential to be emphasised rather than tending to special pleading which can make it difficult for evaluators to distinguish the relative merit of individual circumstances.*
7. *It seems likely, given the loss of self-esteem that can accompany lessening of research activity, that some women (and some men) may need support with making a case that presents their achievements relative to opportunity in this robust way. Workshops appear to have been best received when they take a practical approach and the Committee might work with OSDS, Equity and*

Diversity and individuals who have already succeeded in re-establishing a research career to develop such a workshop.

- 8. The Committee might seek expert help from, amongst others, colleagues in the School of Psychology whose work might contribute to understanding and addressing issues arising from low research activity.*
- 9. Alongside this process for the individual applicant, the Committee might consider specifying that statements provided by Schools and Faculties in connection with a promotion application identify the support which that individual has been given and the measures taken in connection with re-establishing her (or his) research career. This would reinforce the observations made in section 3.1 regarding timely intervention and encouragement.*

1 Background

This study was initiated by Equality and Diversity in response to discussions taking place in the Group of Eight universities (GO8). Those discussions are focussing on how best the principle of consideration of achievement relative to opportunity (AR2O) can be incorporated within employment-related decisions for academic and professional staff within the GO8.

Australian universities face considerable challenges relating to the sustainability and development of the workforce and, therefore, their capacity to achieve excellence in innovation, teaching, research and community engagement. These challenges include an ageing academic workforce, and increasingly global employment market, the Federal Government's widening participation agenda, the different approach taken by Generation X staff to careers, and the under-utilisation of highly educated and talented men and women.

In contemporary universities, the traditional norm of full-time work and an uninterrupted, linear career trajectory no longer matches the profile of many staff, particularly those with established professional careers prior to entering the academy, significant external responsibilities, or with needs that demand accommodation in the workplace. The principle of consideration of AR2O in employment and performance-related decision making provides UWA and other Australian universities with the opportunity to create workplace cultures that attract and retain the very best staff with a diverse range of personal characteristics, employment arrangements and career histories.

An academic linear career is one which begins with a PHD and continues, relatively uninterrupted, perhaps through post-doctoral posts, to a tenured teaching and research post and thence, through promotion mechanisms, to seniority and for some the professoriate. A further feature of academic linearity is that, generally, research will remain within one discipline and will demonstrate continuity in the lines of investigation pursued.

For professional staff, a linear career might be defined as a traditional education resulting in a good degree, followed by pursuit of a chosen career through promotion posts and, possibly development of posts so that they are eventually reclassified. In the university context, this is most likely to apply to specialist professional staff, e.g. HR or finance whose skills are transferable across sectors. Given that many generalist university administrators do not start out thinking of a career in higher education, we might also consider one career change as contributing to a linear career.

For the purpose of this study, we have taken a broad view of what constitutes a non-linear career for an academic. We have observed that non-linearity can occur, for example through:

- A late career start, which may include a PHD later than the norm,
- Breaks and career delays brought about by personal caring responsibilities, often, but not always, connected with child-rearing;
- Illness or disability;
- A significant period of employment in another sector;
- Migration, which may be associated with English as a second language;
- An unexpected event, often in the workplace, which 'hijacks' the individual;
- A preference for pursuing diverse research topics, sometimes, but not always linked with a preference for collaborative rather than individual research.

All of the above, save for the final example, can apply equally to professional staff. A non-linear career for such staff might also include a shortfall in education such as early school leaving and/or not holding a bachelors degree, an early focus on jobs rather than career and more than one major shift in career.

2. Methodology

The hypothesis tested by this study is that non-linearity will have an adverse impact on the career progression of the employees concerned, usually, in the case of academics, by reducing research capacity and thereby reducing the research output of the School and, ultimately, the university. In the case of professional staff, it could be that a 'chequered' past might result in non-academic career paths being undervalued, in talent and potential being overlooked and wasted to the detriment of the individual and the university.

While both men and women may have non-linear careers, society's continued expectation that women will take primary responsibility for child and family care and for domestic labour suggests that women's careers may be more adversely affected than men's and that non-linearity should, therefore, be considered under UWA's equity and diversity policies.

The aims of the study were:

- To explore how the current models of positioning for and evaluation of staff achievement in the workplace are impacting on the career progression of university employees who have non-linear career trajectories.
- To gather information from staff members, in their own words, about factors, evaluations and circumstances that have limited their career advancement, or limited their opportunities to achieve outcomes similar or equal to those of people engaged in longstanding full-time employment patterns.
- To develop suggestions for new methods and ways to position and evaluate AR2O for strategic application within higher education.

The study was carried out through individual interviews with employees who self-identified as having non-linear careers. Staff were alerted to the AR2O project, and the opportunity to be interviewed, through the following electronic communications:

- The Leadership Development for Women alumni list - professional and academic women who have participated in the LDW program and are still employed at UWA.
- The *Notices* email list to UWA staff - sent through the Human Research Ethics Committee, which had approved the study. This internal list is an opt-in arrangement - and is typically used where emails requesting volunteers for research studies are placed.
- The University Managers' Group (UMG) - an email list directed to professional staff senior managers.

Participants were not asked to identify how they heard about the study but it seems that the greatest number of volunteers came via the LDW email; the next most significant proportion came from the *Notices* list and the fewest via the UMG list (although some people would, of course, have been on this list and on one or both of the others). All notices encouraged recipients to extend the invitation to other male and female staff.

Not surprisingly, recruitment to the study by these means attracted many more women than men. Additional male academics, who were understood to have experienced one or more of the indicators of non-linearity, were recruited through personal contact to help redress this imbalance. However, no further professional men were recruited and the small numbers present in the study preclude gender comparisons.

The advantage of interviewing a group of volunteers who had been given a brief explanation of the study is that these were people who had something to say on the subject and whose narrative was therefore of interest – there was no wastage in these interviews. However, a clear disadvantage was that the sample was skewed towards women. The additional men recruited to attempt to redress this imbalance were largely at a later age and stage of career and family life than the women interviewed. While their views have made an important contribution, we have not been able to capture the views of the younger generation of male academics and professional staff.

In total 29 staff were interviewed:

- 21 academic staff (8 men and 13 women) of which total 10 were in science, 2 in medicine, 7 in arts, one in a central service and one in senior leadership. The majority of these staff held tenured teaching and research posts. Two of the women and none of the men held research intensive posts.
- 9 professional staff, 2 men and 7 women; approximately two-thirds working in central functions and one-third in faculties or schools.

Table 1 Academic staff: gender, level and faculty

Level	Women	Faculty	Men	Faculty
A	0		0	
B	6	3 Science 1 Medicine 1 Arts 1 Centre	2	1 Arts 1 Other
C	4	2 Science 1 Arts	1	1 Science
D	1	1 Science	1	1 Science
E+	3	1 Science 2 Arts	4	2 Science 1 Medicine 1 Arts

Table 2 Professional staff: gender, level, area and contract

Level	Women	Area/Contract	Men	Area/Contract
5/6	1	Centre/Short-term		
6	1	Centre/Short-term		
7	1	Centre/Permanent	1	Centre/Short-term
8	2	Centre/Permanent Centre/Permanent		
9	0		1	Centre/Permanent
10	2	School/Permanent Centre/Permanent		

The interviews, which were structured by a questionnaire but followed a conversational route, were carried out by Judith Secker, a Professional Development Adviser visiting from Oxford University. Ms Secker's time with UWA was specifically for the purpose of conducting this study.

In addition to interviewing participants, Ms Secker was able to discuss the study and the issues arising from it with the Chairs of the Academic Promotion and Workload Committees, the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) and, in respect of professional staff, the Deputy Director of Human Resources. Their many helpful comments and ideas have been taken into account in drafting this report and in particular in the recommendations arising from the study.

3 Outcomes

3.1 *The impact of non-linearity on career progression*

3.1.1 Indications of a non-linear career

At the beginning of their interview, participants were asked for a narrative of their experience prior to coming to UWA. This drew out indications of a non-linear career which were probed later in the interview when participants were asked in more detail about the choices and events which had resulted in a non-linear career and to reflect in greater depth on the career impact of these. The career events and choices envisaged were divided into:

- **Pauses**, defined as time taken out of the workforce;
- **Diversions** – issues or responsibilities which have meant reducing workload or deliberately slowing career progress; and
- **Hijacks**, defined as events, at work or outside work, which have temporarily halted the mainstream career.

Outcomes from this line of questioning are set out in tables 3 to 6 below.

Table 3 Indications of a non-linear career: academic men and women:

Indication of non-linearity	Women	Men
Late PHD	9	2
Change of topic	3	1
Primary childcare	11	1
Working abroad	2	0
Period of full time service	6	3
Personal health	3	1
Period of work outside academia	8	4
Short-term contracts	4	0
Overseas nationality	5	4
Time out of employment	4	2
Research not mainstream	3	2
Care of family members	5	0
Travelling for pleasure	4	2
Travelling for spouse's career	2	1

Table 4 Indications of a non-linear career: professional men and women

Indication of non-linearity	Women	Men
Late or no PHD	2	0
Change of topic	0	0
Primary childcare	4	0
Working abroad	0	0
Period of full time service	2	0
Personal health	3	0
Period of work outside academia	5	2
Short-term contracts	0	0
Overseas nationality	0	0
Time out of employment	4	1
Research not mainstream	0	0
Care of family members	4	1
Travelling for pleasure	1	1
Travelling for spouse's career	1	0

Table 5: Pauses, diversions and hijacks: academic men and women

	Pause		Diversion		Hijack	
Cause	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
None	3	5	0	2	2	0
Travelling	4	2	0	0	0	1
Childcare	7	0	10	2	1	0
Study	1	0	2	1	0	0
Spouse career	1	0	1	0	1	0
Family issues	0	0	4	2	3	0
Termination	1	0	0	0	0	0
Service role	0	0	1	2	8	2
Migration	0	0	3	0	1	0
Health	2	0	1	0	0	0
Career change	0	0	1	2	0	0

Table 6: Pauses, diversions and hijacks: professional men and women

	Pause		Diversion		Hijack	
Cause	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Travelling	1	1				
Childcare	3		2		1	
Study	1					
Spouse career	1					
Family problems	2		5	1	1	
Health	1		1			
Termination	1					2
Secondment			1			
Part-time work			2			
Low status role			1	1		
Covering a post					1	

This line of enquiry revealed that, whereas the men interviewed demonstrated one or two indications of a non-linear career, women were more likely to demonstrate compound indications. Amongst the academic staff, table 5 shows that the 13 women averaged 5.3 indications each, while the eight men averaged 2.8.

The small number of men interviewed means that no conclusion can be drawn comparing the experience of professional men and women. Adding them to the academic cohort to provide a finding on the interviewees as a total reveals that:

- The 20 women interviewed averaged 4.75 indications of non-linearity.
- The 10 men interviewed averaged 2.8 indications of non-linearity.

These are findings that should be tested by further interviews with men at an earlier age and stage of career and family life than those included in our cohort.

3.1.2 Impact of a non-linear career

Tables 5 and 6 break down the factors that impact on career progression. Although, for women, child-rearing, plays a major part in the compound picture of career inhibitors, family responsibilities beyond childcare also feature significantly and serve to restrict women's careers – care for elders, siblings and spouses featured in several women's narratives and in one man's.

Asked to reflect on the career impact of these pauses, diversions and hijacks, the majority of interviewees were able to identify not only that their career

progression had been affected by lack of linearity, but also the ways in which it had been affected.

Academic women told us:

'I lack publications for the number of years in the system. If I had got my PHD earlier and had no children I would be level D by now.' (Delayed PHD and two children)

'I'm still treading water and trying to find my way. Some individuals are supportive, some not.' (Earlier non-academic career and school aged child)

'A more linear career would have meant I could have made my research mark by now' (Earlier non-academic career, single parent caring two children and a sick parent)

'If I didn't have kids a linear career would be a lot easier. I look at young women at level C and D doing what I would have liked to have done. I don't regret the kids of course!' (Migrant, English second language, late PHD, two school aged children)

'No conferences, no networking in my field....an equivalent man is being 'brushed up' to be the next head of School.' (Two children, sick husband)

'I feel equal in talent and work ethic with colleagues more linear and who are now mostly level E. I'm the main breadwinner and my family has lost thousands of dollars as a result.' (Early research success, a period of part time work and one child)

'I have colleagues who are much more selfish and who protect themselves but I can't do it.' (Migrant with period of unemployment for health reasons)

'(The impact) is massive. I'm an efficient researcher and have averaged two papers a year. A man without the same responsibilities would be ramping up 5 or 6 papers a year. (This means) I have no success with ARC funding and am unable to establish effective networks and attend conferences.' (Late PHD; two children)

'Linear colleagues got earlier promotions. When I came back to the Faculty (following service roles), people I knew had gone. I lost my peer group network.' (Earlier non-academic career, career break, sick husband)

The careers of just three of the 13 women academic staff interviewed were not so affected by their non-linearity and **academic men** with non-linear careers appeared to be less affected too:

'It didn't stop my career but it made me too busy....I kept the plates spinning - some wobbled but didn't fall.' (Migrant who prioritised time with children)

'The late start doesn't seem to have done me any harm – my CV isn't questioned.' (Migrant with delayed career)

'The politics of the discipline impacts on progressGroup has been together for ten years – keep it together no matter what.' (Earlier non-academic career; discipline not mainstream)

'No real problems – Dean three times but kept research going.' (Migrant)

However, three of the men had experienced career impact:

'Those with publication and grant records have the power to say no. Saying yes has disadvantaged me....I'm trying to be less accommodating and more selfish....I'll get further than working for the common good.' (Industrial experience, shares child-rearing)

'There's no question I would have otherwise been promoted by now.' (Migrant, shares child-rearing)

'It's difficult to compare but my productivity was disrupted and is lower than it should have been. I took longer to move up the ladder.' (Migrant, only child of parents overseas, periods of illness)

While the third man quoted here is of an age and career / family stage commensurate with most of our male interviewees, the first two are of a younger generation and at earlier career / family stages. The similarity of what they have to say to what women with child-rearing responsibility have told us suggests that this generation of men requires further study.

It was interesting that academic staff did not report heavy teaching loads as creating a diversion or as hijacking their careers. Most of our interviewees spoke enthusiastically about their teaching but were often daunted by the amount of teaching they were expected to do. Asking about the division of their duties between research, teaching and service roles revealed that the women and two men who were most heavily involved in child-rearing and who, therefore had more compound indications of non-linearity, talked in some detail about the teaching loads that had resulted from a reduction of their research output and the negative impact of those loads on their ability to recommence research:

'70% teaching – it changes every year with short notice of the requirements. I had 900 students last year, 300 this year with 4 weeks notice each time' (Level D man)

'Teaching sucks out all the oxygen. I work on books at home, journal publications at work – maybe 25% of my time.' (Level B man)

'I'm 60/65% undergraduate teaching; 15% postgraduate supervision. What's left over is for research and service.'(Level B woman)

A specific issue which arose from interviews with professional staff is the impact of being older than might be considered the norm for their pay level and type of work:

Asked about the impact when people see his CV, one man in his forties said: 'it depends on attitude. I have experienced an adverse reaction from traditionalists looking for evidence of stability – this is less the case with generation X interviewers.'

An older woman whose career had been delayed by family concerns said: 'I am quite old to be still seeking further promotions. People who don't know my circumstances may think I'm not up to it. I fear that I could be passed over when I am only just getting going.'

3.1.3 Career support

To elicit the extent to which they had been supported with progressing a career in light of these experiences, interviewees were asked a sequence of questions probing how they had managed to pick up the threads of a career, the extent to which their particular circumstances had received recognition and support and what further recognition or support would help them to keep their career going.

One perhaps surprising feature derived from this sequence was that the career inhibiting aspects of employees' lives were unlikely to be known to more than one colleague and sometimes to no-one with whom they work. For academics this was sometimes the result of the temporary nature of a School headship and academic staff were more likely to discuss personal issues with a close colleague with similar experiences or with friends outside work than with the Head of School or another supervisor. Professional staff were more likely to have told their manager about at least some of their circumstances, often in the context of seeking flexibility or carer's leave and had generally met with a positive response to these requests.

Staff who had benefited from entitlements such as carer's leave and flexible working were appreciative and the existence of such benefits had clearly engendered feelings of loyalty to their manager and to the University. However, career development support in light of these often temporary circumstances, rather than assistance with the immediate situation, did not appear to have been discussed with either academic or professional staff. There may be a tendency for managers and supervisors to steer clear of what they fear might be burdensome discussions about career development with staff in these situations. The risk here is that such staff will be written off in career development terms. Discussions with interviewees suggested that, while some fear that their supervisor may be unsympathetic, for others it may be fear of being written off in this way that deters them from discussing their circumstances openly. There would seem to be scope for particular attention to be paid to career development for them.

3.1.4 Implications for research and the link with child-rearing

Academic women and one man caught in this situation told us that their difficulty was lack of time for research on top of dealing with domestic responsibilities and heavy teaching loads. Further discussions elicited that 'time for research' in this context meant not only the hours in a day or a week but included the sense of mental space and energy necessary to pursue research. This was particularly linked to child-rearing and it was clear that, while women do not all react in the same way to the arrival of a child in their lives, amongst our interviewees, there was a detrimental effect on research capacity which resulted in an increase in their teaching load, making it less likely that they would be able to resume research when the impact of child-rearing lessens. For those in the throes of early child-rearing the detrimental effect seemed everlasting; those who had emerged from this phase could recognise that it had been temporary:

'I don't want to compromise the care of my children I can't go to more than one conference a year and can't be too far away.' (Academic woman with heavy teaching load whose short-term contract and resulting financial insecurity has resulted in her husband taking a fly in/fly out job.)

'I was in a fog for three years after each of my two children the fog cleared when the children started sleeping.' (Academic woman whose research was affected and who is now successfully research active.)

'The year after my daughter was born was the first year in which I had no publications' (Senior woman with a successful career)

As the second and third of these quotes show, the impact of child-rearing on capacity for research varies but does not have to be permanent. Each of these three women had great potential for research success yet there appears to be no means by which the University is able intentionally to intervene to ensure that a woman is able to pick up her research before her capacity is gone for good. It seems likely that the woman quoted first, whose research before she had children was of a standard sufficient to have won her offers from other Go8 universities, will be lost as a researcher.

That such interventions can be effective is evidenced by others of our interviewees:

'I only got tenure in 2001 when the DVC intervened.' (Academic woman whose late start career coupled with child-rearing threatened to result in her being 'lost'.)

'My Head of School is supportive – has reduced my teaching and admin loadsI can't research in short bursts like some people can.....I want to continue part-time for a while, using the extra time for research.' (Academic woman with two children now at school and quality publications but not quantity')

'My career goals were driven by a Head of School who told me to write a research strategy for a, then, non-existent research group. It's the best thing I could have been asked to do –a touchstone that I still refer to.' (Academic woman whose research dipped for six years over child-rearing and who is now highly successful.)

3.1.5 Summary of findings and recommendations on the impact of a non-linear career on career progression

- While both women and men have non-linear career, the factors that inhibit career are more complex for women in this cohort than they are for the men. Child-rearing responsibilities are often compounded by other factors derived from society's continued expectation that women take primary responsibility for domestic life. Younger generations of men show signs of wanting more involvement with their families, as is the case with two interviewees in this study, suggesting that this is becoming an issue more relevant to both genders. The skewing of our sample towards more junior women and more senior men means that we have been unable to test this and a further small study of men at an earlier career and life stage is indicated.
- Those with whom they work may not be aware of the complexity of women's lives (and those of some men), having little idea of what their colleagues are dealing with on top of work each day. Requests for part-time working, flexibility and carer's leave are usually met and appreciated. However, there is unlikely to be any accompanying discussion of career support, enabling the individual to reach his or her potential. The university's current procedures do not make explicit provision available for this kind of discussion and some staff and their supervisors may, for variety of reasons, be steering clear of them.
- Those concerned are clear about the impact of a non-linear career and are well able to articulate the inhibiting factors compared with colleagues whose career is more linear. Despite the skew in our sample, their narratives demonstrate that there are issues of equity which could be addressed through the application of AR2O principles.
- For many academic staff, a non-linear career in which child-rearing features results in a loss of research activity. Workload models usually mean that, when this happens, teaching duties increase. Although the cause of the dip is temporary (its length varying with the individual), there appears to be no means within the model by which a woman (or a man) in this situation can be brought back to full research activity when the time is right. This not only affects an individual's career and inhibits the achievement of the potential which was the basis for his or her appointment: any return on the university's investment in parental leave is also inhibited.
- A particular feature for older professional staff who have come late to a career in HE, is that their earlier experiences and their future potential may be written off by those who don't know the circumstances lying behind a late start and resulting low pay level relative to age.

Recommendations

- 1. A further small study should be conducted, enabling the views of men at earlier career and life stages to be incorporated into these findings; this may nuance the recommendations made to date but they are unlikely to be affected wholesale and, where appropriate, discussions around implementing AR20 principles could begin now rather than be subject to further delay.*
- 2. HR might revisit the PDR, and consider within the PAR process, means of stimulating (i) discussion of past experience, for example in the context of skills and knowledge transferable from earlier working life or life outside work and (ii) career support discussions in the context of opportunity to achieve.*
- 3. Discussions already underway in the workload committee might include consideration of a variety of means by which women and men whose child-rearing responsibilities are a primary cause of a loss of research activity can be encouraged to (i) maintain a research profile, albeit at a lower level than previously, while undertaking more teaching duties than previously and (ii) be given assistance to return to full research activity when the time is right for them to take it up again. Care should be taken to ensure that staff in comparable situations for whom child-rearing is not the main issue are treated equally.*

3.2 Impact of non-linearity on promotion

3.2.1 The measurement of success

Promotion is clearly integral to career progression and the interviews invited more detailed discussion in a number of areas specific to promotion. In addition to discussing their own experience, participants were asked what they thought were the crucial characteristics of career success where they work – how success is measured. They were asked to consider how well the perceived measures of success recognise and accredit their circumstances in comparison to colleagues with a more linear career.

Academic staff were, as expected, able to identify publication in high impact journals and award of grants as the crucial criteria for success. The majority commented that, although promotion criteria appeared to accord equal status to teaching and service, in practice they did not feel this to be the case. Lack of sophisticated criteria for teaching, compared with those for research, was identified as an issue and the difficulty of evolving such criteria was acknowledged.

Reflecting on the extent to which the measures of success recognise and accredit their circumstances in comparison to colleagues with a more linear career, 10 of the 13 academic women were clear that they were comparatively disadvantaged, for the most part by the teaching load resulting from a dip in research discussed in section 3.1 above. (The other 3 women were, for differing reasons, not in a

position to comment.) Typical comments in response to making the success criteria more equitable were:

'I'm not valued for the things I do well. My research is highly cited but I don't have many papers so I'm rated average as a researcher.'

'The only thing valued is research. Those of us passionate about teaching feel that it is not recognised. And the emphasis is on quantity rather than quality of research.'

'The workload model is based on research output so less research output makes for more teaching – a punitive model'

Four of the eight academic men interviewed were Level E Winthrop professors and, as expected, had less to say about the criteria for success. Comments from two of the men on levels B to D are of interest, demonstrating that the features of a non-linear career currently differ between men and women but may become more complex and onerous as men take on more family and domestic responsibility. (The other two men did not comment):

'I work in an unorthodox way rather than conforming to the mainstream. I haven't been funded despite increasingly good reviews because my topic falls between disciplines....my strategy now is not to put all my eggs in the same basket so I have chosen a topic of interest which I can publish and is in the mainstream.'

'My track record of five years with a company doesn't count. I can include patents in a portfolio but they are not really counted. Teaching is valued but not assessed.'

As well as being asked what could be done to make success criteria more equitable for those with non-linear careers compared with colleagues with a more linear career, interviewees were asked later in the interview what, if anything they would change in the way in which promotion works at UWA.

3.2.2 Ideas for change

Most academic staff with non-linear careers elaborated on the earlier discussion about the value attributed to teaching compared with research, the impact that this could have for people for whom teaching at present forms the bulk of their contribution, and their desire for more sophisticated criteria on teaching. There were, in addition, some further ideas put forward for consideration:

'AR20 and the more flexible approach is a challenge to the Academic Promotions committee – relying on good judgement rather than strict criteria. It's not the policy that needs rewording but being prepared to recognise potential against AR20. We promote against what has been done rather than potential; on first appointment we recognise potential so why not with promotion? We have a formal start up process for new appointees so why not something similar for

people after period of less mental space for research – for them to use when they are ready. Research interests could be maintained through collaborative PHD supervision. It's good policy for Schools to have a formal approach to maintaining engagement at times of lower research output.' (Level E man)

'Calculate the benefit (to men with linear careers) of having a spouse.' (Level E woman)

'Don't compare with a person who has a wife at home who does everything and whose only commitment is work.' (Level B woman)

'Close communication with an individual rather than a one size fits all workload model - looking at what a person is capable of rather than just existing publications.' (Level B woman)

'Emphasise quality of research.' (Level C woman)

The first of these quotes is perhaps of particular interest, demonstrating an understanding of the comments made by many of our interviewees who explained the difficulty for them of carrying out research in the brief periods of time available when teaching, childcare and other domestic duties are complete and mental energy is at a low ebb. That there are academic staff at UWA, like this man, whose research interests enable them to understand the psychology that may lie behind a dip in research activity associated with other life and work pressures and who might, therefore, be able to contribute to the implementation of AR20 principles, was also mentioned by one of the senior leaders interviewed for this study.

3.2.3 Career enablers

Towards the end of the interview, participants were asked whether there is one thing – a key enabler – which would make the most difference to their career. The thrust of responses confirmed a desire for help with creating space and time for research:

- The most popular response amongst academic staff (6 of the women and three of the men) involved some sort of collaboration and/or assistance. In one case this was an administrative assistant; others would value research collaborators – PHD students or post doctoral researchers; those with large teaching commitments and big classes mentioned teaching assistants.
- Linked to this need for assistance with reducing burdens was a desire amongst the women and two men whose research had slowed because of child-rearing for a 'kickstart' to enable them to become more research active. Three and one of the men made suggestions along the lines suggested in this quote:
- 'A kickstart for my research when the time is right – time and funding.' (Level C woman with children aged 8 and 4.)

3.2.4 The role of career support (professional and academic staff)

Career support, in various forms, can play a key role in encouraging employees to stretch their abilities and achieve potential, including promotion. Participants were therefore invited to discuss what career support they are receiving or have made use of in the past. Where career support had been taken up, interviewees were asked how useful it had been and to give examples.

Table 7: Career support men and women (professional staff)

Helpful support	Women	Men
PDR	3	1
Timely conversation	1	0
Workshops & courses	5	2
Mentoring	1	0
Staff entitlements	7	1
None	1	0

Of those professional staff who commented on the formal PDR, although only 2 professional staff had found it unhelpful (one man describing the experience as 'destructive'), most were lukewarm, feeling that they were unable to address the issues that really concerned them and which were the subject of these interviews.

As might be expected some workshops and courses were thought to have been more useful than others. Perhaps because of the disparity in their roles, there was no clear picture from professional staff about which courses had been of most use. (But see section 3.2.5 below on the LDW programme.)

Turning to those who had made use of mentoring, one woman commented on her experience: 'I had a good informal mentor and am myself a mentor now'. Another described her manager as 'a very wise mentor with guidance at times of extreme frustration'.

The correlation between a non-linear career and career support take up is clearest in take-up of staff entitlements: carer's leave, flexible working, parental and day care provision were each specifically cited by two women, with flexibility in respect of a family member's health cited by one man: the seeming lack of follow through to career support when such requests are made is discussed earlier.

Table 8: Career support men and women (academic staff)

Helpful support	Women	Men
PDR	3	2
Timely conversation	5	0
Workshops & courses	6	2
Mentoring	5	2
Staff entitlements	6	3
Networks	0	2

Table 8 shows that the academic women in this cohort were more likely than the men to appreciate career support. Like their professional colleagues, academics were lukewarm about the formal PDR. A timely, informal conversation had, in many cases, been more useful:

'The right word at the right time – a Dean who had turned down my promotion (not at UWA) a year later said 'now you're ready.' I might otherwise not have felt confident enough.' (Senior woman)

Academic interviewees' experience of mentoring has been variable:

'I've had mentors 3 times but it hasn't been successful. The first, when my baby was four weeks old told me the only way was to put in the hours. The other two dumped their problems on me.' (Level E woman)

'Mentoring by (Name) was fantastic. Some men know about achievement relative to opportunity and will encourage you to see a career as a longer term endeavour.' (Level C woman)

'Informal mentoring with a colleague has been my best support'. (Level D man)

Responses to staff development courses and workshops varied according to the perceived relevance of the course, with those having a tangible output receiving most favourable comments.

'Workshops and seminars for teaching have been most useful.' (Level B man)

'A writing retreat organised by OSDS for people between levels A and C' (Level C woman)

'Courses are useless when they are too general. One good one was on writing an application for promotion (not at UWA) – the focus was on making your application a success story.' (Senior woman)

'A workshop on strategic planning resulted in a research strategy.' (Level C woman)

3.2.5 Leadership Development for Women

That 12 of the women interviewed (four professional staff and eight academics) commented specifically on the LDW's role in their career development is testimony to the success and continued relevance of this well-established programme. In some cases participation had encouraged a successful application for promotion, in others a valuable mentoring relationship had been created and for many the programme enabled them to understand the university's aims and objectives and, therefore, to 'see the bigger picture'.

3.2.6 Summary of findings and recommendations on promotion

- There is a clear perception that teaching is treated less favourably than research in promotion and that this is linked to the difficulty of identifying more sophisticated criteria for teaching.
- Academics with non-linear careers clearly perceive disadvantage in promotion compared with those with more linear careers and this is linked in particular to the role of women (and some men) in child-rearing.
- Interviewees who felt able to put forward ideas for change stressed the need to be treated as individuals rather than being compared with others whose time and opportunity for research may be greater.
- There are UWA staff whose research interests may enable them to contribute to an understanding of how conflicting home and work pressures reduce research activity and who may, therefore, be able to help with embedding AR2O principles within the universities processes.
- A minority of interviewees would be content with a teaching career if teaching contribution was to be better recognised in promotion criteria. However, the majority of interviewees whose research output was currently reduced as a result of child-rearing were anxious to get the support they need to return to more active research when that is practicable.
- Career development for academic staff is most helpful when it is specifically targeted rather than generalised and when there is a tangible result that supports career progression.
- The LDW is clearly a phenomenal success and, judging by the outcomes that women told us about, represents excellent value for money for the university.

Recommendations

4. *Staff who are passionate about teaching need to be able to see how they can translate that passion into measurable success for the university and their own careers.*

5. *The Academic Promotions Committee might consider the development of criteria which can distinguish different levels of teaching achievement commensurate with the research-based criteria.*

6. *In light of the comments received about AR2O being there in policy but not in practice, the committee might consider the means by which the achievements of those whose scope for research is currently limited can best be expressed, perhaps through a template which enables quality of work and therefore demonstrable potential to be emphasised rather than tending to special pleading which can make it difficult for evaluators to distinguish the relative merit of individual circumstances.*

7. *It seems likely, given the loss of self-esteem which often accompanies lessening of research activity, that some women (and some men) may need support with making a case that presents their achievement relative to opportunity in this robust way. Workshops appear to have been best received when they take a practical approach and the committee might work with OSDS, Equity and Diversity and individuals who have already succeeded in re-establishing a research career to develop such a workshop.*

8. *The Committee might seek expert help from, amongst others, colleagues in the School of Psychology whose work might contribute to understanding and addressing the issues arising from low research activity.*

9. *Alongside this process for the individual applicant, the committee might consider specifying that statements provided by Schools and Faculties in connection with an application identify the support which that individual has been given and the measures taken in connection with re-establishing her (or his) research career. This would reinforce the recommendation made in section 3.1 regarding timely intervention and encouragement.*