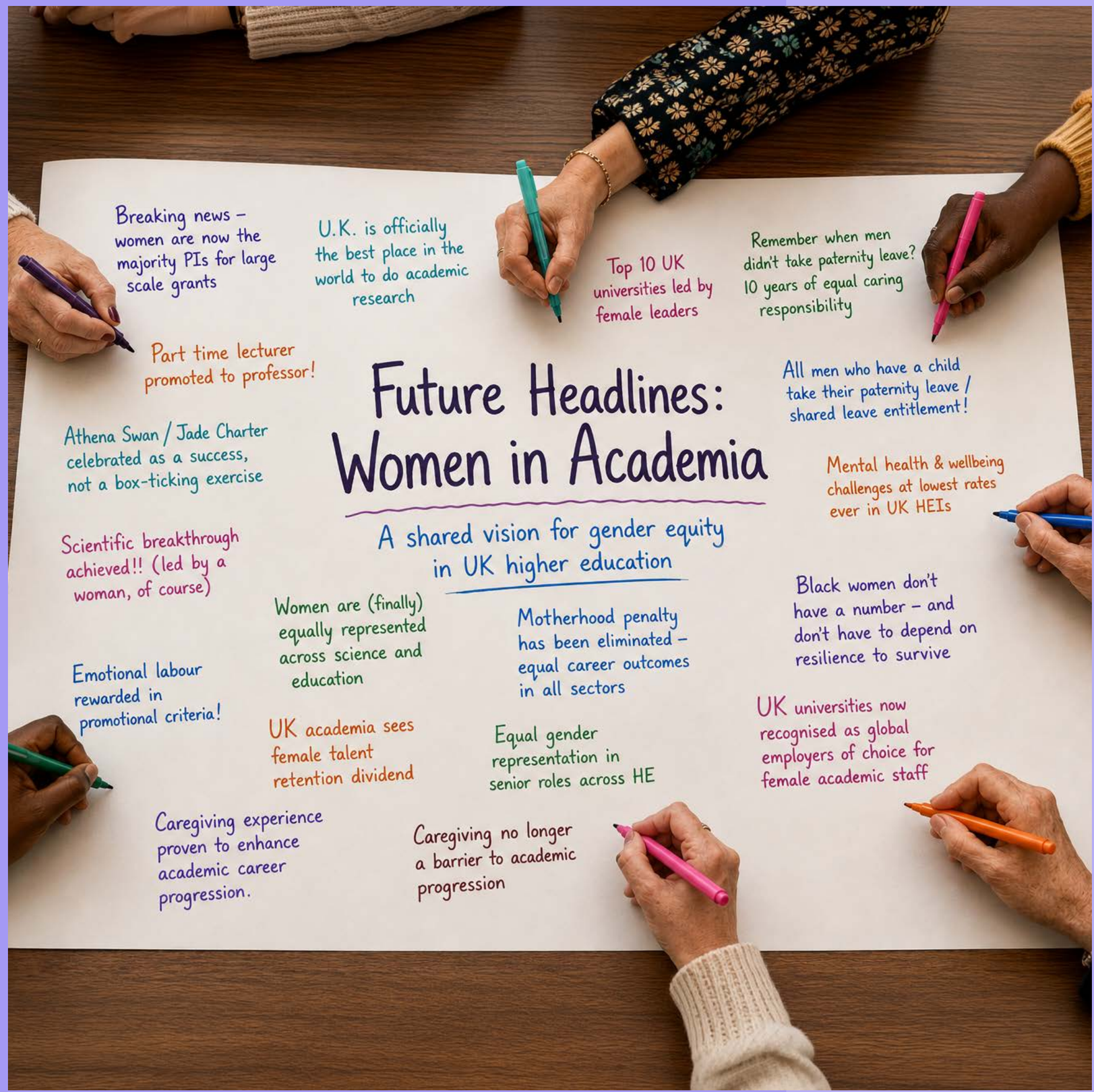
UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

Developing national priorities for advancing gender equity in UK higher education

Findings from the Women in Academia Phase II modified Delphi study



Foreword

What would the headlines look like if we achieved gender equity in academia?

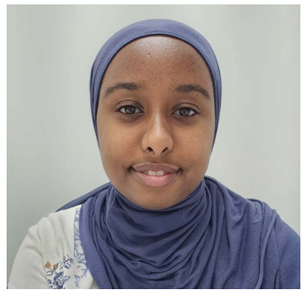
This was one of the questions we asked through the Women in Academia (WinA) Phase II project. The Future Headlines pictured here capture an ambitious vision: An academic sector in which gender no longer determines who progresses, who leads, whose work is recognised, or who is disadvantaged by caregiving responsibilities.

WinA Phase II takes a step towards that future. Building on the experiences and recommendations generated through Phase I, we brought together expertise from across UK higher education and research to establish consensus on priorities for change and begin exploring how the strongest priorities could be translated into action.

The findings reinforce that achieving these future headlines will require more than supporting individual women to navigate existing systems. It requires structural and cultural change, shared responsibility and meaningful accountability.

This report provides a basis for moving from imagined future headlines towards measurable change.

Executive Summary



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Women in Academia (WinA) Phase II built on the lived-experience findings and evidence-informed recommendations generated from Phase I to establish national consensus priorities for advancing gender equity across UK higher education. Phase II sought to identify areas of agreement, distinguish the relative strength and stability of expert consensus and provide a foundation for subsequent implementation and evaluation.

A three-round online modified Delphi study was conducted with 20 experts from higher education institutions, funding and research organisations, equality, diversity and inclusion, academic leadership, policy and research culture. Participants rated proposed actions on a nine-point importance scale and provided free-text comments on implementation considerations, barriers and enabling conditions.

The Delphi process began with 83 priorities across eight themes. Given the high level of endorsement in Round 1, an additional grading framework was introduced to distinguish moderate (A), strong (A*) and very strong (A**) consensus without changing the original threshold for inclusion. Nine participant-suggested priorities were also introduced, and priorities were progressively re-rated across subsequent rounds to assess the strength and stability of consensus.

The resulting final consensus-based set contains 64 priorities (Appendix 1) across all eight themes: nine graded A** (Tier 1), 46 graded A* (Tier 2) and nine graded A (Tier 3). The strongest priorities focused on proportionate promotion and progression expectations, collaborative, team-based and early-career funding models, recognition of pastoral and student-support work, fair recognition and distribution of administrative, teaching and service responsibilities, employment protection during parental leave, shared caregiving and accountable inclusive leadership.

Across both quantitative and qualitative findings, the central message was consistent: advancing gender equity requires structural and organisational change rather than relying primarily on individual women to adapt to existing systems. Participants repeatedly emphasised the importance of transparency, accountability, adequate resourcing and consistent implementation. Policies, mentoring, training and wellbeing initiatives were considered valuable, but insufficient without corresponding changes to workload, promotion and reward, funding, employment protections and leadership accountability.

Following the Delphi process, an implementation workshop held in July 2026 explored how the nine A** priorities could be translated into practice. Participants considered their feasibility and potential barriers, enabling conditions and resources, responsible stakeholders, indicators of meaningful success, and realistic early steps and timescales. Across the discussions, several common implementation principles emerged: improving transparency and use of data; embedding recognition within formal workload, promotion and funding systems; aligning institutional and funder action; piloting and evaluating interventions before wider scale-up; and addressing organisational culture alongside formal policy change.

Together, Phase II produced two complementary outputs: a national consensus-based priority set capturing the breadth of actions required to advance gender equity, and a more focused implementation pathway for the nine priorities receiving the strongest endorsement. The full 64-priority list provides a basis for institutions, funders and sector organisations to assess current practice and identify gaps, while the nine A** priorities provide a practical starting point for Phase III.

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1. Background and purpose

Gender inequality in academic and research careers is shaped by connected structural, organisational and cultural factors.

These include unequal access to secure employment, funding, leadership and progression; the uneven distribution and recognition of teaching, pastoral and service work; barriers linked to caregiving and parental leave; and workplace cultures in which bias, poor behaviour and excessive workload are not always addressed consistently. Although many institutions have relevant policies, their implementation and impact remain uneven.

Women in Academia (WinA) was established to better understand these challenges and identify practical opportunities for sector-level change. Phase I examined the experiences of women and female-identifying staff working in academic and research settings and identified eight interconnected areas of challenge. These findings informed an evidence-based Roadmap containing recommendations for action across recruitment and progression; leadership and career development; job precarity and career security; research funding; the recognition and design of academic roles; caregiving and parental leave; equity and inclusion; and psychological and physical wellbeing.

The breadth of the Phase I findings highlighted that there is no single intervention capable of addressing gender inequity in higher education. It also raised an important next question: where should institutions, funders and other sector organisations focus their efforts, and which actions command the strongest support from those with expertise and responsibility for creating change?

Phase II therefore moved from this broad evidence base to establishing a shared consensus-based priority list. Its purpose was not to reduce gender equity to a small number of isolated actions, but to identify which actions sector experts considered the most important, to distinguish the strength and stability of agreement and identify a practical starting point for implementation.

A modified Delphi approach was selected because responsibility for change is distributed across institutions, funders, leaders, departments and teams. The method supports independent judgement, structured feedback and re-rating while reducing the influence of hierarchy and dominant voices. The study was informed by CREDES and DELPHISTAR guidance on transparent Delphi design and reporting (Jünger et al., 2017; Niederberger et al., 2024), alongside recent methodological guidance on the use of Delphi studies for complex organisational and policy questions (Hasson, Keeney and McKenna, 2025).

Together, the Phase II Delphi process and subsequent implementation workshop were designed to provide a bridge between the evidence generated in Phase I and the implementation and evaluation of priority actions in Phase III.

2. Aims and objectives

To identify national priority areas using the actions and recommendations developed through WinA Phase I;

To establish expert consensus on the importance of these priorities, using qualitative feedback to understand implementation considerations, barriers and enabling conditions; and

To produce a transparent and usable evidence base to inform subsequent implementation, testing and evaluation in Phase III.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study design and expert panel

A three-round online modified Delphi study was conducted through Qualtrics over 11 weeks with four weeks allocated to Rounds 1 and 2, and three weeks to Round 3. The design retained the core characteristics of a Delphi study: an expert panel, pseudonymised individual responses, repeated rounds, structured feedback between rounds and descriptive analysis of group ratings. Free-text responses were collected alongside quantitative ratings to contextualise participants' judgements and identify implementation considerations, barriers and enabling conditions.

Academic Institutions:

- Russel groups
- Post 92
  - Oxford University
  - Imperial College London
  - Herriot Watt University
  - University of Glasgow
  - Queen's University Belfast
  - Aberystwyth University
  - Queen Mary University
  - University of Manchester

Sector & Research Orgs:

- NIHR
- UKRI
- Research England
- British Council
- ESRC
- British Academy
- Royal Society
- MRC
- HEPI
- White Rose Consortium
- WHEN
- Women-Space

Critical friends:

- University of Warwick
- Manchester Metropolitan University
- Coventry University
- University of Birmingham

Roles:

Directors	Heads of Dept.	EDI Leads	Athena Swan Chairs	Research Leaders

Participants were purposively recruited to capture expertise from across the UK higher education and research sector. See above for the panel composition. A group of Critical Friends reviewed the methodology and survey materials to support breadth, clarity and relevance.

Twenty-four participants entered Round 1 and 20 remained by Round 3. Recent evidence suggests that panels of 20-30 can provide moderate replicability when a Delphi is focused on an individual stakeholder group, although results should still be interpreted as expert judgement rather than a statistically representative estimate of the wider sector (Manyara et al., 2024).

Participants could be of any gender, provided they had substantial knowledge and experience of EDI policy, practice or strategy within their organisational or disciplinary setting. The priorities themselves remained grounded in Phase I evidence about the experiences of women and female-identifying staff. The study recognised that women, female-identifying and non-binary staff are not a homogeneous group and that the relevance or impact of individual actions may vary according to protected characteristics, career stage, contract type, discipline and institutional context.

3.2 Development of the priority list

The Phase I Roadmap contained approximately 50 recommendations across eight themes. The research team reviewed these recommendations, combined conceptually overlapping actions and refined their wording to produce specific, actionable statements suitable for expert rating. This resulted in an initial longlist of 83 priorities across the eight Phase I themes.

Participants were also invited in Round 1 to identify important priorities they considered missing. Suggested additions were reviewed by the research team for relevance, duplication and clarity. Nine distinct participant-suggested priorities were subsequently added to the Delphi process.

3.3 Delphi procedure

In Round 1, participants rated all 83 priorities for importance using a nine-point scale ranging from 1 ("not important at all") to 9 ("extremely important"). Optional free-text comments allowed participants to explain their ratings, identify implementation considerations and suggest wording refinements or additional priorities. For each priority, the median importance rating, interquartile range (IQR), percentage rating the priority 7-9 and percentage rating it 1-3 were calculated. A valid response required at least 50% of the panel to provide a substantive rating rather than selecting "I don't know". Nine-point scales and combined measures of central tendency and agreement are commonly used in Delphi studies (Schifano and Niederberger, 2025).

In Round 2, participants re-rated priorities requiring further assessment and considered the nine newly suggested priorities. They received structured feedback from Round 1, including the group median, IQR and anonymised summaries of qualitative comments. This allowed participants to reconsider their judgement in light of the distribution of views across the panel while maintaining anonymity between participants.

Round 3 provided final confirmation of priorities that had not already demonstrated sufficiently stable consensus. Participants again received feedback from preceding rounds before making their final ratings.

3.4 **Consensus and analysis**

Consensus was initially defined using pre-specified criteria combining the median importance rating, dispersion and percentage agreement. In Rounds 1 and 2, a priority reached consensus in where the median was ≥7, IQR ≤2 and at least 70% of participants rated it 7-9. Consensus out required a median ≤3, IQR ≤2 and at least 70% rating it 1-3. Items meeting neither definition were classified as having no consensus.

Application of these criteria in Round 1 resulted in 64 of 83 priorities meeting consensus-in criteria, with 19 reaching no consensus and none meeting consensus-out criteria. Given this unexpectedly high level of endorsement, an additional grading framework was introduced to distinguish the relative strength of consensus among included priorities.

The approach was informed by the COSMIG modified Delphi study (Haywood et al., 2021), which used a bespoke A/A/A** grading system to differentiate levels of agreement and support prioritisation. The grading criteria were adapted for the present study to reflect the WinA panel and its pre-specified consensus criteria. Importantly, this did not change the original inclusion threshold or remove priorities that had already met consensus criteria.

The methodology applied in this study was further supported by Pearson et al. (in-press).

Tier 3 - A	Tier 2 - A*	Tier 1 - A**
Median >=7; IQR <=2; >=70% rating 7-9	Median 8-9; IQR <=2; >=75% rating 7-9	Median=9; IQR <=1; >=80% rating 7-9
Moderate consensus	Strong consensus	Very strong consensus

Twelve priorities achieving A** in Round 1 progressed directly to Round 3 for final confirmation, while the remaining priorities were considered in Round 2 alongside the nine newly suggested items. Following Round 2, 29 priorities that maintained the same consensus grade or strengthened across rounds were considered to demonstrate stable or strengthening consensus and were retained without further re-rating. This reduced repetitive scoring where an additional round was unlikely to meaningfully alter participants' judgements (Holey et al., 2007; Belton et al., 2019).

Round 3 therefore included 63 priorities: 51 requiring further consideration following Round 2 and the 12 A** priorities from Round 1. At this final stage, a priority was included where the median was ≥7 and at least 70% of participants rated it 7-9. IQR was retained as a descriptive measure of residual variation rather than a strict exclusion criterion.

Free-text comments were divided into meaning units and analysed using seven categories: enabling factors; concerns or reservations; implementation challenges; contextual considerations; support; wording or clarity issues; and general comments. Keyword-supported organisation was followed by manual review. Comments were used to explain ratings and identify implementation conditions, not as additional votes. Theme-level summaries were fed back in subsequent rounds.

3.5 **Implementation workshop**

Following completion of the Delphi process, an in-person implementation and dissemination workshop was held at the University of Warwick in July 2026. The workshop focused on translating the nine A** priorities receiving the strongest consensus into potential routes for implementation.

Participants worked in facilitated groups, with the nine priorities distributed across three tables. For each priority, groups considered: its feasibility and principal barriers; enabling conditions and resources required for implementation; stakeholders who would need to be involved or could sponsor the work; and what meaningful success would look like. Groups then undertook an action-planning exercise to identify practical early steps and indicative short-, medium- and longer-term timescales.

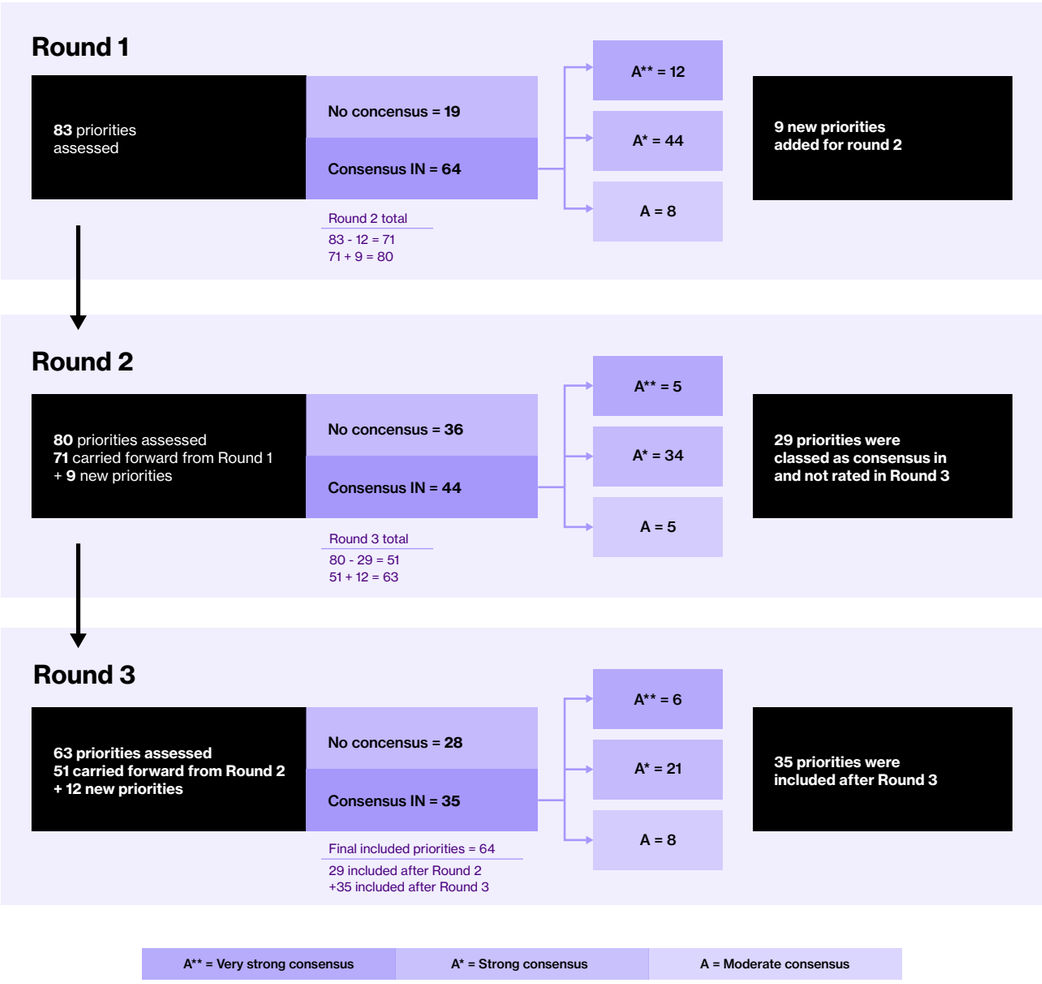
The workshop was used to contextualise the Delphi findings and inform implementation planning for Phase III rather than to alter the consensus status or ranking of priorities. Workshop discussions were synthesised across the nine priorities to identify common implementation considerations and priority-specific opportunities for action.

4. Findings

4.1 Overview of the final set of priorities

The Delphi process resulted in a final consensus-based set of 64 priorities (Appendix 1) across all eight themes, demonstrating broad expert support for action across multiple, interconnected areas of academic work. Of these, nine achieved very strong consensus (A**), 46 strong consensus (A*) and nine moderate consensus (A).

Flow of priorities across rounds



4.2 Cross cutting findings

Participants consistently supported structural and accountable action and cautioned against approaches that place responsibility for change on individual women through confidence, resilience, mentoring or training interventions without equivalent changes to systems, incentives and accountability. They also emphasised that the existence of a policy is not the same as its consistent application across departments, recruitment and promotion panels, workload allocation, funding processes and day-to-day management

> **We should be prioritising actions that can embed structural change rather than relying on individuals to take training, immerse themselves, etc."**

> **Changing both the systems and processes alongside cultural change is important but I have scored suggestions that link to the latter slightly higher as I feel that policies and frameworks are slightly pointless unless combined with mechanisms to implement and 'socialise' these among staff."**

Across these themes, accountability and transparency emerged as recurring enabling conditions. Recognition and reward systems were expected to value mentoring, pastoral support, collegiality, service and research culture. Participants supported mentoring and coaching but did not regard them as substitutes for structural reform or as additional unrecognised labour for senior women.

Similarly, standalone wellbeing initiatives were considered less effective than action on workload, staffing, leadership behaviour and psychological safety.

> **I think addressing workload and culture is more effective in managing staff wellbeing than other wellbeing initiatives."**

> **Recognising pastoral contributions in workloads is important but will only be effective if they are also truly valued in recruitment and promotion criteria."**

> **Many of these things are already in place but there's lots of variation across institutions about how effectively they are implemented."**

Funding and resource constraints were particularly important in relation to career security and research funding. Participants supported stronger employment protections, bridge funding and inclusive eligibility criteria, while noting that poorly designed schemes could reinforce existing advantage. Across workload and caregiving priorities, the main concern was often inconsistent implementation and uneven access to information, flexibility and support. Overall, participants viewed the value of any action as dependent on clear responsibility, adequate resourcing, effective monitoring and meaningful consequences.

4.3 Distribution of final priorities

The final set comprised 64 priorities across all eight themes, demonstrating that expert consensus extended across the multiple and interconnected factors shaping gender equity in academic careers.

The largest number of final priorities fell within Theme 5: *Redesigning and valuing all roles* (n=15), followed by Theme 6: *Caregiving, parental leave and family-friendly policies* (n=12) and Theme 4: *Funding accessibility and structures* (n=10). However, the number of priorities within a theme should not be interpreted as a ranking of the relative importance of the eight themes, as themes contained different numbers of actions entering the Delphi process. Rather, the retention of priorities across all eight themes reinforces the Phase I finding that gender inequity is shaped by interconnected conditions spanning recruitment and progression, leadership, career security, funding, workload and role recognition, caregiving, inclusion and wellbeing.

4.4 **Nine priorities with very strong consensus** (Tier 1)

Nine priorities achieved the highest level of consensus, Tier 1 (A**), in the final consensus-based priority set. These represent the actions receiving the strongest and most consistent endorsement across the Delphi process.

No.	Theme and subtheme	Priority
1	**Theme 1:** Transparent and Inclusive Recruitment and Promotion	Ensure promotion and progression criteria are proportionate and adjusted for time worked (e.g. part-time contracts, parental leave), including pro-rata expectations of outputs and contributions.
2	**Theme 4:** Funding Sustainability and Research Support Infrastructure	Create funding schemes that reward collaborative, team-based research models incorporating mentorship and career development opportunities and pathways for junior staff, women, and underrepresented researchers. (e.g., The UKRI Mission pilot funding opportunity, run by AHRC and the THRIVE project, trialled team-based applications that explicitly acknowledged the broader roles of research teams, moving away from a single-PI model).
3	**Theme 4:** Expanding Funding Access for Early-Career Researchers	Provide equitable access to internal pump-priming funding to support early-stage research, teaching innovation and career development.
4	**Theme 5:** Valuing Diverse Academic Roles and Contributions	Professionalise and clearly define pastoral and student-support responsibilities, ensuring roles are voluntary, workload-credited, and supported by appropriate training.
5	**Theme 5:** Workload Equity, Sustainability and Accountability	Introduce accountability mechanisms to ensure equitable participation in administrative, teaching and service responsibilities across all staff, including senior academics.
6	**Theme 6:** Job Security and Protection During Parental Leave	Introduce mechanisms to prevent contract termination during parental leave, including automatic extensions or equivalent protections where appropriate.
7	**Theme 6:** Normalising Shared Caregiving and Family-Friendly Working	Promote awareness and uptake of shared parental leave and caregiving arrangements across all genders with clear guidance and institutional support to simplify access.
8	**Theme 6:** Normalising Shared Caregiving and Family-Friendly Working	Actively challenge cultural barriers that discourage uptake of caregiving leave, particularly among men and senior staff (e.g., testimonials, case studies).
9	**Theme 7:** Safe, Accountable and Transparent Reporting Cultures	Embed inclusive leadership expectations within promotion and reward systems to ensure accountability for research culture, collegiality, and staff wellbeing, and to prevent status-based immunity from behavioural standards.

The nine A** priorities are the Tier 1 leading actions within the full consensus-based priority set, not a replacement for the remaining 55. Together, they emphasise changes to institutional rules, resource allocation and accountability. They include proportionate promotion expectations for staff working part-time or taking parental leave; collaborative funding models and pump-priming support for early-career researchers; formal recognition and fair distribution of pastoral, student-support, administrative, teaching and service work; employment protection during parental leave; wider uptake of shared caregiving; and inclusive leadership expectations linked to promotion and reward.

The consistent message is that policy must be supported by responsibility and consequences. Training, mentoring, well-being support and policy development may contribute to change, but participants were less convinced when these approaches stood alone. The strongest priorities therefore focus on how workload, funding, employment security, career progression and behaviour are rewarded, monitored or challenged.

4.5 Translating priorities into implementation

Following completion of the Delphi process, the implementation workshop explored how the nine A** priorities could be translated from areas of strong consensus into practical action. Participants considered the feasibility of each priority and potential barriers to implementation; enabling conditions and resources; stakeholders who would need to be involved; indicators of meaningful success; and practical early steps and timescales.

Across the **nine priorities**, several common implementation considerations emerged:

- Transparency matters: participants repeatedly called for clearer criteria, better data and more visible pathways.
- Pilot first, then scale: several groups favoured pilots or local trials before wider sector adoption.
- Recognition must match rhetoric: hidden or informal work only changes when it is built into workload models, promotion criteria, and funding rules.
- Funder and institutional alignment are essential, especially for parental leave protections, career-development funding and collaborative funding models.
- Culture change is as important as policy change, particularly around caregiving by men and senior staff.
- Role models, case studies, mentoring and networks were recurring enablers across the discussions.

Priority:

Ensure promotion and progression criteria are proportionate and adjusted for time worked (e.g. part-time contracts, parental leave), including pro-rata expectations of outputs and contributions.

Key barriers	Enablers/resources	Who needs to act	Success & early steps/timeline
Criteria lack transparency; different contributions and career pathways may be valued unequally.	Clear, context-sensitive criteria; visible "goalposts"; applicant/panel guidance; pathway-specific data; successful case studies.	Professors; promotion panels; senior leaders; teaching/research staff; sector/data bodies (HESA); funders.	**Success:** Transparent and flexible progression criteria recognising different career pathways and working patterns. **Early steps:** Short term: clarify and publish criteria and progression routes; medium term: publish pathway-level data and case studies; longer term: work towards greater sector consistency.

Priority:

Create funding schemes that reward collaborative, team-based research models incorporating mentorship and career development opportunities and pathways for junior staff, women, and underrepresented researchers.

Key barriers	Enablers/resources	Who needs to act	Success & early steps/timeline
Feasible on a smaller scale, but dependent on funder willingness, university processes and evidence that alternative models work.	Review existing models; embed mentoring/career pathways; convene funders; develop and evaluate pilots.	Research funders; government; universities; research assessment/ policy actors.	**Success:** An evaluated team-based funding model demonstrating proof of concept and improved recognition of wider team contributions. **Early steps:** Short term – review existing models and evidence; medium term – convene funders and develop pilots; longer term – evaluate, refine and support wider adoption.

Priority:

Provide equitable access to internal pump-priming funding to support early-stage research, teaching innovation and career development.

Key barriers	Enablers/resources	Who needs to act	Success & early steps/timeline
Inconsistent institutional practice; patchy ECR opportunities; limited ring-fenced support.	Targeted/ring-fenced funding; bridge funding; mentoring and career-planning support; better communication.	Institutions; funders; mentors; others shaping funding opportunities (e.g. philanthropic).	**Success:** More targeted and equitable access to opportunities for ECRs, supported by transparent applicant and award data. **Early steps:** Short term – establish baseline and improve communication; medium term – introduce targeted schemes with mentoring; longer term – strengthen links with external funding and career-development opportunities.

Priority:

Professionalise and clearly define pastoral and student-support responsibilities, ensuring roles are voluntary, workload-credited, and supported by appropriate training

Key barriers	Enablers/resources	Who needs to act	Success & early steps/timeline
Entrenched workload patterns; implementation may depend on committed local leadership.	Review workload models/ incentives; gender audit; formal recognition within promotion rather than token recognition.	Institutional leaders; workload-model owners; departments/schools.	**Success:** Voluntary, trained and appropriately workload-credited roles without disproportionate concentration among particular groups. **Early steps:** Short term – establish baseline and audit current distribution; medium term – review workload allocation and report findings; longer term – embed within workload, promotion and reward systems.

Priority:

Introduce accountability mechanisms to ensure equitable participation in administrative, teaching and service responsibilities across all staff, including senior academics

Key barriers	Enablers/resources	Who needs to act	Success & early steps/timeline
Workshop discussion questioned whether the emphasis should be on equal participation or appropriate recognition/ reward, while allowing staff to play to their strengths.	Explicit workload allocation; recognition of citizenship/EDI/service; clearer promotion criteria; embedded in universal job descriptions.	People teams; senior leaders; promotion, recruitment and workload leads.	**Success:** Fairer distribution and recognition of teaching, administrative and service contributions across grades and staff groups. **Early steps:** Short term – review current distribution and expectations; medium term – pilot revised workload/job-description approaches; longer term – embed within promotion and reward.

Priority:

Introduce mechanisms to prevent contract termination during parental leave, including automatic extensions or equivalent protections where appropriate

Key barriers	Enablers/resources	Who needs to act	Success & early steps/timeline
Existing contract arrangements can leave staff vulnerable during parental leave.	More secure contracts; day-one rights; employment benefits; funder terms preventing disadvantage during leave.	Funders; unions; institutions; sector/ professional bodies.	**Success:** No contract loss, attrition or career disadvantage/ penalty attributable to taking parental leave. **Early steps:** Short term – review institutional policies and identify gaps; medium term – engage funders and sector actors and align protections; longer term – establish consistent protections (employment-rights bill) across funding and employment arrangements.

Priority:

Promote awareness and uptake of shared parental leave and caregiving arrangements across all genders with clear guidance and institutional support to simplify access.

Key barriers	Enablers/resources	Who needs to act	Success & early steps/timeline
Low visibility and uncertainty about eligibility or consequences can suppress uptake.	Adequate funding; clear guidance; communication; visible role modelling by men/senior staff; parent/carer networks.	Employers; managers; communications teams; fathers'/parents' networks.	**Success:** Increased awareness and uptake of shared caregiving arrangements across genders. **Early steps:** Short term – establish baseline uptake and identify gaps; medium term – develop an action plan and strengthen communication and support; longer term – monitor uptake and adapt provision.

Priority:

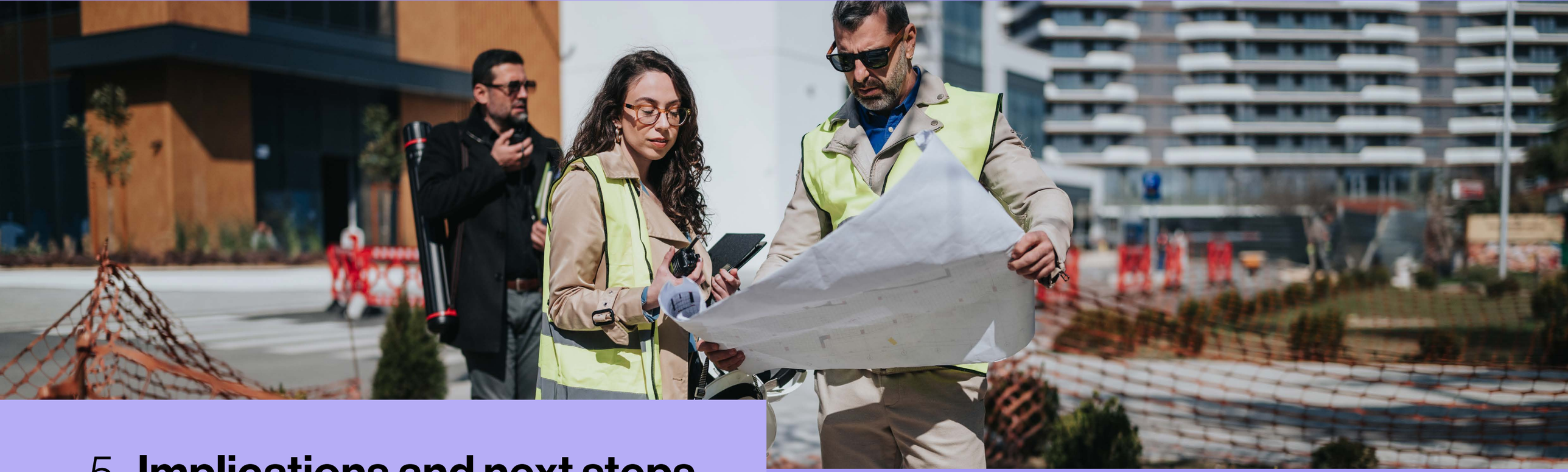
Actively challenge cultural barriers that discourage uptake of caregiving leave, particularly among men and senior staff (e.g., testimonials, case studies).

Key barriers	Enablers/resources	Who needs to act	Success & early steps/timeline
Norms around masculinity, seniority and what constitutes legitimate academic behaviour.	Storytelling/showcase events; openness; visible male allyship; parent/dad networks; formal recognition of expectations.	Senior leaders; communications; network sponsors; parent/carer groups; male ally networks.	**Success:** Greater openness in discussing caregiving, reduced stigma and increased uptake of caregiving leave among men and senior staff. **Early steps:** Short term – develop communications/ case studies and identify role models; medium term – strengthen networks and senior sponsorship; longer term – monitor cultural change and uptake.

Priority:

Embed inclusive leadership expectations within promotion and reward systems to ensure accountability for research culture, collegiality, and staff wellbeing, and to prevent status-based immunity from behavioural standards.

Key barriers	Enablers/resources	Who needs to act	Success & early steps/timeline
[Detailed barriers were not captured due to limited workshop discussion.]	Explicit leadership reflection; stronger gender/equality expectations; embedding EDI throughout the research lifecycle.	People/HR teams; senior management.	**Success:** Inclusive leadership, collegiality, research culture and staff wellbeing explicitly recognised and assessed within promotion and reward. *Detailed early steps/timeline were not captured due to limited workshop discussion.*



5. Implications and next steps

The final consensus-based priority set should be used as a staged implementation tool rather than a simple ranked list. All **64** included priorities met the study's inclusion threshold. The categories A**, A* and A indicate the strength and stability of endorsement and can help institutions, funders and sector organisations identify where to begin, which actions may require further local development, and how implementation can be sequenced.

The nine A** priorities provide a clear starting point for Phase III and identify several potential routes for implementation:

- **work with research funders and institutions** in distinguishing between actions that can be taken locally and those requiring coordinated national leadership;
- **audit existing policy and practice** against the final framework to identify where action is already in place, where implementation is inconsistent, and where clear gaps remain;
- **pilot selected actions in different institutional and disciplinary contexts** to assess feasibility, consistency and transferability;
- **develop practical implementation guidance** for each priority, including intended outcomes, ownership, resource requirements, likely barriers and indicators of progress;
- **produce practical tools and sector-facing guidance**, such as case studies, self-assessment frameworks and evaluation resources, to support wider uptake and longer-term change.

6. Emerging impact

The Women in Academia programme is already beginning to contribute to policy and institutional change beyond the immediate research outputs.

National policy influence.

The Department for Business, Innovation, Science and Trade (formerly known as Department for Science, Innovation and Technology) formally recognised the Women in Academia project's contribution to the development of the UK Government's Women in Research Charter. Evidence and recommendations from the Phase I Roadmap, which highlighted systemic barriers affecting women's academic careers, directly informed the Charter's six themes and associated commitments.

Supporting institutional change.

The programme has also begun translating its findings into institutional practice. Workshops with the University of Birmingham have applied the WinA evidence at both institutional and departmental levels, including co-production activities supporting Athena Swan planning. These sessions have provided opportunities to use the evidence to reflect on existing practice, identify priorities for local action and consider how recommendations can be adapted to different organisational contexts.

Together, these activities provide early evidence of WinA's potential to operate across multiple levels of change, informing national policy while supporting institutions and departments to translate evidence into locally relevant action.

7. Strengths and limitations

This study has several strengths. It brought together participants with strategic and operational experience across higher education institutions, funders, research organisations, EDI practice and academic leadership.

The iterative Delphi process translated a large set of Phase I recommendations into a structured (Tier 1, 2 and 3) set of priorities while retaining qualitative insight into feasibility, barriers and enabling conditions. The subsequent implementation workshop further strengthened the practical value of the findings by moving beyond priority-setting to explore feasibility, barriers, enabling conditions, responsible stakeholders and potential routes to implementation.

Several limitations should also be considered. The Delphi panel was purposively selected for relevant expertise and was not intended to be statistically representative of the UK higher education sector. The findings should therefore be interpreted as expert consensus rather than an estimate of sector-wide opinion.

The unexpectedly high level of endorsement in Round 1 also required additional analytical decisions during the study. The A/A*/A** grading framework and stability rules were introduced to distinguish between priorities demonstrating different strengths and stability of consensus. These changes were documented and applied consistently and did not alter the original threshold for inclusion; nevertheless, their introduction during the Delphi process represents an additional layer of researcher judgement and may limit direct comparison with other Delphi studies.

The large number of priorities assessed may also have contributed to participant fatigue, particularly in earlier rounds, while the fixed ordering of themes and priorities may have introduced order effects. In addition, although qualitative comments provided valuable contextual information, the depth of feedback varied between participants and priorities. A planned additional sense-check against Athena Swan submissions was not completed; these materials were therefore not incorporated as an additional source of evidence.

Finally, the implementation workshop provided an important opportunity to explore how the nine A** priorities might be translated into practice, but these discussions represent initial implementation considerations rather than tested or agreed implementation strategies. The depth of discussion also varied across priorities, and some actions, responsible stakeholders and timescales were explored more fully than others. These proposals therefore require further co-development, testing and evaluation before wider implementation.

8. **Conclusion**

WinA Phase II produced a national consensus-based priority set of 64 priorities across eight connected areas of academic work, providing a shared basis for action to advance gender equity in UK higher education. Nine priorities achieved very strong consensus, 46 strong consensus and 9 moderate consensus. The strongest support focused on fair promotion expectations, collaborative and early-career funding, recognition and fair distribution of pastoral and service work, protection during parental leave, support for shared caregiving, and accountable inclusive leadership.

The high level of agreement across the study is itself an important finding. It suggests that the case for action is not in doubt; the central challenge is how to implement change consistently, with clear responsibility, adequate resourcing, effective monitoring and meaningful accountability. Across the findings, participants consistently prioritised structural reform over approaches that rely primarily on individual women adapting to inequitable systems.

The consensus-based priority set does not assume that all institutional contexts are the same, nor that consensus alone guarantees effective implementation. Its value lies in providing a clear, evidence-informed basis for the next phase of work. Phase III should therefore focus on translating these priorities into practice by clarifying responsibilities across institutions, funders and sector bodies, testing implementation in different contexts, and evaluating which approaches lead to measurable and sustainable improvement. In doing so, WinA III can begin to generate evidence about what works, for whom, under what conditions, and how effective change can be sustained and scaled across the sector.

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Appendix 1

This table contains all 64 final priorities, including the nine A** priorities presented in the main report.

Tier 1 (A**)

No.	Theme	Subtheme	Priority
1	Theme 1	Transparent and Inclusive Recruitment & Promotion	Ensure promotion and progression criteria are proportionate and adjusted for time worked (e.g. part time contracts, parental leave), including pro-rata expectations of outputs and contributions.
2	Theme 4	Funding Sustainability and Research Support Infrastructure	Create funding schemes that reward collaborative, team-based research models incorporating mentorship and career development opportunities and pathways for junior staff, women, and underrepresented researchers. (e.g., The UKRI Mission pilot funding opportunity, run by AHRC and the THRIVE project, trialled team-based applications that explicitly acknowledged the broader roles of research teams, moving away from a single-PI model).
3	Theme 4	Expanding Funding Access for Early-Career Researchers	Provide equitable access to internal pump-priming funding to support early stage research, teaching innovation and career development.
4	Theme 5	Valuing Diverse Academic Roles and Contributions	Professionalise and clearly define pastoral and student-support responsibilities, ensuring roles are voluntary, workload-credited, and supported by appropriate training.
5	Theme 5	Workload Equity, Sustainability and Accountability	Introduce accountability mechanisms to ensure equitable participation in administrative, teaching and service responsibilities across all staff, including senior academics.
6	Theme 6	Job Security and Protection During Parental Leave	Introduce mechanisms to prevent contract termination during parental leave, including automatic extensions or equivalent protections where appropriate.
7	Theme 6	Normalising Shared Caregiving and Family-Friendly Working	Promote awareness and uptake of shared parental leave and caregiving arrangements across all genders with clear guidance and institutional support to simplify access.
8	Theme 6	Normalising Shared Caregiving and Family-Friendly Working	Actively challenge cultural barriers that discourage uptake of caregiving leave, particularly among men and senior staff (e.g., testimonials, case studies).
9	Theme 7	Safe, Accountable and Transparent Reporting Cultures	Embed inclusive leadership expectations within promotion and reward systems to ensure accountability for research culture, collegiality, and staff wellbeing, and to prevent status-based immunity from behavioural standards.

Tier 2 (A*)

No.	Theme	Subtheme	Priority
10	Theme 1	Transparent and Inclusive Recruitment & Promotion	Normalise the inclusion of individual circumstances statements in recruitment and promotion processes to account for career breaks, caring responsibilities, and non-linear career trajectories.
11	Theme 1	Target Setting, Data Monitoring & Accountability	Introduce proactive and targeted recruitment strategies to increase the proportion of women applicants (with potential caregiving responsibilities) for senior roles, particularly in under-represented disciplines/departments. (e.g. advertising job share and part-time opportunities)
12	Theme 1	Target Setting, Data Monitoring & Accountability	Link senior leadership performance reviews to measurable progress on gender equity outcomes. For example, Institutional rewards.
13	Theme 1	Incentives and Structural Levers	Implement systems that allow staff to (log and) evidence skills, outputs, and broader contributions, supporting fairer, more holistic promotion decisions.
14	Theme 1	Changing Culture and Reframing Academic Success	Actively showcase diverse models of academic success using strengths-based and narrative formats, moving beyond metric-dominant profiles.
15	Theme 1	Transparent and Inclusive Recruitment & Promotion	Establish anonymised transparent and inclusive recruitment and promotion criteria with clear and accessible assessment frameworks.
16	Theme 2	Structured Onboarding & Early Integration	Implement structured onboarding programmes for all staff(with targeted support for underrepresented and first generation scholars), including tailored components with clear signposting to institutional systems, EDI policies, wellbeing resources, and career development opportunities.
17	Theme 2	Mentorship as Core Academic Infrastructure	Recognise mentorship as a formal academic contribution within workload allocation models and promotion criteria.
18	Theme 2	Mentorship as Core Academic Infrastructure	Develop dedicated support and visibility for non-academic career pathways, including supervisor training to value diverse career outcomes.
19	Theme 2	Mentorship as Core Academic Infrastructure	Monitor and report equity in access to research resource (e.g. equipment, internal funding, PHD studentships, lab space). using disaggregated data.
20	Theme 2	Mentorship as Core Academic Infrastructure	Promote a culture of continuous professional development, including protected and monitored time for training and development activities (e.g. Vitae-10 CPD days)
21	Theme 3	Transparent Pathways to Secure Employment	Develop structured tenure-track or progression models for postdoctoral and early-career researchers, including defined milestones and formal review processes.
22	Theme 3	Reforming Fellowships and ECRs roles	Revise eligibility criteria for early-career fellowships to remove unjustified mandatory institutional mobility requirements and recognise institutional retention of talent as a valid strategic pathway.
23	Theme 4	Reducing Administrative Burden in Grant Applications	Streamline grant application processes to reduce administrative burden and duplication across funding schemes, by improving standardisation across funder application systems.
24	Theme 4	Inclusive and Flexible Funding Eligibility	Develop funding schemes that support researchers returning from career breaks or caregiving responsibilities.
25	Theme 4	Fairer and Transparent Funding Assessment	Require funders and institutions to openly publish disaggregated funding outcome data by gender, career stage, and other protected characteristics, and report on actions taken in response to identifies disparities in funding outcomes.

Tier 2 (A*) continued

No.	Theme	Subtheme	Priority
26	Theme 4	Expanding Funding Access for Early-Career Researchers	Enable early-career researchers to apply as principal investigators on internal funding schemes, including eligibility for salary support.
27	Theme 4	Inclusive and Flexible Funding Eligibility	Introduce clear and accessible mechanisms for requesting eligibility extensions or deferrals without penalty or loss of funding.
28	Theme 4	Fairer and Transparent Funding Assessment	Improve diversity in funding peer review panels and embed explicit weightings of inclusion, research culture and environment criteria in funding assessment processes.
29	Theme 5	Redefining Academic Success and Working Culture	Deliver campaigns that shift institutional definitions of academic success away from "always-on" productivity towards quality, wellbeing, sustainability, and team-based contributions.
30	Theme 5	Redefining Academic Success and Working Culture	Establish institutional standards that promote healthy work-life boundaries and discourage overwork through leadership-endorsed wellbeing practices (e.g., protected time practices and realistic expectations around availability).
31	Theme 5	Flexible and Inclusive Working Practices	Provide transparent guidance and independent support mechanisms to ensure fair access to flexible working arrangements.
32	Theme 5	Valuing Diverse Academic Roles and Contributions	Develop diverse academic and professional career pathways with distinct progression and promotion routes For example, teaching-focused, research-enabling, leadership, or pastoral-focused roles
33	Theme 5	Workload Equity, Sustainability and Accountability	Create psychologically safe channels for reporting workload concerns, overwork, and misaligned expectations.
34	Theme 5	Flexible and Inclusive Working Practices	Adopt clear, equitable, and consistently applied flexible and hybrid working policies across roles and disciplines.
35	Theme 5	Valuing Diverse Academic Roles and Contributions	Reform workload and job models to recognise the full range of academic contributions, including mentoring, pastoral care, leadership, service, and EDI work.
36	Theme 5	Valuing Diverse Academic Roles and Contributions	Formally recognise and reward "invisible labour",including pastoral, administrative, and equity-related contributions.
37	Theme 5	Workload Equity, Sustainability and Accountability	Implement regular workload review and calibration processes informed by actual time demands and staff feedback.
38	Theme 5	Workload Equity, Sustainability and Accountability	Incorporate workload contributions and equity considerations into performance review and promotion processes to promote accountability and transparency.
39	Theme 5	Valuing Diverse Academic Roles and Contributions	Clearly articulate parity between teaching and research roles in recognition and progression criteria to support equitable career progression and recognition of diverse contributions (such as collegiality, mentoring, pastoral support).
40	Theme 5	Workload Equity, Sustainability and Accountability	Embed mechanisms to monitor and ensure equitable distribution of service and administrative work across staff groups.
41	Theme 6	Job Security and Protection During Parental Leave	Establish institutional bridge-funding mechanisms to support contract continuity where external funding ends during leave periods.

Tier 2 (A*) continued

No.	Theme	Subtheme	Priority
42	Theme 6	Supporting Research Continuity and Career Progression After Leave	Offer targeted institutional schemes that support research continuity, grant development, and completion of key outputs after return from leave (e.g., short-term RA, time).
43	Theme 6	Supporting Research Continuity and Career Progression After Leave	Promote 'return to work' schemes after carer or parental leave such as dedicated research funding or extended study leave to focus on re-skilling and career development (e.g. The Warwick Academy Returners Fellowship; Oxford's Returning Carer's Fund).
44	Theme 6	Transparent Caregiving Policies and Return-to-Work Support	Introduce structured return-to-work support following parental or caregiving leave, including phased returns and advance planning discussions.
45	Theme 6	Transparent Caregiving Policies and Return-to-Work Support	Provide dedicated institutional support contacts or advisers to offer confidential guidance to staff planning or taking parental or caregiving leave.
46	Theme 6	Practical Family-Friendly Infrastructure and Flexible Working	Provide practical support mechanisms that enable participation in research activities for staff with caregiving responsibilities (e.g., carers' fund for conference or fieldwork support).
47	Theme 6	Practical Family-Friendly Infrastructure and Flexible Working	Embed family-friendly scheduling and flexible working practices within departmental norms and expectations (e.g., core working times 10am-3pm: inclusive access to networking and social opportunities during working times).
48	Theme 7	Safe, Accountable and Transparent Reporting Cultures	Strengthen reporting mechanisms and whistleblowing protections against bullying, harassment, discrimination, and microaggressions through confidential and independent reporting routes with transparent resolution processes.
49	Theme 7	Safe, Accountable and Transparent Reporting Cultures	Monitor and publish anonymised data on grievances, complaints, and exit themes to identify systemic cultural issues and enable early institutional intervention.
50	Theme 7	Addressing Bias and Building Inclusive Cultures	Embed active allyship and shared responsibility for gender equity across all staff, including targeted engagement of men and senior leaders.
51	Theme 8	Institutional Mental Health Support and Capability	Establish comprehensive staff wellbeing frameworks that provide accessible mental health support, prevention resources, and stress management programmes.
52	Theme 8	Normalising Wellbeing and Open Dialogue in Academic Culture	Promote psychologically safe and inclusive spaces for discussing wellbeing and academic challenges, recognising that experiences may differ across gender and other identities, and providing tailored or identity-sensitive support where appropriate (e.g. single sex spaces
53	Theme 8	Normalising Wellbeing and Open Dialogue in Academic Culture	Recognise and support workplace discussions and accommodations related to health experiences that affect staff wellbeing. For example, menopause, chronic health conditions, life-stage transitions
54	Theme 8	Normalising Wellbeing and Open Dialogue in Academic Culture	Establish institutional standards for compassionate and inclusive communication across internal policies, feedback processes, and correspondence, supported by guidance and leadership modelling of emotionally intelligent communication.
55	Theme 8	Institutional Mental Health Support and Capability	Ensure wellbeing and mental health training is recognised within workload allocation rather than treated as additional labour.

Tier 3 (A)

No.	Theme	Subtheme	Priority
56	Theme 3	Transparent Pathways to Secure Employment	Ensure equitable access to employment rights from the start of contracts ("day one rights"), including for fixed-term and externally funded staff.
57	Theme 3	Creating Sustainable Research Career Roles and Strengthening Redeployment	Create and fund permanent or long-term core-funded research and research-enabling professional roles with defined progression routes.
58	Theme 3	Creating Sustainable Research Career Roles and Strengthening Redeployment	Introduce bridge funding or transition support mechanisms between grants or roles.
59	Theme 4	Inclusive and Flexible Funding Eligibility	Replace 'time-since-PhD' eligibility criteria on funding calls – and introduce flexible assessment frameworks that account for career breaks, part-time working, caregiving, health, or visa-related disruptions.
60	Theme 4	Fairer and Transparent Funding Assessment	Pilot anonymised or partially blinded review processes at early funding assessment stages to reduce bias, particularly during initial assessment (e.g., Lottery system trialled previously by the Wellcome Trust).
61	Theme 5	Valuing Diverse Academic Roles and Contributions	Develop models of student support that reduce disproportionate pastoral burden on particular groups of staff (e.g., neurodivergent profiles).
62	Theme 6	Practical Family-Friendly Infrastructure and Flexible Working	Expand access to childcare and family-friendly institutional resources where feasible (e.g., childcare vouchers, nursery, low cost school holiday clubs, childcare support for conferences/events).
63	Theme 6	Transparent Caregiving Policies and Return-to-Work Support	Strengthen and clearly communicate institutional caregiving and parental leave policies, ensuring transparency and accessibility for all staff.
64	Theme 7	Supporting International Staff	Ensure visibility of immigration and relocation support throughout recruitment, onboarding, and contract renewal stages.