



Submission on *DRAFT Representation on UNSW Committees and Decision-Making Bodies Procedure*

UNSW Women in Research Network (WiRN)

This submission is made by the UNSW Women in Research Network (WiRN). WiRN represents 800 female and female-identifying research staff, including academics, HDR students and professional staff engaged in research across UNSW and its affiliated research institutes. For the past 11 years, WiRN has worked to inform, support and advocate for women researchers at UNSW, and this submission is informed by that experience.

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the draft *Representation on UNSW Committees and Decision-Making Bodies Procedure* (“the Procedure”). We agree strongly that there is a need to increase efforts to achieve gender equity within committees and, particularly, within decision-making bodies and leadership roles across UNSW.

Summary of recommendations

Recommendation 1: Where there is a significant gender imbalance in the Faculty/ group from which committee/decision-making members are selected, less than 40% of one gender may be permissible. The reasons for this must be reported to the EDI Board along with a strategy explaining how and by when this underlying imbalance will be addressed. The proportion of committee members from each gender should not be less than 30%, and the timeframe for achieving 40% should be less than five years.

Recommendation 2: Where there is an underlying imbalance making it difficult to achieve 40% targets across all committees/decision-making bodies, priority for this gender balance must be given to the most influential committees and decision-making bodies.

Recommendation 3: The procedure should be revised to make it clear that it applies to leadership positions as well as committees and decision-making bodies.

Recommendation 4. A survey of appointment practices across UNSW should be undertaken within 12 months of the commencement of the Procedure. Results should be used to inform revisions to the Procedure. Findings should be reported across the university including guidance on best practice, with concrete examples.

Recommendation 5. An audit of service roles across UNSW should be undertaken within 12 months of the commencement of the Procedure. Results should be used to inform revisions to the Procedure. Findings should be reported across the university including guidance on best practice, with concrete examples.

Targets for representation

WiRN supports the adoption of targets of 40% for each gender across all committees and decision-making bodies at UNSW. Numerical targets enable measurement of outcomes, which is crucial to ensure that those outcomes are achieved.

However, these targets may not be immediately achievable and some transition measures, with a clear timeline, should be included in the Procedure.

Where the relevant staff from which committee members may be selected have very low numbers of one gender, the requirement to achieve 40% of that gender may result in the same people sitting on multiple committees to the detriment of their other work. Instead of enhancing gender equity, this may have negative consequences for the career progression of those overburdened staff members, and for their ability to contribute to academic life at UNSW.

Where the relevant faculty/group from which the committee/decision-making body is selected is highly imbalanced, it may be more appropriate to have less than 40% of one gender during a transition period. Where this is the case, there must be clear reporting on the gender imbalance and the reasons for it to the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Board. As part of that reporting, there must be a clear strategy explaining how the 40% target will be achieved without overburdening members of one gender and the timeframe within which this will be done. The proportion of committee members from each gender should not be less than 30%, and the timeframe for achieving 40% should not be more than five years.

Where there are low numbers of one gender, priority should be given to achieving gender equity in the most influential/senior committees first.

***Recommendation 1:* Where there is a significant gender imbalance in the Faculty/ group from which committee/decision-making members are selected, less than 40% of one gender may be permissible. The reasons for this must be reported to the EDI Board along with a strategy explaining how and by when this underlying imbalance will be addressed. The proportion of committee members from each gender should not be less than 30%, and the timeframe for achieving 40% should not be more than five years.**

Recommendation 2: Where there is an underlying imbalance making it difficult to achieve 40% targets across all committees/decision-making bodies, priority for this gender balance must be given to the most influential committees.

Related to this, the provision in the third paragraph under section 2 of the draft Procedure should be a transition measure, not an ongoing rule. If committee composition is imbalanced because the ex-officio or nominated members are dominated by one gender this indicates an underlying problem with the distribution of senior roles within the relevant group/Faculty. Providing for “such other person” to be appointed to the committee to meet the requirements of this section does not address ongoing gender imbalance. It may also result in people sitting on committees to the detriment of other work without achieving much – if all of the more powerful and informed ex officio members are from one gender, those from the other gender may find it difficult to be heard/ to make a difference to the decisions taken by the relevant body.

Given that the procedure applies to decision-making bodies, we assume that it would apply to Faculty Leadership Groups (or equivalent). The procedure should thus apply also to leadership roles (Dean, Head of School, Associate Deans, Directors etc) and in turn to ex-officio roles on committees and decision-making bodies.

Where the 40% target cannot be achieved in these roles, this should also be reported to the EDI Board. These reports should also include a strategy as to how the imbalance will be addressed, and by when.

Recommendation 3: The procedure should be revised to make it clear that it applies to leadership positions as well as committees and decision-making bodies.

Appointment practices

The procedures for appointing members of committees and decision-making bodies and for filling leadership roles varies greatly across UNSW. A fuller understanding of this range of practices is necessary for a more comprehensive procedure on committee representation, and for the achievement of gender equity at UNSW. A university-wide survey should be undertaken within the first 12 months of the Procedure coming into effect, with the results then used to revise the Procedure as necessary. Findings of the survey should be reported, including include advice on best practice, with concrete examples.

Recommendation 4. A survey of appointment practices across UNSW should be undertaken within 12 months of the commencement of the Procedure. Results should be used to inform revisions to the Procedure. Findings should be reported across the university, including examples and guidance on best practice.

As a general rule, WiRN understands that female academics, particularly at Levels B and C, perform a very large share of service roles across the University. Anecdotal evidence (and surveys in some Faculties) suggests that women are more likely to serve on committees and undertake roles with less power and prestige, but higher workloads (for example,

undergraduate education committees, student advice and pastoral care roles). A thorough audit of service roles across UNSW is necessary to identify areas in need of attention. This should encompass seniority and other forms of diversity as well as gender. Gender equity should be a target at all levels of service within UNSW.

Recommendation 5. An audit of service roles across UNSW should be undertaken within 12 months of the commencement of the Procedure. Results should be used to inform revisions to the Procedure. Findings should be reported across the university, including examples and guidance on best practice.

WiRN would be happy to discuss any of the matters covered in this submission, and to contribute to the development of a revised procedure.

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