

Addressing the challenges that impede the progression and retention of early-to mid-career stage women in academia (WinA)

Presented by Dr Amber Tout

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First things first...

There is still work to do



Women comprise 50% of all academic staff but **only 30% of professors**
(HESA, 2024)



Women take **15 years longer** than men to reach professorship status.
(Harris et al., 2024)



The sex-pay gap stands at **13.7%** across academic staff.
(Advance HE, 2024)

Project Aims

Three aims addressed by three work packages (WP)

Aim 1

To identify key challenges

WP1

Quantitative
Survey

Aim 2

To understand their impact(s)

WP2

Qualitative
Interviews

Aim 3

To co-develop new solutions

WP3

Co-Production
Workshops

WP1

Quantitative Survey (N = 401)



Survey Measures

Completed by 401 women from 62 UK HEIs

Demographics

- Age
- Ethnicity
- Parental status
- Relationship status
- Disability status
- Contract type
- Job role
- Academic discipline

Academic Challenges

- Belonging and inclusion
- Job precarity and pay
- Bullying and harassment
- Gender inequality
- Career development
- Access to mentors
- Work-life balance
- Wellbeing at work

Wellbeing

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Quality of life
- Social support
- Imposter syndrome
- Future uncertainty
- Perceived control
- Identity conflict

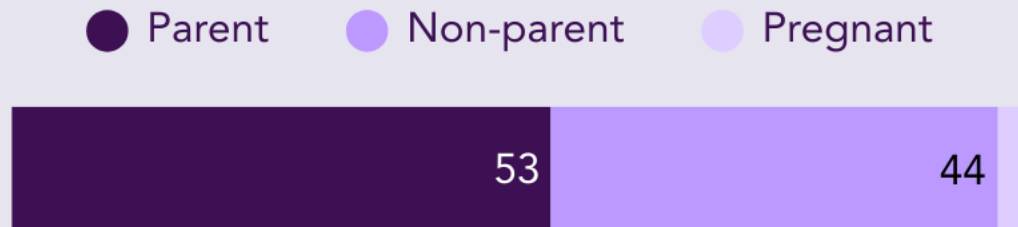
Sample Characteristics

N = 401

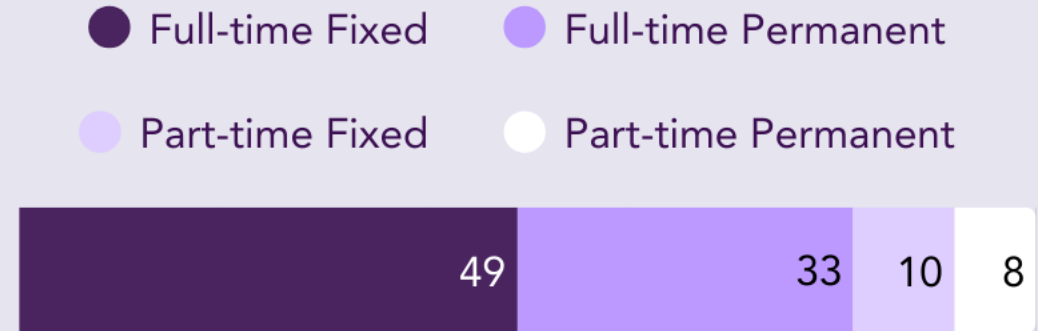
Ethnicity (%)



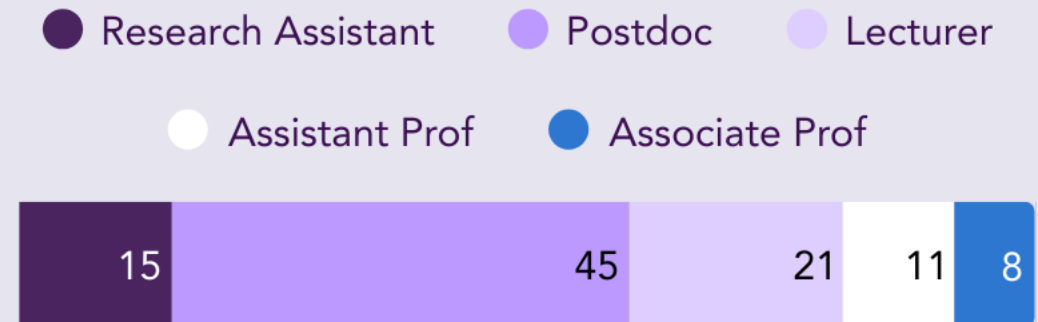
Parental Status (%)



Contract Type (%)



Academic Role (%)



Aim 1: Identifying Key Challenges

Mean scores across the eight academic challenge areas

For each challenge area, women were asked to indicate their agreement with 2-3 statements, ranked 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree.

E.g., *"I am satisfied with the security of my employment"*

Higher mean scores indicate higher levels of challenge.

Aim 1: Identifying Key Challenges

Mean scores across the eight academic challenge areas

1. Job precarity and pay (M = 3.14, SD = .95)
2. Work-life balance (M = 2.98, SD = .85)
3. Wellbeing at work (M = 2.93, SD = .99)
4. Gender inequality (M = 2.85, SD = .86)
5. Career development (M = 2.54, SD = .81)
6. Belonging and inclusion (M = 2.52, SD = .81)
7. Bullying and harassment (M = 2.48, SD = .95)
8. Access to mentors (M = 2.14, SD = .89)

For each challenge area, women were asked to indicate their agreement with 2-3 statements, ranked 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree.

E.g., *"I am satisfied with the security of my employment"*

Higher mean scores indicate higher levels of challenge.

Aim 1: Identifying Key Challenges

Mean scores across the eight academic challenge areas

1. Job precarity and pay ($M = 3.14$, $SD = .95$)

50%

Feel that their employment is insecure

Are unsatisfied with opportunities for pay regrading and promotion

Aim 1: Identifying Key Challenges

Mean scores across the eight academic challenge areas

1. Job precarity and pay ($M = 3.14$, $SD = .95$)
2. Work-life balance ($M = 2.98$, $SD = .85$)

60%

Feel pressured to work beyond their normal hours to maintain or advance their career

Aim 1: Identifying Key Challenges

Mean scores across the eight academic challenge areas

1. Job precarity and pay ($M = 3.14$, $SD = .95$)
2. Work-life balance ($M = 2.98$, $SD = .85$)
3. Wellbeing at work ($M = 2.93$, $SD = .99$)

50%

Feel uncomfortable and unsupported taking time off for work-related stress

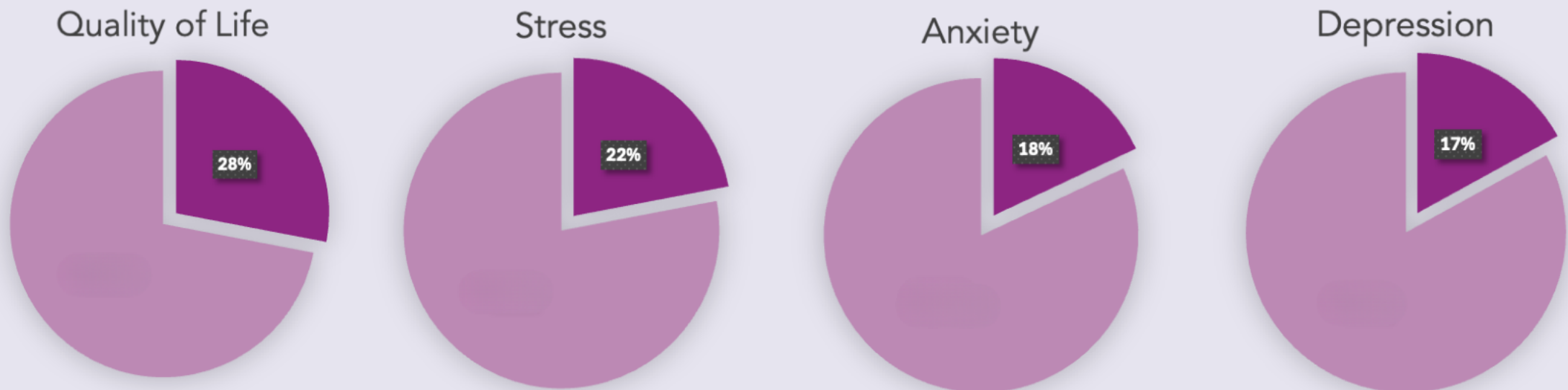
Aim 2: Impacts on Wellbeing

The proportion of variance explained by academic challenges

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The proportion of variance explained by academic challenges

Collectively, the eight academic challenges explained **17–28%** of the variance in mental health and wellbeing outcomes (all $p < .001$). **Job precarity and pay** and **work-life balance** emerged as significant linear predictors (all $p < .001$).



Aside: Intersectional Differences

Mean difference tests (ANOVAs)

Aside: Intersectional Differences

Mean difference tests (ANOVAs)

ANOVAs indicate sig. differences in mean job precarity and pay scores based on academic role and contract type after correcting for multiple comparisons ($p < .0004$)

	Job Precarity & Pay
Academic Role	Research Assistants (vs. Lecturers) Postdocs (vs. Lecturers and Associate Profs)
Contract Type	Fixed-Term Full-Time (vs. Full-Time and Part-Time)

Aside: Intersectional Differences

Hierarchical cluster analysis

Aside: Intersectional Differences

Hierarchical cluster analysis



Aside: Underlying Mediators

Exploratory mediation analysis

Aside: Underlying Mediators

Exploratory mediation analysis

Academic Challenge

Mediators

Wellbeing Outcomes



Identity Conflict



Depression (full)



Social Support



Anxiety (full)



Percieved Control



Quality of Life (partial)

Job Precarity & Pay

WP2

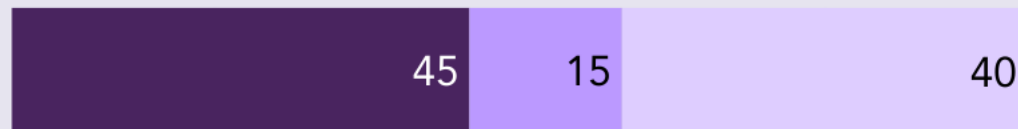
Qualitative Interviews (N = 20)

Sample Characteristics

N = 20

Ethnicity (%)

● White ● Other White ● BAME



Parental Status (%)

● Parent ● Non-parent



Academic Role (%)

● Research Assistant ● Postdoc ● Lecturer

● Assistant Prof ● Associate Prof

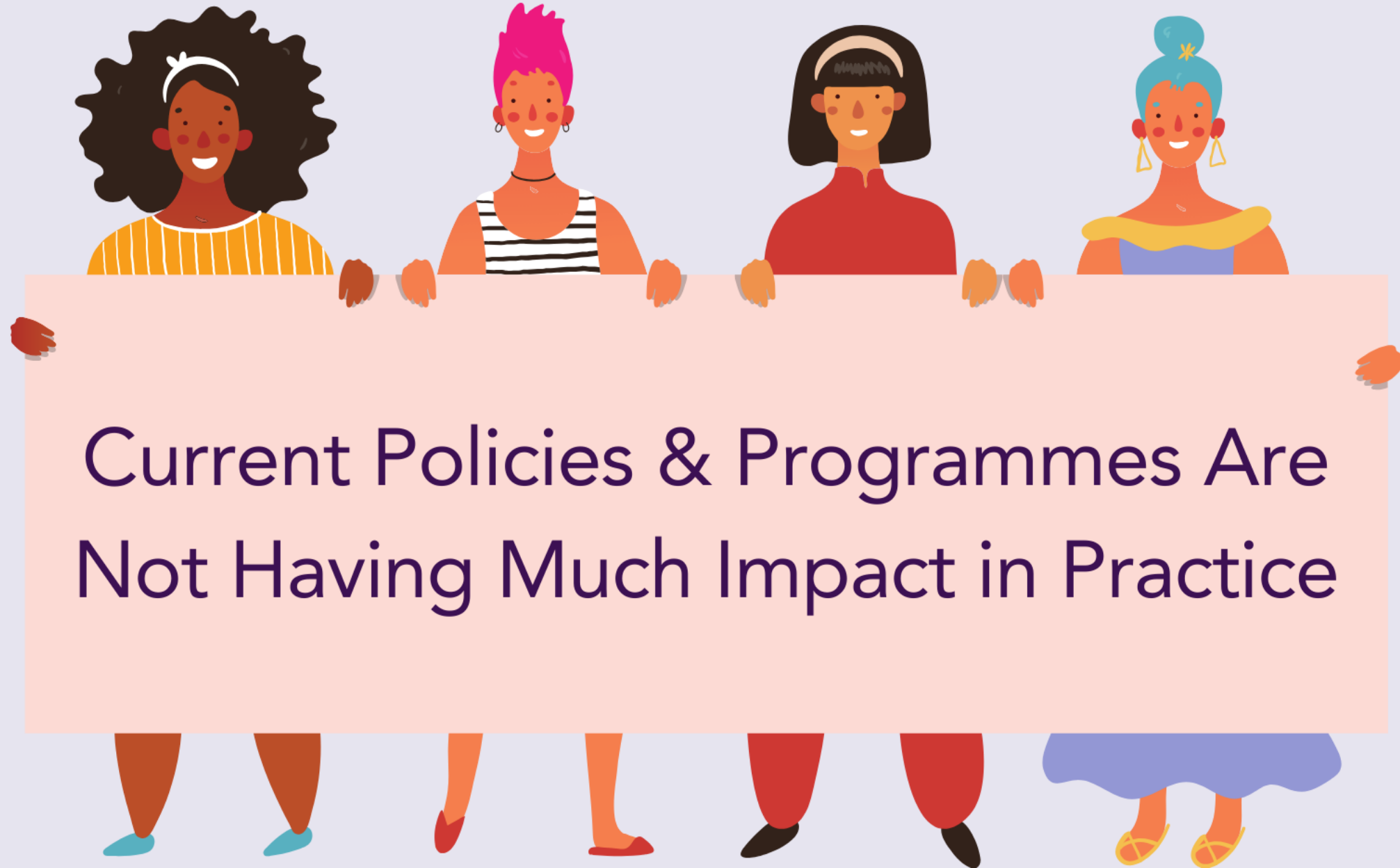


8 Key Themes

Derived From Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

- **Theme 1:** Gender (Im)Blances in Academia
- **Theme 2:** (Un)Supportive Academic Environments
- **Theme 3:** Precarious Employment Practices
- **Theme 4:** Funding
- **Theme 5:** Academic Work Culture & Hidden Workloads
- **Theme 6:** Navigating Academia with Caregiving Responsibilities
- **Theme 7:** Unfair Treatment, (Un)Conscious Bias & Inequity in Experiences
- **Theme 8:** Psychological Wellbeing & Physical Health





Current Policies & Programmes Are
Not Having Much Impact in Practice

“
There are a lot of words and a lot of policies and guidelines and stuff, but it's just in practice, I'm not sure... It's the difference between stuff that's written down on paper and stuff that actually happens
”

“
I know that having the Athena badge means 'Thumbs up you're doing a good job with women, but I don't actually know what it means they do'
”

“
I just think the last thing we need is another policy, and another charter... I must say it's a very British thing to do... Policy this and policy that, toolkit this and toolkit that constantly. But again, what do they mean? What do they practically mean, you know?
”

WP3

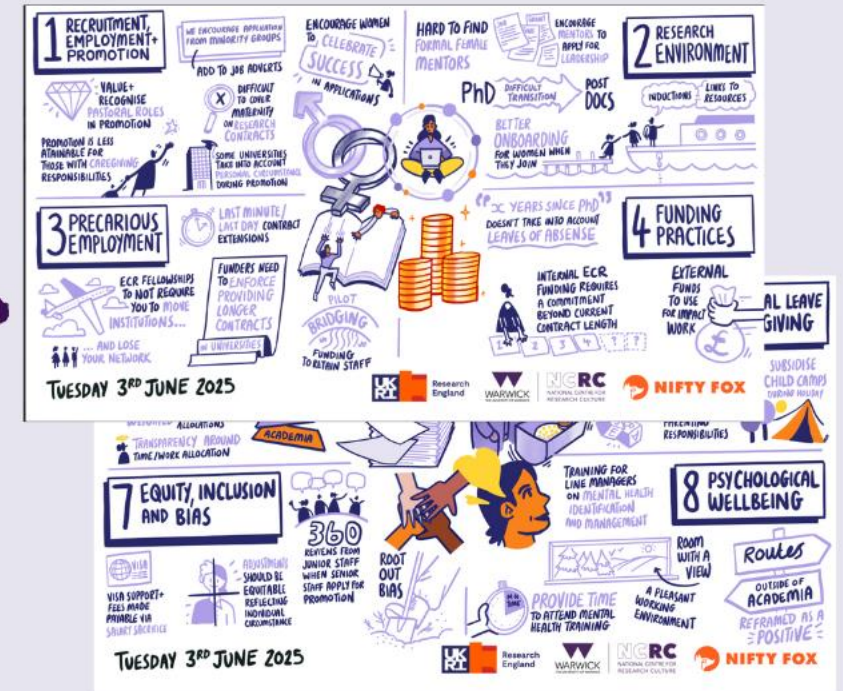
Co-production Workshops

Co-developing Solutions

Lived experience focus group (N = 8)

Co-developing Solutions

Lived experience focus group (N = 8)



Co-developing Solutions

Collaborative strategy development workshop

Co-developing Solutions

Collaborative strategy development workshop



Report of Recommendations: Worked Example

Worked Example:



Survey findings revealed **job precarity and pay-related** concerns represent the biggest barrier to women's retention and progression.

Interviews showed **Precarious Employment Practices (Theme 3) and Funding (Theme 4)** are barriers to personal and professional stability — *"the projectification of research"*.

Worked Example:



Focus group discussions suggest the introduction of internal '**bridging funds**' and **external support funds** to help retain staff and support the finalisation of project outputs.



Worked Example:



- Create institutional schemes offering short-term (e.g., 3–6 month) **project continuation funds** to help retain staff, support the scaling of high-impact research, and finalise key outputs after primary funding ends.
- Ring-fence a proportion of strategic or discretionary research funds for this purpose annually (e.g., 10%).
- PIs to submit short “Phase 2” cases to funders outlining the remaining value of the project and how continuation aligns with strategic priorities.

Next Steps...

The formation of national-level working groups

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The formation of national-level working groups

Theme 1 Strategy and systems for gender equity in recruitment, promotion, and recognition	Theme 2 Supportive research environments: Leadership, mentoring and career development opportunities	Theme 3 Addressing job precarity and improving career security	Theme 4 Fairer funding accessibility and structures
Theme 5 Redesigning and valuing all roles	Theme 6 Caregiving, parental leave and family-friendly policies	Theme 7 Equity, inclusion and bias	Theme 8 Psychological wellbeing and physical health

Thank you!

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All our wonderful participants and stakeholders!

WinA
Webpage

