

SAGE Cygnet Award Application

RMIT: SAGE Cygnet 4

Enabling accessibility: supporting people with disability and neurodiversity

October 2025



Acknowledgement of Country

RMIT University acknowledges the people of the Woi wurrung and Boon wurrung language groups of the eastern Kulin Nation on whose unceded lands we conduct the business of the University.

RMIT University respectfully acknowledges their Ancestors and Elders, past and present.

RMIT also acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Ancestors of the lands and waters across Australia where we conduct our business.

Artwork 'Sentient' by Hollie Johnson

Hollie is a Gunaikurnai and Monero Ngarigo woman from Gippsland who graduated from RMIT with a BA in Photography in 2016.

RMIT: SAGE Cygnet 4

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	Current Cygnet	Barrier
[Mandatory] Institution-wide barrier		Attraction: Recruitment of academic women in STEMM
[Mandatory] Sub-group barrier		Participation and career fulfilment: Supporting parents and carers
Sub-group barrier		Supporting LGBTIQ+ inclusion
Sub-group barrier	✓	Enabling accessibility – supporting people with disability and neurodiversity
Institution-wide		Respectful cultures and behaviours

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Key barrier

Key barrier 4: Enabling accessibility – supporting people with disability and neurodiversity

- Sub-barrier 4.1: Barriers to access in the built environment
- Sub-barrier 4.2: Barriers to access in digital tools and systems
- Sub-barrier 4.3: Exclusion of people with disability and neurodiversity
- Sub-barrier 4.4: Lack of workplace flexibility

Evidence of barrier

Evidence gathered around the time of RMIT's SAGE Athena Swan Bronze application, in 2019, showed that staff and students who identified as living with disability experienced a range of barriers to full inclusion and participation in University life.

In the 2019 RMIT Staff Survey, staff who identified as living with disability responded less favourably across all factors measured. The number of respondents to the survey, with and without disability, by gender identity, are shown in Figure 1, below. It should be noted that there were no respondents with disability that identified as 'trans/gender-diverse', 'other' or 'unspecified'.

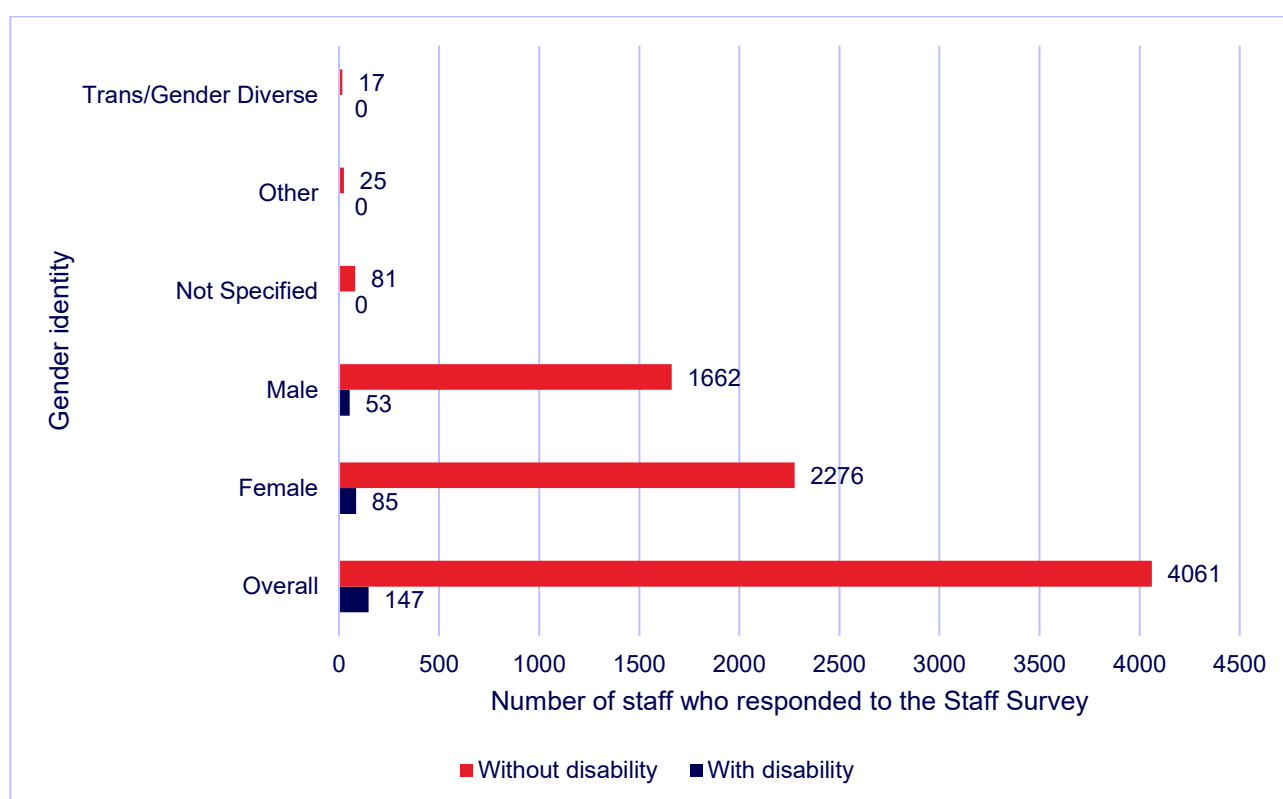


Figure 1: Number of respondents to the Staff Survey 2019, by disability status and gender identity

With respect to students, Student Experience Survey 2019 showed that students with and without disability had some similar and some disparate experiences. The total number of respondents to this survey was 7,078.

The time-limited Working Group brought together specifically to support the development of this application, in 2025, provided further anecdotal evidence about the barriers faced by this cohort, as well as some recommendations for further action. The Working Group comprised representatives from the Employee Experience, Recruitment, Property, Digital Accessibility, Workplace Adjustments and Student Equity areas of the University, as well as the leader of the Disability and Neurodiversity Staff Network. These staff were either part of RMIT's community who identified as living with disability or neurodiversity or had been working directly with the community to understand issues and implement change from 2019 onwards.

Sub barrier 4.1: Barriers to access in the built environment

As shown in Figure 2, staff who identified as living with disability were 20 percentage points less likely than staff without disability to report that they had access to the things they needed to do their jobs well. Staff who identified as living with disability were also 17 percentage points less likely than staff without disability to report that they found the physical workspace enjoyable to work in.

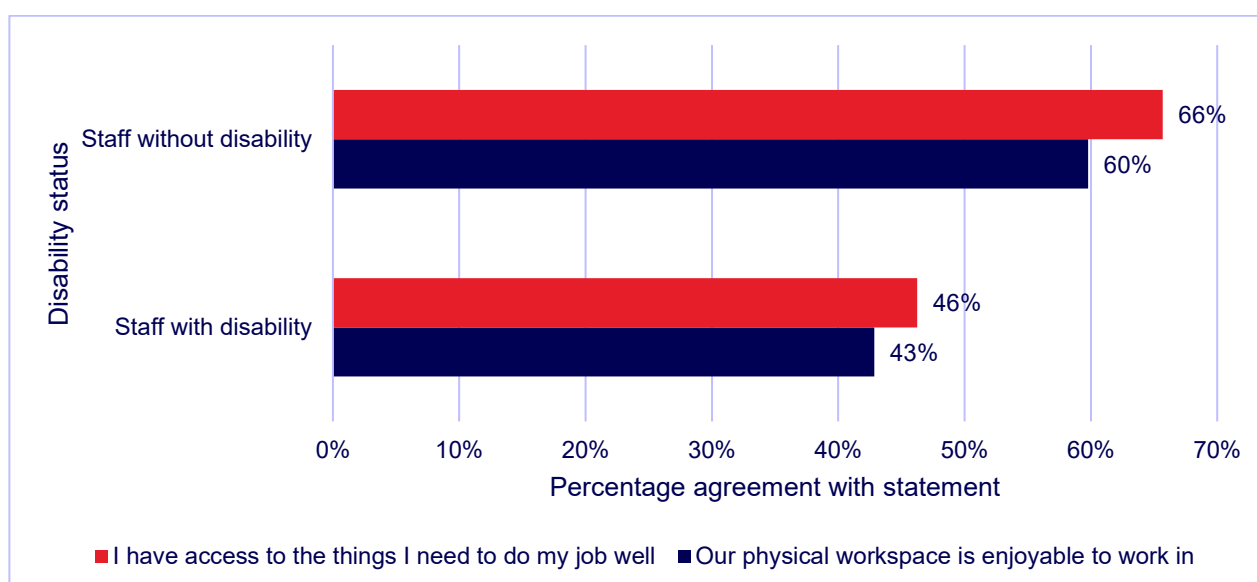


Figure 2: Experiences of enablement (built environment) 2019, by disability status

Men who identified as living with disability were significantly less likely than women who identified as living with disability to report that they found the physical workspace enjoyable to work in—these gendered dynamics were mirrored in the staff cohort without disability, though, were less pronounced (see Figure 3).

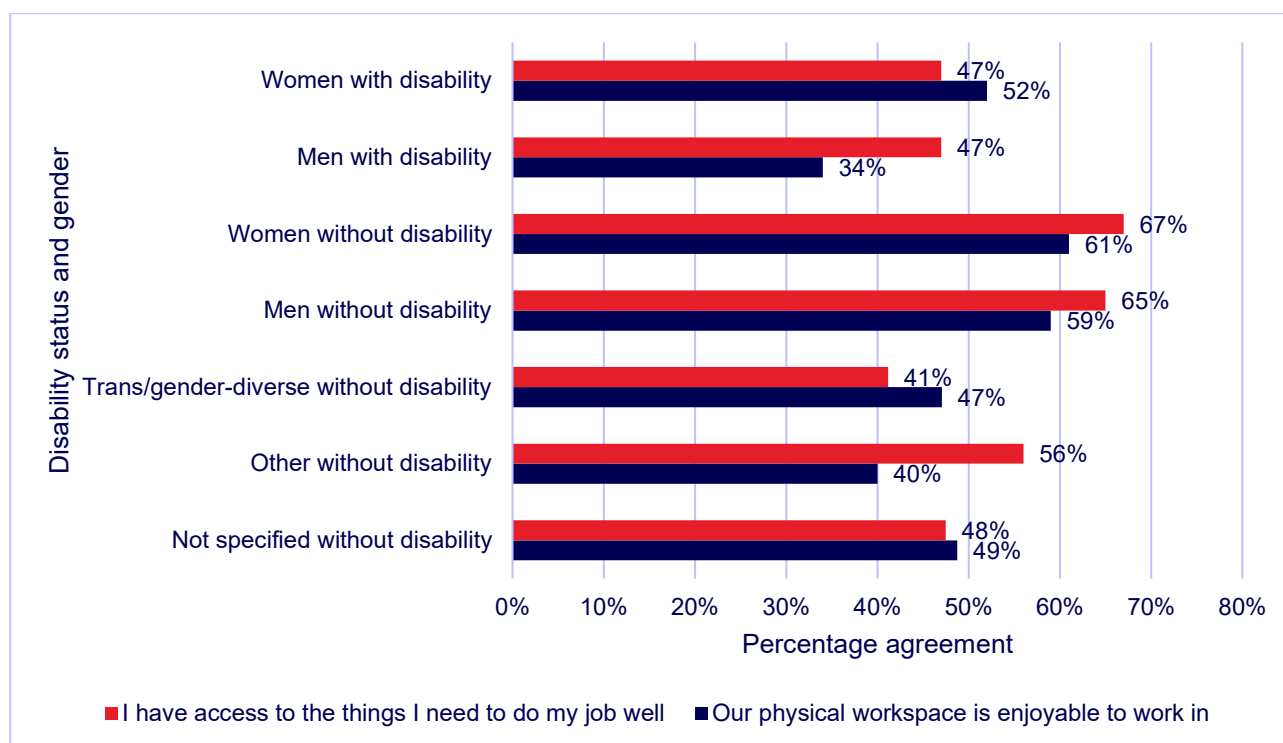


Figure 3: Experiences of enablement (built environment) 2019, by disability status and gender identity

The Cygnet Working Group further noted that: not all physical workspaces on campus were accessible, wayfinding supports—like signage and maps to help people navigate space intuitively—were unclear or non-existent, and open plan workspaces presented difficulties for neurodiverse staff, who may have issues with noise and lighting.

Sub barrier 4.2: Barriers to access in digital tools and systems

In 2019, staff who identified as living with disability were 15 percentage points less likely than staff without disability to feel that the information they needed to do their jobs was readily available and 16 percentage points less likely to feel that systems and processes supported them, as shown in Figure 4.

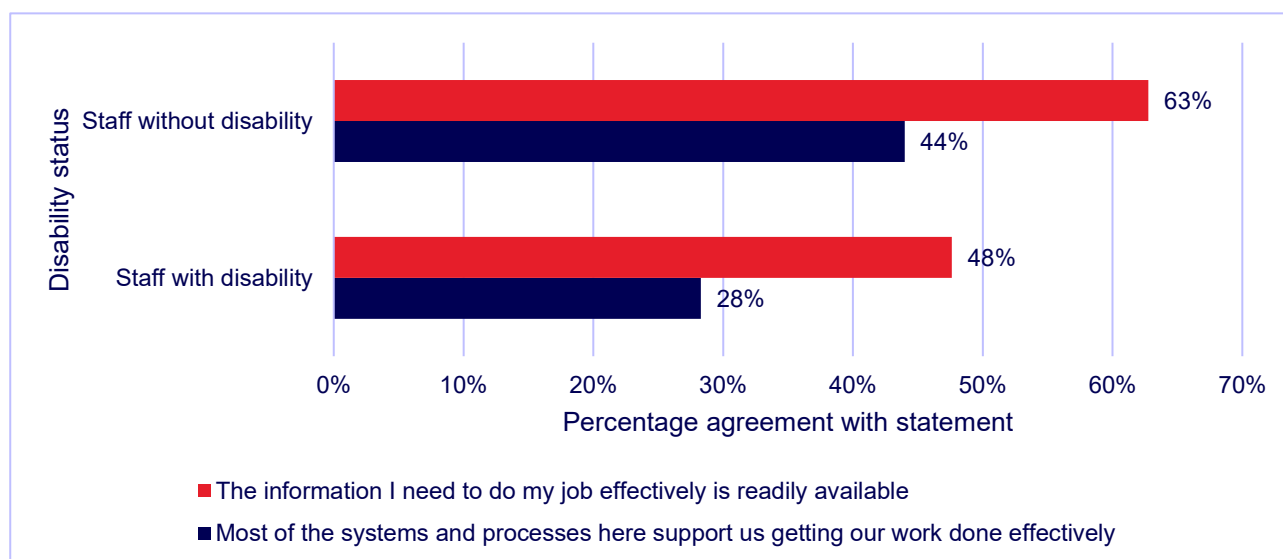


Figure 4: Experiences of enablement (digital tools and systems) 2019, by disability status

Men who identified as living with disability were significantly less likely than women who identified as living with disability to report that systems and processes supported them to get their work done—though, this time, this gendered dynamic was *not* mirrored in the cohort without disability (see Figure 5). The reasons for this are unclear.

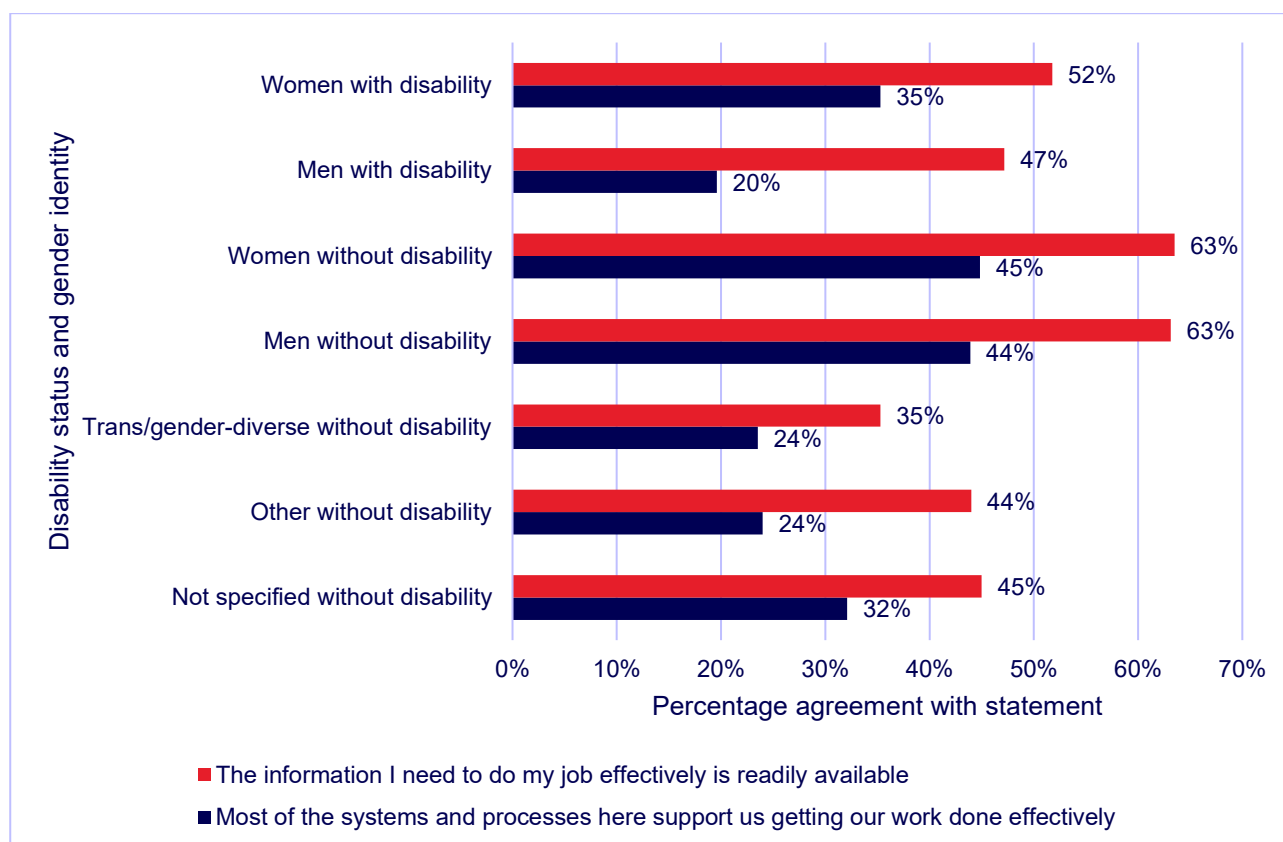


Figure 5: Experiences of enablement (digital tools and systems) 2019, by disability status and gender identity

The Cygnet Working Group expanded upon these issues, noting that: some systems used at the University were not accessible, there were issues getting timely access to necessary accessibility technology, and frequent changes to technology presented challenges for neurodiverse staff.

Sub-barrier 4.3: Exclusion of people with disability and neurodiversity

As shown in Figure 6, below, staff who identified as living with disability were less likely than staff without disability to report that they could be their 'authentic self'. Staff with disability were less likely than staff without disability to report that they felt that they belonged (-16 percentage points) and that people from all backgrounds had equitable opportunities to succeed (-15 percentage points).

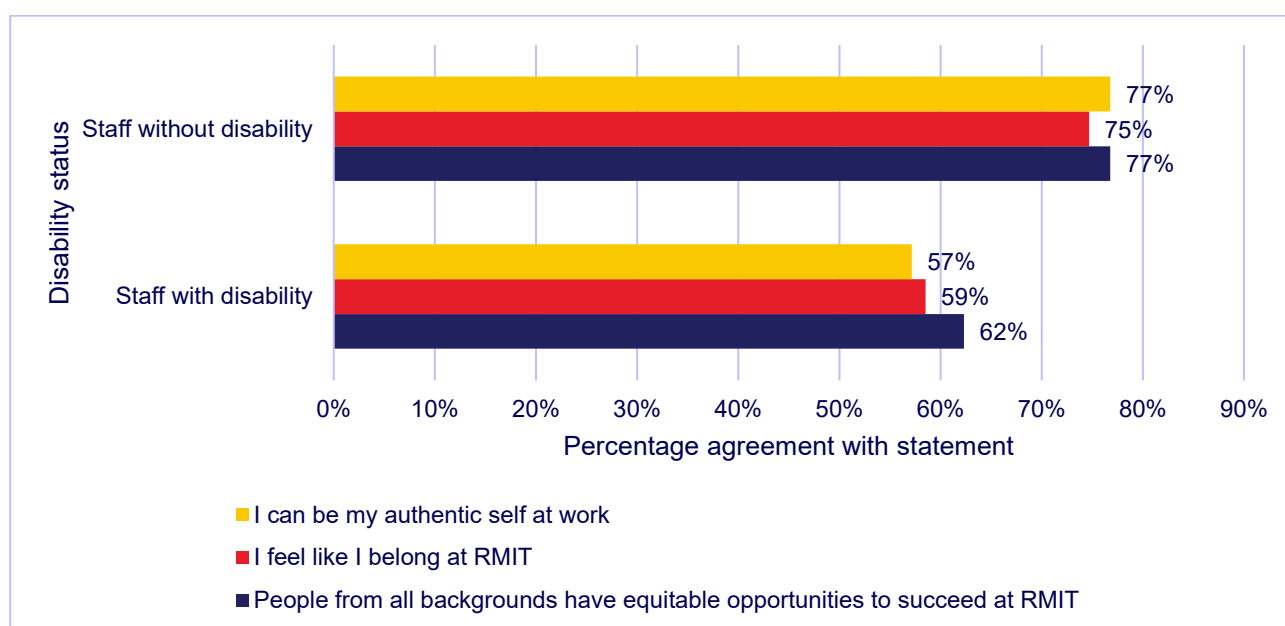


Figure 6: Experiences of inclusion 2019, by disability status

Again, men who identified as living with disability were less likely than women who identified as living with disability to report that they could be their authentic selves at work—there were no gendered differences for the other inclusion-related questions among people with disability (see Figure 7).



Figure 7: Staff experiences of inclusion 2019, by disability status and gender identity

With respect to students, in 2019, domestic undergraduate students with disability had lower participation in RMIT studies than their representation in the Australian population and had worse study and employment outcomes than other domestic students who did not indicate a disability at enrolment. At this time:

- 2,598 students who identified as living with disability were enrolled at RMIT, representing 6.7% of the domestic undergraduate student population
- these students passed 84.9% of their enrolled courses, with 79.5% staying on to enrol again the following year and
- students with disability had a notably lower rate of participation in employment than students without disability, with the overall employment rate of this cohort at 77.3%, 10 points behind that of other domestic students.

Student Experience Survey 2019 showed that students with and without disability had similar experiences of student support and services and peer engagement—while students who identified as living with disability reported generally poorer experiences of learning resources (see Figure 8). It should be noted that this data is not available further disaggregated by gender.

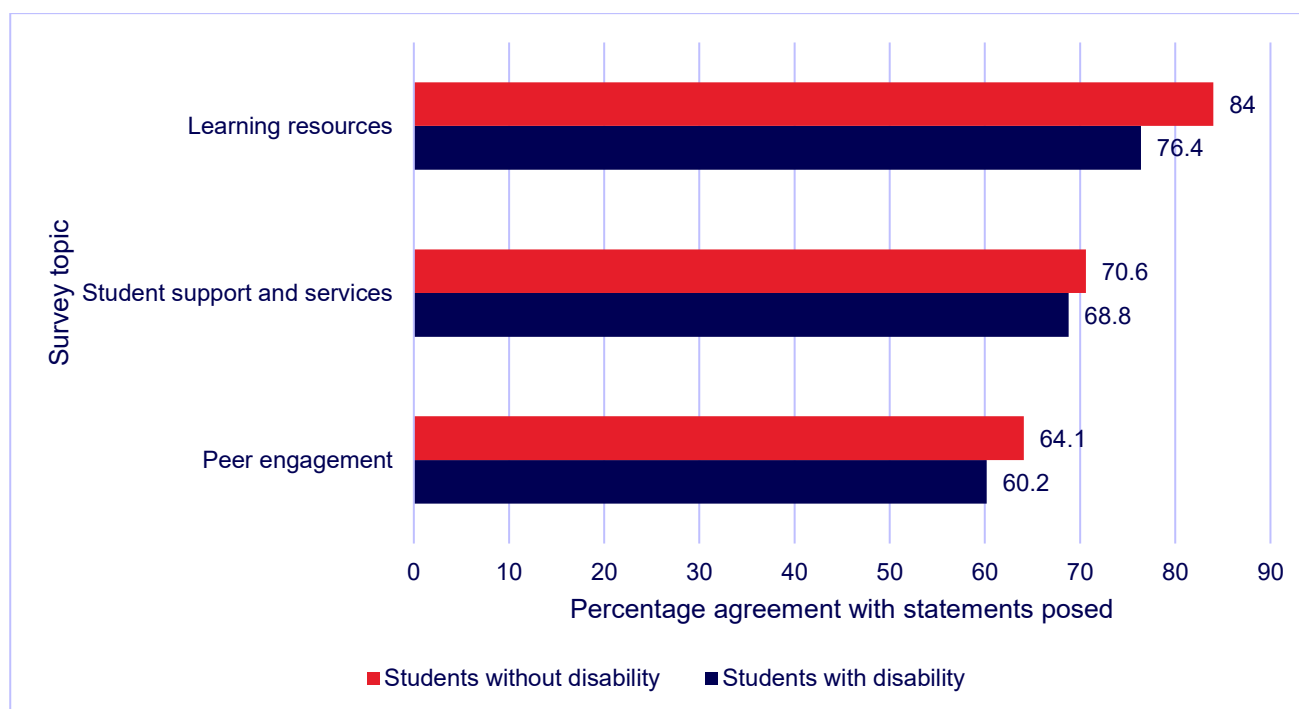


Figure 8: Student Experience Survey outcomes 2019, by disability status

Anecdotally, the Cygnet Working Group highlighted that: staff and students often did not feel comfortable to disclose their disabilities due to fear of discrimination, there may be bias against people with disability and neurodiversity in recruitment, and some students faced negative attitudes from staff, because of their disabilities.

Sub-barrier 4.4: Lack of workplace flexibility

Many staff who identified as living with disability reported that they did not have sufficient flexibility to manage work and other commitments, recording 66% agreement with the relevant statement (compared to the 80% for staff without disability), as shown in Figure 9. It should also be noted that, if a flexible work arrangement is sought by a person with a disability, this request should be managed through a reasonable adjustment process.

Staff who identified as living with disability were also more likely to report that their workload was unreasonable, compared to staff without disability (46% agreement, compared to 62%).

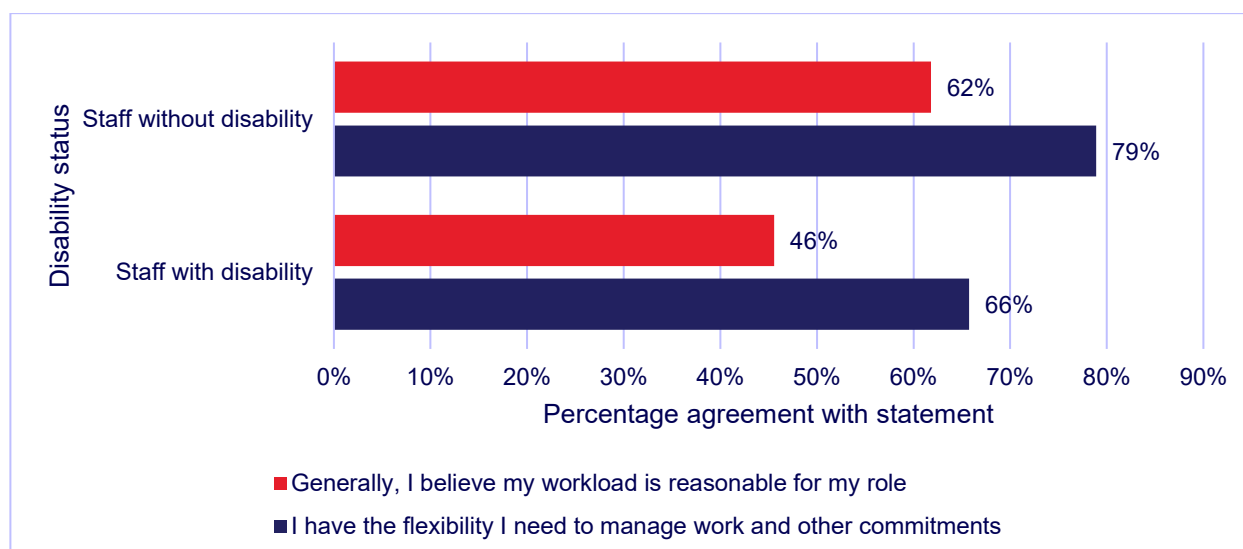


Figure 9: Staff experiences of work/life blend 2019, by disability status

Men who identified as living with disability answered less favourably than women who identified as living with disability in relation to their experiences of workplace flexibility, as shown in Figure 10.

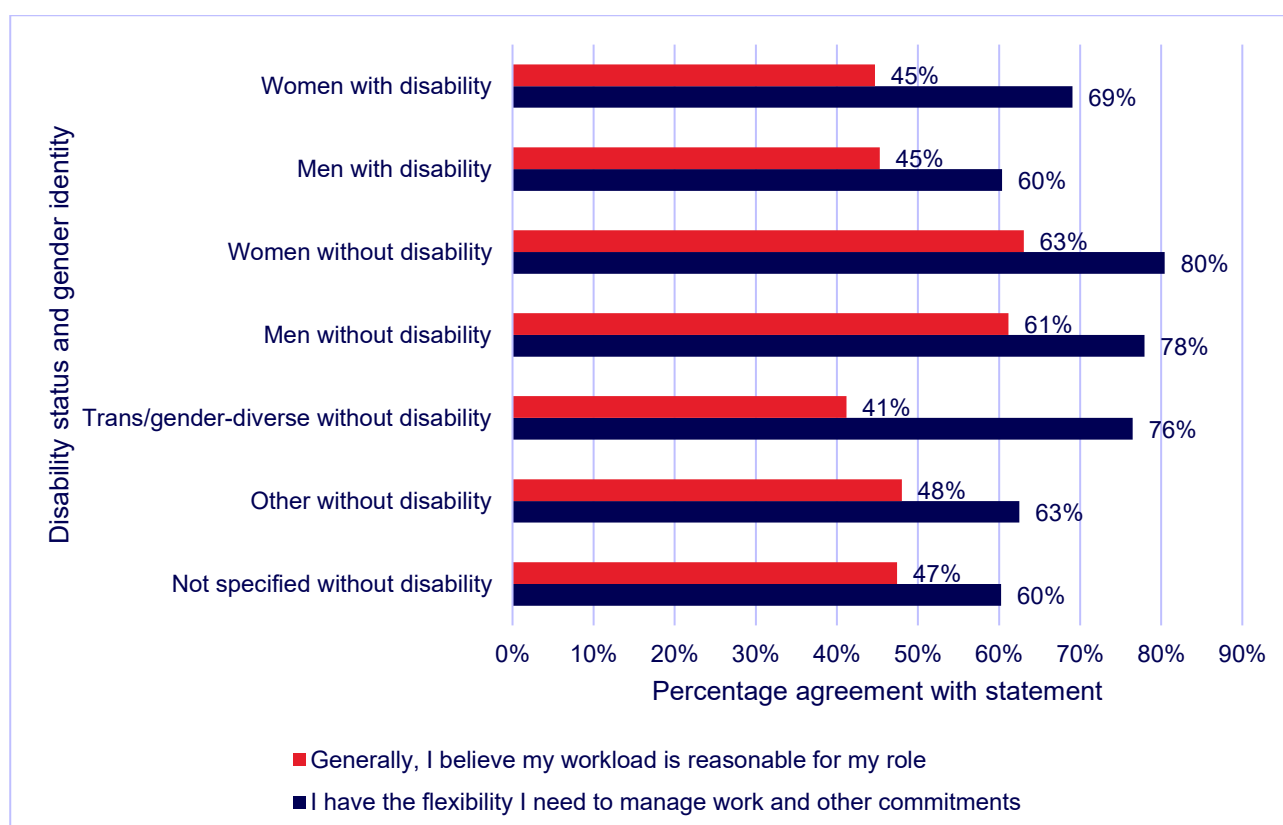


Figure 10: Staff experiences of work/life blend 2019, by disability status and gender

The Cygnet Working Group further noted that experiences of flexible work, as a part of the reasonable adjustments process, were 'patchy' in that manager discretion would often impact the types and extent of flexible work people could access, rather than fairly and routinely applying reasonable adjustments and flexible work policies.

Progress (actions and outputs)

As part of our *Athena Swan Bronze Action Plan*, RMIT committed to participating in the Australian Disability Network's (ADN's) Access and Inclusion Index. The Index is a whole-of-organisation tool that gives insights into accessibility and inclusion strengths and opportunities. RMIT participated in the Index from 2019 to 2021—in 2021, the ADN announced RMIT as one of its top 5 performers. At this time, the ADN provided recommendations to inform RMIT's future actions. These recommendations (see Figure 13, at the end of this chapter)—along with the actions set out in the *Bronze Action Plan* (see Table 2) and the University's *Accessibility Action Plan*—have informed the actions taken by the University from 2019-2025, detailed below. Leadership and governance for this work was provided through the Accessibility Working Group, chaired by the Chief Operating Officer, with annual plans and reports to Academic Board and the University Executive Committee.

1. Progressing campus accessibility improvements

To address sub-barrier 4.1 (barriers to access in the built environment), RMIT progressed campus accessibility improvements throughout the period 2019-2024. The aim was to both achieve compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) and to make our campuses inclusive and welcoming for all staff and students, including those who identified as living with disability. Projects were identified via feedback from student and stakeholder surveys and overseen by the DDA Compliance Project Control Group. This group was chaired by the Senior Manager and Program Leader, Capital Works, and met monthly to oversee, monitor and evaluate progress of the program of accessibility improvements. See Table 1 for the full suite of works undertaken to achieve compliance with the DDA, from 2019 to 2024.

Year	Details
2019	General uplift of facilities - Medical Centre build (on New Academic Street) - Ngarara Willim Centre Redesign Stage 1
2022	General uplift of facilities Refurbishment of city facilities: - Queer Lounges (safe spaces for queer students and their allies to meet, relax, organise and socialise) - Women's Room a private space for women can go to speak to someone or take time out to themselves) - Equitable Learning Assistance consulting suites (rooms where students can meet with Equitable Learning Services team members to discuss their needs and Equitable Learning Plans)
2023	- Seven new accessible car park spaces were created at Bundoora East, 6 at Bundoora West. - Three spaces in the RMIT Swanston Library were uplifted with sensory-friendly features (comfortable furniture, low level adjustable lighting, sensory friendly colour palette) allowing these spaces to be launched as designated sensory-friendly study spaces available to students. - Installing a DDA-compliant lift to the stage at Storey Hall on RMIT's City Campus to improve accessibility for speakers and audience members.
2024	Physical audit of RMIT campuses to assess all physical spaces with consideration to aspects of accessibility and inclusion throughout the campus

- and with reference to the Building Code of Australia 2022, Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010 and other relevant Australian Standards.
- A room in Building 56 Level 4 was converted to a sensory-friendly lounge for students in City North.

Table 1: Works under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) compliance program – 2019-2024

In 2020, RMIT also undertook a refresh of the Property Services Design Standards to better incorporate accessibility—all environments, facilities and grounds must meet these standards. A new Design Standards Compliance Group was formed to provide oversight and ensure that RMIT meets or exceeds minimum standards of accessibility.

2. Progressing digital accessibility improvements

To address sub-barrier 4.2 (barriers to access in the digital tools and systems), in 2021-22, we included accessibility requirements in the University's design system. A design system is a set of reusable design components that can be used to prototype web pages. Doing this enabled staff to embed accessibility considerations when creating new websites under the University's domain.

While there are many resources online to learn about digital accessibility, studies show that staff are more likely to access company-branded resources. Therefore, from 2021 onwards, we created and disseminated a series of resources for RMIT staff, students and visitors to help them improve digital accessibility. We also provided accessibility training sessions to raise accessibility knowledge across RMIT. The sessions were tailored to individual teams, including Marketing, Admissions, Communications, Events, Research and Innovation and Web Publishing. Through this process, over 450 staff were trained on digital accessibility.

In 2024, we updated RMIT's Digital Accessibility Procedure, to set up expected levels of compliance with web accessibility across the University. Prior to this, RMIT had a *Digital Accessibility Framework* that had not been updated since 2015. The Framework was converted into a procedure to encourage compliance. This update considers the latest web accessibility standards and sets compliance expectations for third party vendors.

In 2025, the University's Accessibility Statement was updated, displaying our commitment to accessibility and the ways in which RMIT provides support, publicly, on our website. A link to our "Accessibility" pages is now incorporated into the footer section of all RMIT websites. The website also informs visitors of RMIT's commitment to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) version 2.2, level AA.

3. Improving representation of people with disability in the workforce

To address sub-barrier 4.3 (exclusion of people with disability and neurodiversity), RMIT has maintained its Disability Confident Recruiter (DCR) status since 2020—and was the first university to gain accreditation. The aim of the DCR program was to build RMIT's confidence and capability to attract and support candidates with disability.

In 2020, we undertook a complete review of the talent acquisition process and worked to remove barriers for people with disability—this included our People team undertaking training with the Australian Disability Network. The process was reviewed again in 2021, as RMIT transitioned to use of Workday, our human resources and finance management system. From 2022-2024, there were minor changes and improvements to the talent acquisition system to further embed accessible practices.

In 2024-25, RMIT partnered with Job Access—the Australian Government’s national hub for workplace and employment information for people with disability and employers—to help build our disability knowledge and skills and access the talents of people with disability. Job Access provided expert and tailored recommendations to implement long-term, sustainable changes to improve workplace accessibility and inclusion. Recommendations that were implemented included disability awareness training and train-the-trainer programs; promoting our opportunities with Disability Employment Service (DES) providers; holding DES information sessions where RMIT speaks to providers about the roles available in our organisation and what we are looking for in candidates; the provision of resources, including templates on reasonable adjustment; and the development of disability inclusion action plans.

In 2025, we partnered with PACE, an ADN mentoring program, to support the personal and professional development of mentees by connecting them with experienced mentors. Through this program, 11 mentors across RMIT were selected. As well as formal mentoring, there was also a launch, closing event and awards.

Further to these initiatives with external partners, there have also been staff-led initiatives, including the establishment of the RMIT Disability and Neurodiversity Staff Network. The Network, which has been running since 2022, is a group of professional and academic staff living with disability, neurodiversity, medical and/or mental health conditions. The Network provides peer support, aims to build awareness of disability-related experiences and champions the inclusion of people with disability within the RMIT staff community. Participation is voluntary and open to those with lived experience—it currently has 137 members across RMIT’s City, Brunswick, Bundoora, Vietnam and Barcelona campuses. The Network continues to have a significant and ongoing impact, including successfully advocating for the appointment of a dedicated Workplace Adjustment Officer (commencing in January 2024). In December 2024, the Network developed *RMIT’s Disability and Neurodiversity Staff Network: Workplace Challenges and Successes report*, which they presented to the University Executive. This report included 52 case studies shared by Network members and informs the Impact section of this application.

4. Embedding a Universal Design approach to teaching and learning

To address sub-barrier 4.3 (exclusion of people with disability and neurodiversity), the principle of “Universal Design” or “inclusive by design” was embedded in RMIT’s *Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (IDEA) Framework*. This approach has informed a range of strategic initiatives, including the development of the next Education Plan—and services, programs and initiatives across the Education Portfolio are starting to take an ‘inclusive by design’ approach.

In 2024, the Student Equity team partnered with the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training to host a Universal Design Symposium. This National Symposium on Universal Design for Learning included a presentation by international guest speaker Dr Thomas Tobin.

A Community of Practice (CoP) on inclusive and ‘Universal Design for learning’ was also established in 2024, providing a forum for educators to share research and practice insights. The CoP met six times in 2024—175 professional, academic and educator staff attended across the six sessions. A related SharePoint site was also created to broaden access to Universal Design resources.

The Student Equity team also partnered with RMIT’s Centre for Educational Innovation and Quality (CEIQ) to deliver three inclusive assessment workshops. The workshops aimed to support educators to develop assessments from a disability-inclusive perspective and were attended by nearly 60 staff.

5. Delivering a program of staff capability development and awareness campaigns/events

To address sub-barriers 4.3 (exclusion of people with disability and neurodiversity) and 4.4 (lack of workplace flexibility), RMIT delivered a suite of voluntary staff capability development. The aim was to promote the inclusion of staff and students who identified as living with disability and neurodiversity—including an understanding of the importance of workplace flexibility for staff who identified as living with disability. Training programs included:

- Neurodiversity training for College of Vocational Education Creative Industries, the School of Art, the Barcelona team, and others
- Disability Awareness with College of Vocational Education Community Services Educators
- Workplace Adjustments and the Australian Disability Legal framework and
- Blindness and low vision in the workplace

In 2024, over 1,500 staff participated in professional development opportunities and events to improve their disability inclusion capability and awareness.

We also delivered a range of awareness campaigns and events, including on days of significance, with the aim of promoting the inclusion of people with disability and neurodiversity. For example, on Global Accessibility Awareness Day in 2024, subject matter experts and representatives with lived experience came together for an in-person forum to discuss how we can help progress accessibility in new and universal ways, through our systems, facilities, environments and interactions. Figure 11 is a photo from a similar Global Accessibility Awareness Day event in 2022.



Figure 11: Image from Global Accessibility Awareness Day 2022

In another example, in March 2024, RMIT partnered with The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower to help create awareness of hidden disabilities. This campaign involved the distribution of sunflower lanyards and pins (see Figure 12). Displaying the sunflower is a simple tool to voluntarily disclose that you have a hidden disability and might need extra help, understanding, or time. Throughout 2024, 500 lanyards, 250 pins for staff with hidden disabilities, and a further 250 pins for supporters, were distributed.



Figure 12: Hidden Disabilities Sunflower promotional merchandise

6. Providing dedicated supports to staff and students who identified as living with disability

Lastly, to address all sub-barriers, we provided a range of dedicated supports for staff and students who identified as living with disability and neurodiversity.

For staff, we enhanced and extended the rollout of workplace adjustments. The aim was to ensure staff needing workplace adjustments—whether they be for assistive technology, modified workstations or flexible working arrangements—were able to have their needs met in a timely and effective way. We reviewed the Workplace Adjustments procedure, to ensure it was meeting staff needs. We also hired a dedicated Workplace Adjustment Officer to provide dedicated support to staff requiring such adjustments.

For students, since 2019, we introduced a range of supports and programs, including the below.

Planning, reporting and evaluation

- **RMIT-wide Accessibility Action Plan implemented**—this plan has now been replaced by RMIT's *Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (IDEA) Framework* for students and staff, which outlines aspirations and actions to achieve an RMIT that is 'inclusive by design' across all locations and operations.
- **Detailed student data dashboards** developed and published, providing a range of insights on the representation, experience and outcomes for students with disability.

Access, learning and academic support

- Introduced sensory-friendly **calm zones and accessibility initiatives during Open Day**, meeting access needs of 89% of respondents with disabilities.
- **Inherent requirements** for programs published to provide guidance to prospective and current students about non-academic requirements.
- **New scholarships** secured to support students with disabilities with cost of living (e.g. the Dylan Alcott Scholarship established in 2024), with additional new grants for assistive technology and laptops.

- **Equitable Learning Plans (ELPs)** provided to thousands of students annually for access to adjustments and services, with increased staffing, process and technology enablement for the Equitable Learning Services team to meet increased student demand, particularly among students with complex circumstances.
- In addition to a range of enabling staff support, such as Auslan interpreters in classes, in 2024, we conducted a trial under which we provided a **Participation Assistant (disability support worker) in classes**, rather than assigning them to specific students. In doing so, we aimed to offer discrete support to those in need and free up teacher time for the entire class.
- **Designed and implemented the STEM Pilot service** for students with multiple assessment adjustments, such as through Equitable Learning Plans or special consideration, to provide holistic support across personal and study issues.
- **Dedicated study sessions** on all campuses and sensory-friendly study spaces for neurodivergent students.
- **Accessible digital resources**, such as electronic textbooks and journals, under a “digital first” strategy, providing accessible, alternative resource formats for people with disability.

Employment and career support

- **Established a new role to provide targeted career advice and support** to students with disability and neurodivergence, including one-on-one career planning appointments and events and resources to support students to prepare for and participate in work-integration learning and industry placements and internships. This responded to data showing worse employment outcomes for graduates with disability.
- **Updated Work Integrated Learning (WIL) guidelines** for students with ELPs.

Mental health and wellbeing

- More than 7,000 counselling appointments a year were attended by students, including those with a mental health condition.
- Launched and implemented the *RMIT Mental Wellbeing Strategic Action Plan 2020-25* and related surveys and initiatives.

Community engagement and creative initiatives

- RMIT students featured in *Alter State*, a **disability-led arts initiative**.
- In partnership with RMIT staff, students created **video works exploring inclusive futures and accessibility in nature**.
- New **partnership with the Neurodiversity Hub** to provide resources and other support to students and staff.

Figure 13: Recommendations from the ADN to inform actions from 2021

Action		Time scale					Success measures
		19	20	21	22	23	
5.1	Build inclusive culture						Improved staff survey results particularly regarding <i>Inclusion factors: ethics; mission & values; diversity; involvement</i>
	a. through education: Implement campaign specifically to build inclusive culture and ways of working including promoting a culture of zero tolerance to bullying, discrimination or harassment leveraging existing programs of <i>Change the Course</i> and <i>Respect. Now. Always</i>						
	b. through communication and events: Embed inclusive language and practices in RMIT communications, policies and systems including gender balance and representation of speakers and Chairs in University events and marketing materials						
5.2	Embed flexible working						- Increase in uptake of flexible work arrangements - Improved staff survey results particularly regarding <i>Flexibility factors: workload; wellness; work/life balance</i> - Increase in flexible work arrangements including part-time STEMM appointments in level C and management role
	a. Embed organisation design principles enabling work flex for all roles including all roles can be part-time						
	b. Increase flexible working practices specifically for mid-career academics and managers and publicise role models						
6.3	Progress RMIT STEMM staff and students with a disability						- Participation in Access and Inclusion Index maintained - Increased proportion of staff who identified as living with disability across the pipeline in STEMM academic roles - Improved staff survey outcomes for staff who identified as living with disability, reducing the gap compared with outcomes for staff without a disability - Identify and support at least 1 Employer-based internship program per year for females in STEMM with a disability
	a. Continue to partner with the Australian Disability Network (AND) and to participate in the Access and Inclusion Index to advise and benchmark RMIT's progress in supporting staff and students with a disability; analysis and reports continue to inform decision making and planning to improve experience for staff and students with a disability						
	b. Improve capability, confidence and awareness of staff and managers across the University through education and awareness campaigns regarding managing disability in the workplace						
	c. Promote Australian Network on Disability internship programs and mentoring students and staff with a disability						

Table 2: Relevant actions from RMIT's Athena Swan Bronze Award Action Plan (2019-23)

Outcomes

The outcomes of RMIT's program of staff-focused work to enhance accessibility can be understood with reference to the results of the Staff Pulse Survey 2024—an abridged version of the full Staff Survey conducted in 2019. There were 2,208 respondents to this survey without disability and 234 respondents with disability. The breakdown of respondents by gender identity is shown in Figure 14, below.

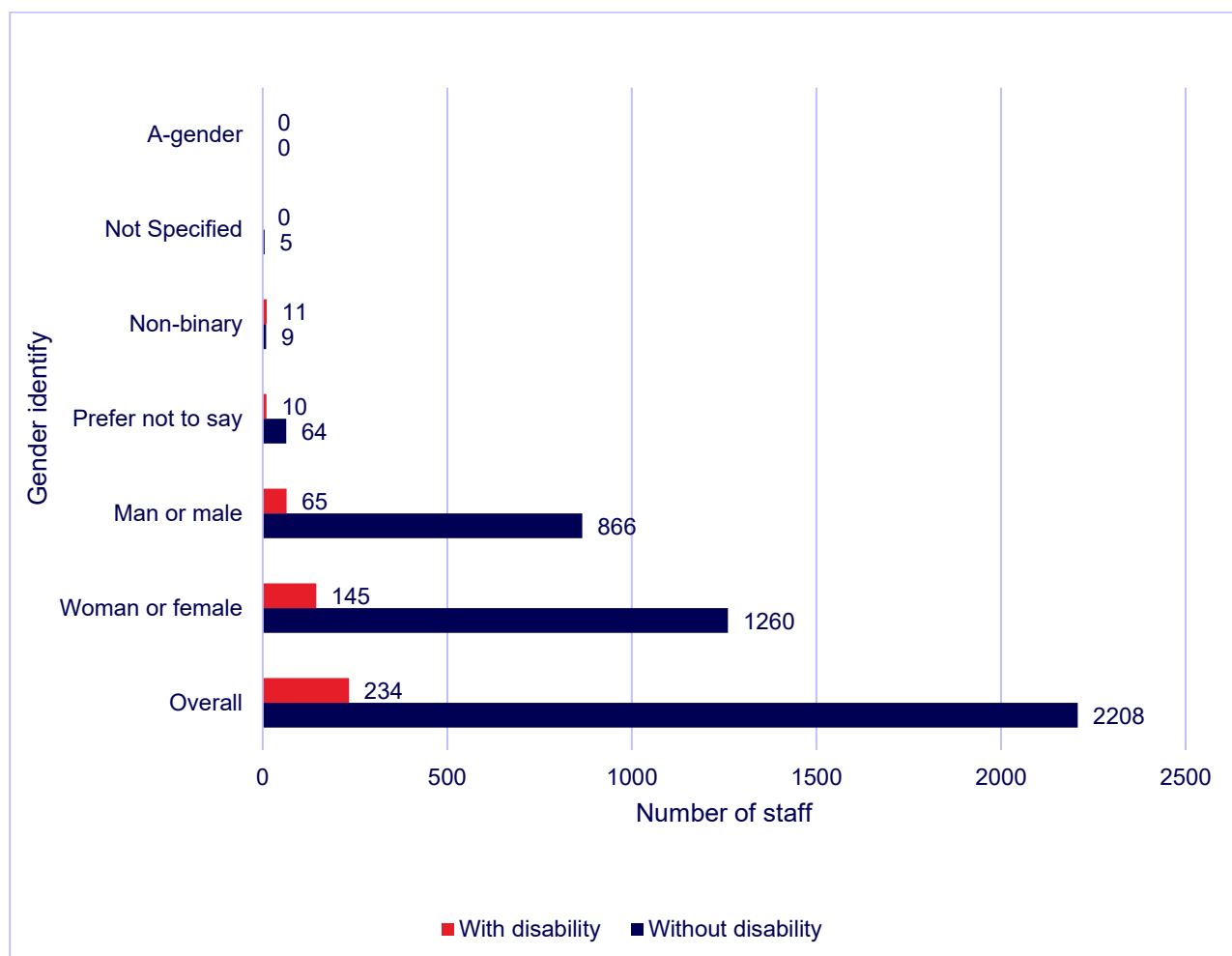


Figure 14: Number of respondents to Staff Pulse Survey 2024, by disability status and gender identity

Other data sources demonstrating outcomes include our workplace adjustments and workforce management/recruitment data.

Student outcomes can be understood with reference to comprehensive dashboards that present a number of indicators across academic access and outcomes (participation, retention, success, completion), as well as evaluations of the RMIT experience, including the Student Experience Survey and Graduate Outcomes Survey. The total number of respondents to the Student Experience Survey 2023 was 4,405.

In addition, the Equitable Learning Services dashboard represents an intersectional view of the characteristics of students registered for an Equitable Learning Plan, including their disability type, waiting type for an appointment, and adjustments provided for in plans.

Sub barriers 4.1 and 4.2: Barriers to access in built environment, digital tools and systems

The Staff Pulse Survey did not include questions about the built environment in 2024—therefore, we do not have any data to compare to our baseline in 2019.

However, achieving compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) was one outcome of RMIT's efforts in this space. Works to address non-compliance were completed, such that DDA compliance was achieved.

With respect to digital accessibility, the Staff Pulse Survey 2024 found that experiences of digital enablement had worsened for both staff with and without disability, since 2019, as shown in Figure 15. Agreement with the statement 'Most of the systems and process here support us getting our work done effectively' dropped 7 percentage points for both cohorts—there was no change in the "gap" between cohorts (16 percentage points).

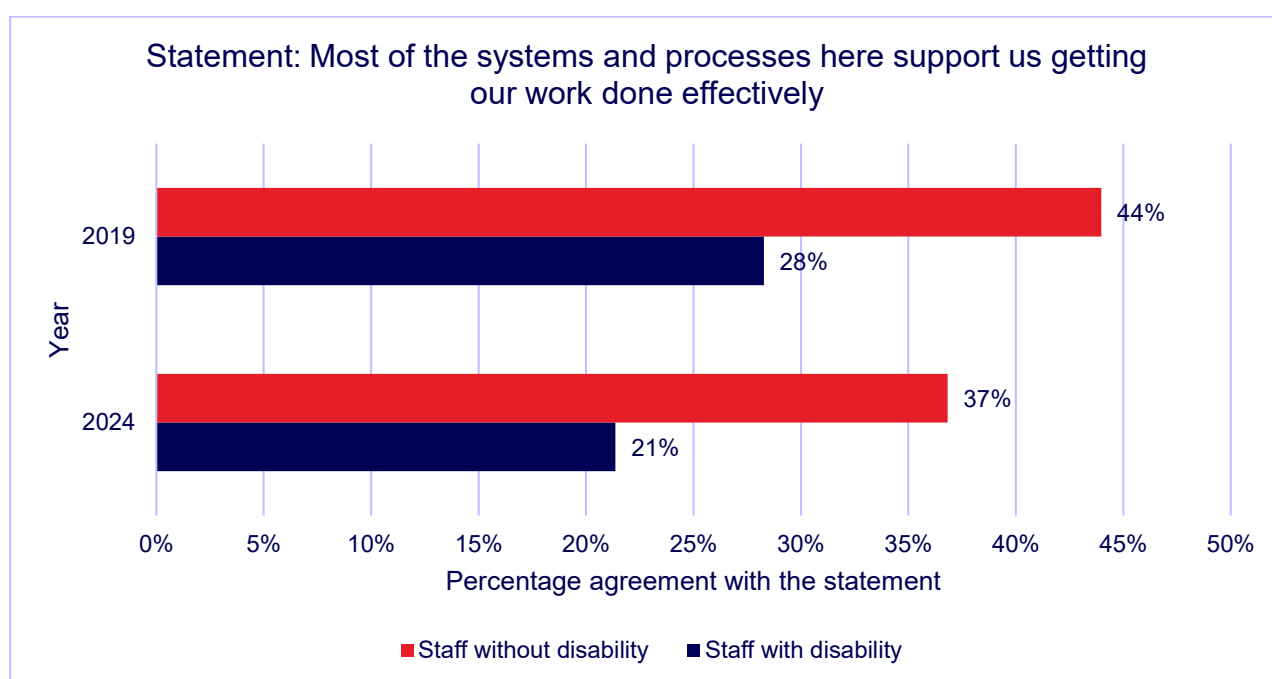


Figure 15: Experiences of enablement 2019 and 2024, by disability status

When we compare experiences by gender identity, we can see that women's agreement with the statement declined more steeply than other cohorts'—this was particularly the case for women with disability (see Figure 16). However, men who identified as living with disability still reported worse experiences of enablement than women who identified as living with disability, overall. Since the total numbers of non-binary respondents in 2024 was low—and different gender identity categories were used in 2019 ('trans/gender-diverse' and 'other')—it is difficult to draw conclusions based on this data.

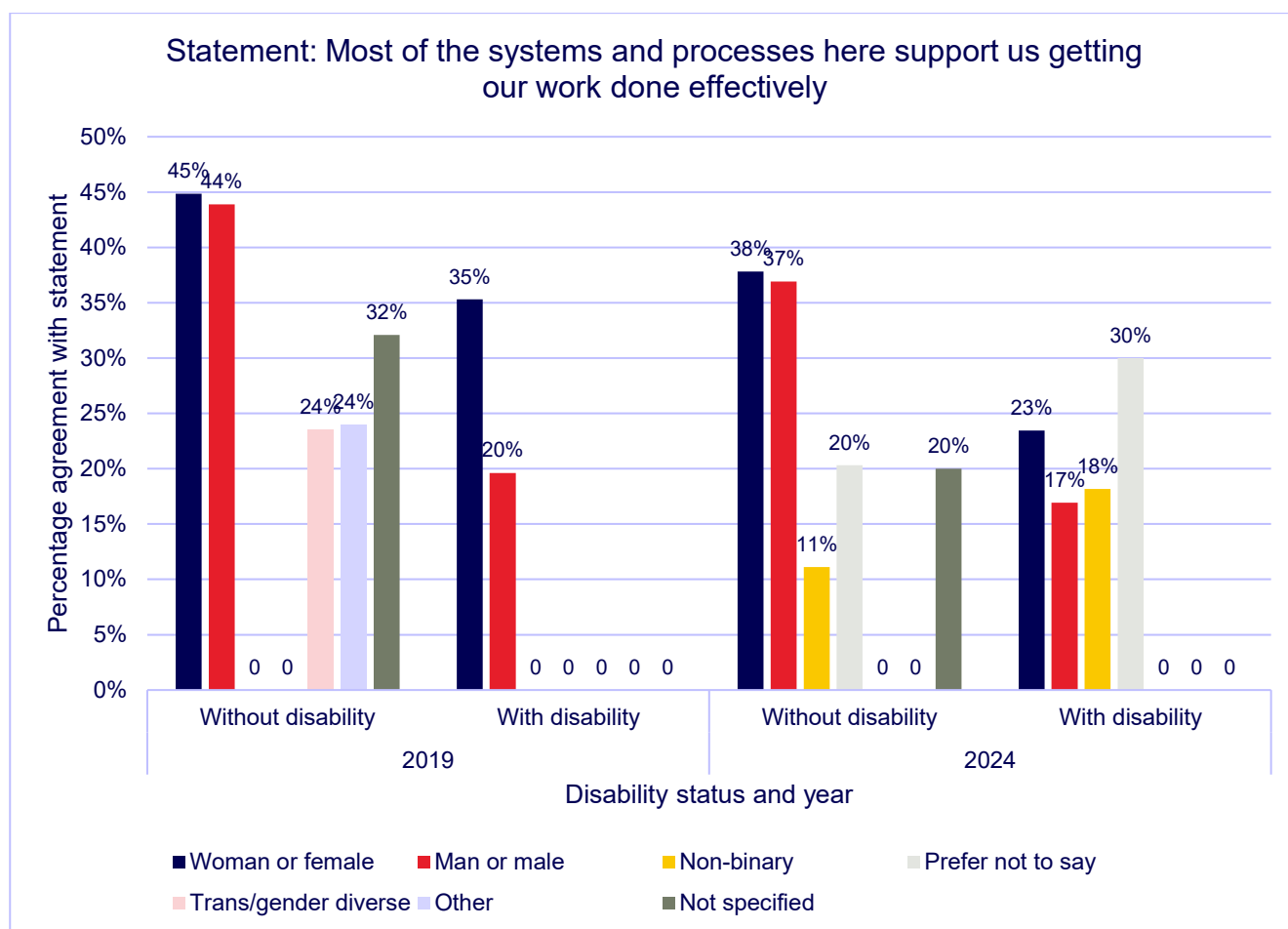


Figure 16: Experiences of enablement 2019 and 2024, by disability status and gender identity

Given that worse experiences of enablement were reasonably universal, this may be a reflection of the move to new systems in this period, including the self-service human resources and finance management system Workday, as well as the post-COVID landscape, which required greater use of remote-working technologies. However, since worse experiences of digital enablement are acute for some cohorts, it is clear that the University needs to make efforts to particularly support people with disability, going forward. Actions that seek to address this that the University has committed to can be found in the 'Further action' plan at the end of this document, under '[Digital tools and systems](#)'.

Sub-barrier 4.3: Exclusion of people with disability and neurodiversity

In terms of the representation of people with disability, data show that RMIT currently employs 285 staff who identify as living with disability. Given that this is a relatively small proportion of the just over 12,000 staff RMIT employs, globally—and that around one in six Australians are known to live with disability—it is very likely that this is an under-reporting of the number of staff with disability. This data is self-reported, either at recruitment or through our human resources management system Workday. Further efforts are needed to improve this dataset to ensure confidence in our disability data—item 19 in the '[Inclusion](#)' section of the 'Further action' plan addresses this issue.

In terms of staff experiences of inclusion, since 2019, agreement with the statement 'People from all backgrounds have equitable opportunities to succeed at RMIT' declined slightly for staff who

identified as living with disability to 58% (-4 percentage points), but stayed relatively stable at 78% for staff without disability (+1 percentage point), as shown in Figure 17.

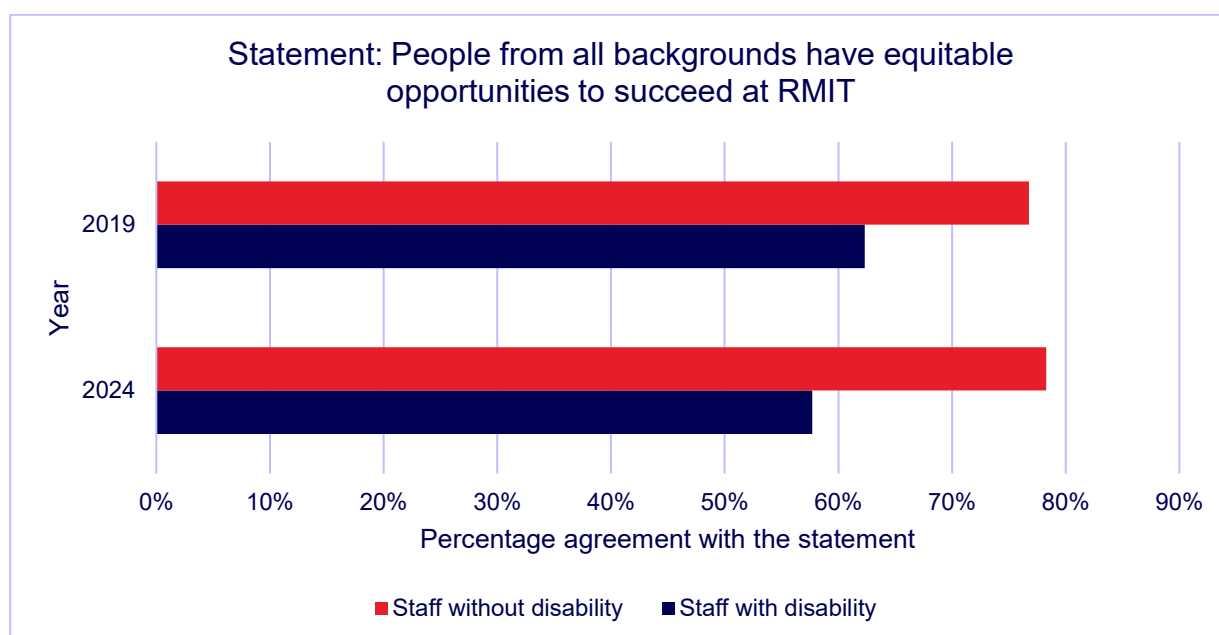


Figure 17: Experiences of inclusion 2019 and 2024, by disability status

This change was wholly due to the experiences of women, non-binary people and those who preferred not to disclose their gender identity who identified as living with disability, as shown in Figure 18. Men who identified as living with disability reported a slightly improved (+1 percentage point) experience of inclusion, while women who identified as living disability recorded a 5-percentage point drop and non-binary people with disability were included for the first time and reported only 27% agreement.

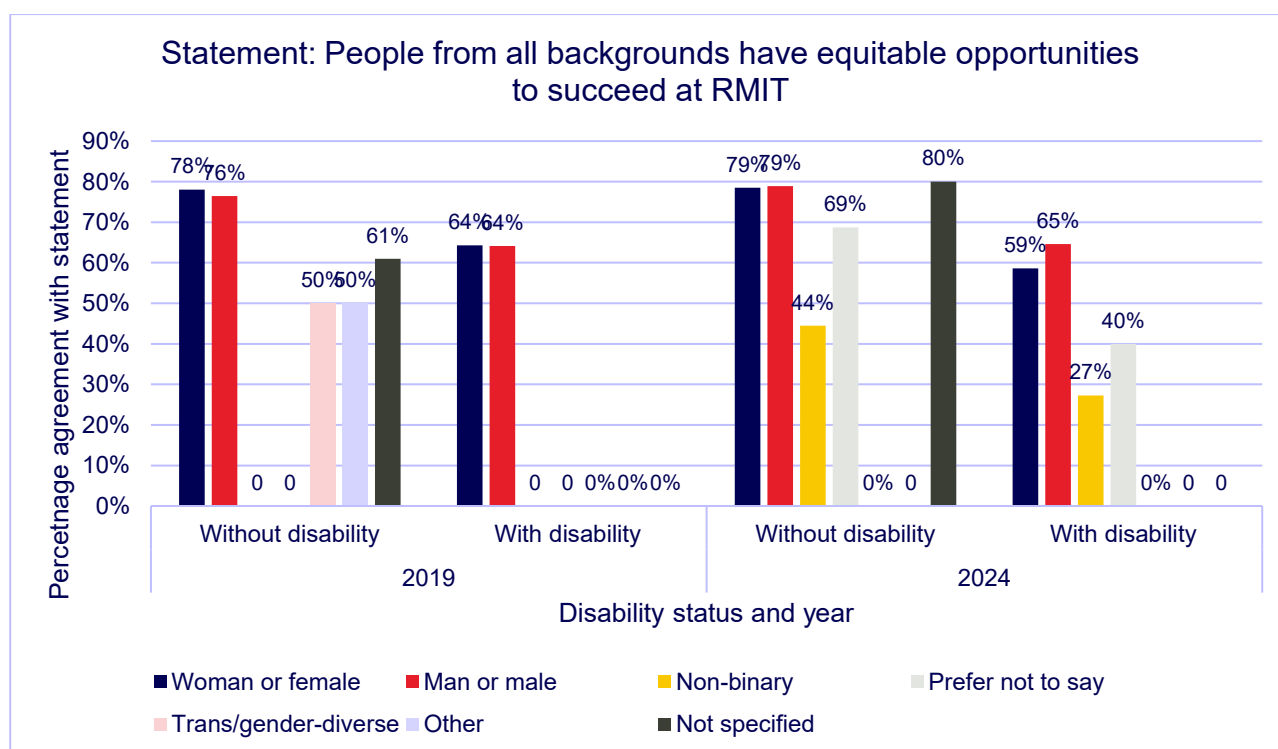


Figure 18: Experiences of inclusion 2019 and 2024, by disability status and gender identity

Further to this, the change was particularly pronounced for some LGBTIQ+ staff who identified as living with disability—bi+ staff (35 respondents) and queer staff (11 respondents) agreement with the statement was at 46% and 27%, respectively, compared to the 62% agreement recorded by LGBTIQ+ staff who identified as living with disability in 2019 (see Figure 19).

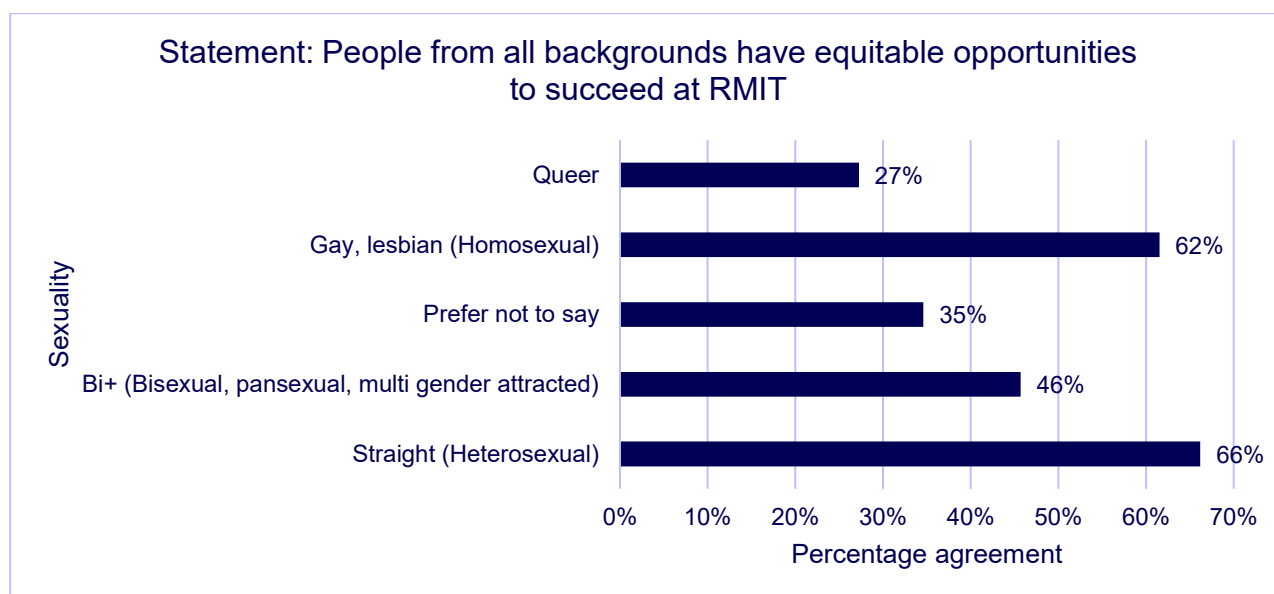


Figure 19: Experiences of inclusion 2024 for people with disability, by sexuality

In the 2019 Staff Survey, the demographic category ‘diverse genders, sexes and sexualities’ was used—therefore, the responses may have captured the spectrum of LGBTIQ+ experience. In 2024, when there was greater granularity of analysis, it became clear that gay/lesbian staff experiences of inclusion were accounting for more of the agreement with the relevant statement. This may mean that it is the combination, or intersection, of queer experience with the experience of disability or neurodiversity that is accounting for feelings of exclusion among some staff.

With respect to students, between 2019 and 2024, enrolments of domestic undergraduate students with disability have more than doubled from 2,598 to 5,790, with the share of students with disability in the overall domestic student population correspondingly rising from 6.7% to 15.4%. More of this cohort is also successful in their studies and in completing their programs.

- Students with disability are passing a higher percentage of the courses in which they are enrolled, up from 84.9% to 87.1%. This success rate is still behind domestic students, but the gap has narrowed.
- The retention rate of students with disability has slightly declined over this period, from 79.5% to 78.4%, but this rate is on par with other domestic students.
- Attainment of programs for this cohort has increased from 5.6% in 2019 to 12.6% in 2023.

Student evaluations of ‘Quality of the entire educational experience’ and ‘Student support and services’ declined from 2019 to 2024, as was the case for all other domestic students (with some gains post-COVID years).

With respect to employment outcomes, the overall employment rate of students with disability was 77.3% in 2019, 10 points behind that of other domestic students. In 2024, the employment rate for students with disability had climbed to 83% (with the gap that gap narrowing to 1.4 percentage points).

For its progress supporting students with disability, RMIT has attained numerous awards and recognition, including:

- individual and team awards from the Australian Disability Clearinghouse in Education and Training,
- top 5 organisations in Australia in the Australian Network on Disability 'Access and Inclusion Index' in 2021 and
- #1 organisation in the world in the Times Higher Education evaluation of achievements against the UN Sustainable Development goal for 'Reduced Inequalities'.

Sub-barrier 4.4: Lack of workplace flexibility

Since 2019, staff experiences of workload improved for both staff with and without disability, as shown in Figure 20. The “gap” between staff with and without disability closed marginally, going from 16 to 13 percentage points (52% and 65% agreement with the relevant statement, respectively).

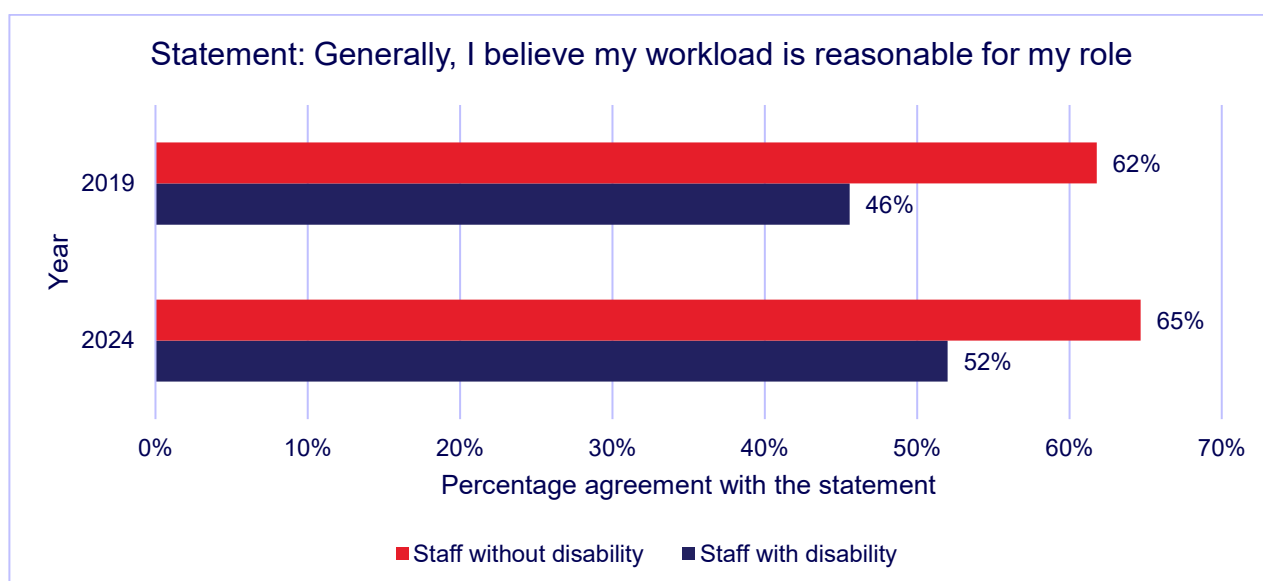


Figure 20: Experiences of work/life blend 2019 and 2024, by disability status

When we consider experiences of work/life blend by disability status and gender identity, we can see that, while both women and men who identified as living with disability reported reasonable increases in agreement (+7 and +9 percentage points, respectively), non-binary people who identified as living with disability (11 respondents) still reported only 45% agreement (see Figure 21).

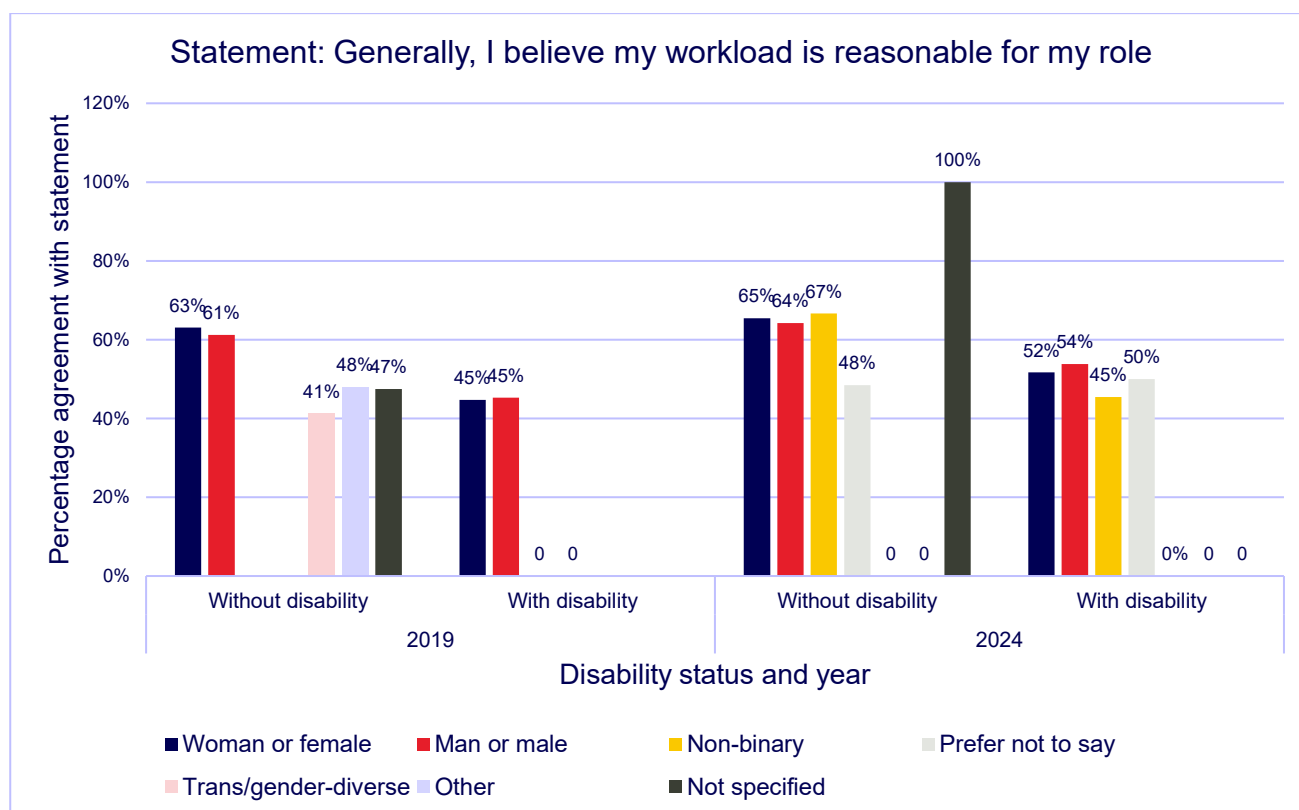


Figure 21: Experiences of work/life blend 2019 and 2024, by disability status and gender identity

Staff experiences of workload were less positive for academic and vocational education staff than for professional staff, both with and without disability—a trend that continued since 2019. In 2024, academic and vocational education staff who identified as living with disability recorded 33% and 14% agreement with the above statement, respectively. This is a well-known trend—academic staff often face greater workload challenges than professional staff due to the need to balance teaching, research and administrative responsibilities. Academic work frequently extends beyond standard hours, with tasks like marking, publishing and grant writing often being done in personal time. Notwithstanding this, it is clear that further effort needs to go into workload management for academic and vocational education staff who identified as living with disability—this is being addressed through a dedicated workload project (item 24 in the ‘Further action’ plan).

Outcomes with respect to workplace adjustments for people with disability and neurodiversity were more positive. Since the beginning of 2024, 147 staff were supported to access workplace adjustments—a significant increase from 2023.

Impact

Staff feedback was gathered by RMIT's Disability and Neurodiversity Staff Network. Members of the Staff Network were invited to share their experiences in writing between April-October 2024, via inputs into a database. At the time of data collection, there were 118 Network members (academic and professional staff). The below prompting questions were used.

Challenges

- What is your role?
- What happened and when?
- What was the outcome?
- What would have been a better outcome?
- What has changed/not changed because of your experience?

Successes

- What is your role?
- What happened and when?
- What was the outcome?

A total of 52 cases studies, highlighting 44 challenges and 8 successes, were collected—all entries were voluntary and anonymous. The case studies were written up into the *RMIT's Disability and Neurodiversity Staff Network: Workplace challenges and successes report*.

Sub barrier 4.1: Barriers to access in the built environment

When it came to experiences of the built environment, staff who identified as living with disability reported some positive experiences with having adjustments made to physical spaces. One staff member reported that being allocated a desk location away from busy thoroughfares led to reduced anxiety and increased focus.

However, there were also a number of experiences of the built environment that were less positive. Staff noted a need for dedicated spaces for staff who identified as living with disability and neurodiversity:

“I get issues with my joints and get fidgety from sitting all day, which is a symptom of my hyperactive ADHD. When I work from home, I like to 'reset' by doing some yin yoga-style stretches to remove tension and bring my mind back into focus. Having a dedicated space where this isn't seen as 'weird', where staff can have 'floor time' to stretch, lie down and sit on the floor during short breaks would be great.”

– Respondent 1, full-time professional staff member

It was also noted that open plan offices can lead to sensory overload and reduced productivity:

“Years ago, RMIT moved to open plan office spaces. As someone with ASD, ADHD and dyslexia, I find these spaces virtually impossible to be productive in... The problems include visual and audible noise, harsh lighting, and having to constantly process every personality in the environment (even if they're not there). Every hour spent in one of these spaces is not only an hour I must spend at home catching up on work...”

– Respondent 2, full-time academic staff member

These experiences demonstrate that, while efforts to make the University DDA-compliant were a first step, further efforts with respect to accessibility of the built environment are needed, particularly in response to the needs of neurodiverse staff—actions planned in this space can be found in the ‘Further action’ plan, under [‘Built environment’](#).

Sub barrier 4.2: Barriers to access in digital tools and systems

Staff who identified as living with disability noted that they have had difficulties getting the assistance they needed with technology in a timely way. One staff member was unable to work on a particular day because of their inability to get support:

“My assistive tech software had an error. I contacted IT by phone, explained I needed to use this software to do my work... The IT person on the phone logged the job (they did not attempt to resolve the problem over the phone) and then I received an email telling me to make an appointment, but no appointments were available that day.”

– Respondent 3, full-time professional staff member, non-people leader

However, other staff have had more positive experiences. One staff member noted that having voice-to-text software installed quickly enabled them to avoid getting repetitive strain injury (RSI):

“I can only type with one hand and was getting RSI. I told my manager who instantly suggested to get Dragon voice to text software and organised this with ITS immediately... It was incredibly empowering to have my manager say yes instantly and take action for me.”

– Respondent 4, part-time professional staff, non-people leader

While the University has taken a range of positive steps in relation to digital accessibility—including updating design systems and procedures and introducing training—it is more practical supports, including timely access to technology, that staff are calling out for. Going forward, the University will work to ensure that gaining timely support for assistive technology is a consistent experience—actions planned to support this include items 9-10 and 12-15 in the ‘Further action’ plan.

Sub-barrier 4.3: Exclusion of people with disability and neurodiversity

Some staff reported a lack of inclusive communication, especially from their managers:

“A manager asked to have a conversation about my performance/attitude/ways of working. The biggest comments were directly related to my neurodiversity... ongoing communication and conversations earlier and more compassion for people having different ways of working [would be better].”

– Respondent 5, part-time, academic sessional staff member, people leader

However, staff had extremely positive experiences of their involvement in the Disability and Neurodiversity Staff Network, with one member noting:

“The Network has done outstanding and invaluable work in creating and building an incredible peer support and advocacy community. My experience joining RMIT would have been completely different without it, and I cannot thank you enough. The commitment of the leadership team in this group, to our community and equality, is seen and deeply appreciated.”

– email correspondence from Network member

Positive student experiences of inclusion were also reported:

“The School of Design has a large cohort of neurodiverse students, many of whom are visual and kinaesthetic learners. It was refreshing to see processes tailored to these learning styles. For example, program mapping was done using hard copy sheets, allowing students to follow directions more easily.”

– Respondent 6, full-time professional staff member, non-people leader

These experiences highlight that involvement in communities—like networks and Schools with diverse student cohorts—are positive experiences that promote a sense of inclusion among our staff and students who identified as living with disability. They also highlight that inclusive communication, especially from managers, continues to be an area for further improvement—item 16 in the ‘Further action’ plan goes toward addressing this.

Rich data obtained from students with disability informed the development of the RMIT *IDEA Framework*, with its commitment to building an RMIT that is ‘inclusive by design’. Recent consultations with students and the RMIT University Student Union Disabilities and Carers Officer, staff and leaders have identified ongoing challenges relating to the provision of equitable and inclusive education for students with disability. The model that requires individual disclosure and registration to obtain learning support and adjustments through an Equitable Learning Plan is insufficient to meet the diverse needs of such a large student body, including social needs.

“In terms of academics and study, my disabilities are well catered for and understood by all of my professors. I have never been judged for needing extensions on most assessments; in fact, they reassured me that taking the extensions was the right thing to do. However, in terms of social life at RMIT, I do feel a bit left out because of my disabilities and location [regional Victoria].”

– Respondent 1, student consultation

As such, RMIT has committed to embed inclusive teaching frameworks, like ‘Universal Design for learning’, across curriculum, pedagogy and assessment to minimise the requirement for individual adjustments. This commitment is embedded in the next *Education Plan* and encompasses improvements to facilities and digital platforms and tools. Simultaneously, RMIT continues to take action to improve resourcing, systems and processes, and capability development for the implementation of individual adjustments. These actions are reflected in item 22 of the ‘Further action’ plan.

Sub-barrier 4.4: Lack of workplace flexibility

Some staff emphasised that reasonable adjustments, including flexible workplace arrangements, led to greater work productivity and physical, neurological and mental wellbeing:

“When being offered my role, I disclosed my chronic illness (epilepsy) and asked People (HR) to negotiate specific adjustments with my immediate manager – e.g. flexible work arrangements. To manage seizure triggers I need to work at least one day from home... My flexible work arrangements were accommodated, and I had a very positive experience with this overall.”

– Respondent 7, part-time professional staff member, non-people leader

Some staff, however, reported difficult interactions with colleagues who either did not understand or were unwilling to accommodate needs for reasonable adjustments, including workplace flexibility:

“I suffer from mostly invisible issues—physical disability, PTSD, anxiety and, recently, Long COVID. I felt my work colleagues did not believe me and rolled their eyes when I spoke about agreed ‘on campus days’ with my doctor and manager. I feel like there were double standards [about] flexibility.”

– Respondent 8, full-time professional staff, non-people leader

These experiences highlight that, while flexible working practices post-COVID have improved accessibility for staff who identified as living with disability, there continues to be a need to educate managers and staff about the fact that flexible working arrangements are a form of reasonable workplace adjustments for people with disability. Items 1, 18, 23 and 25 in the ‘Further action’ plan, particularly the ‘Hybrid work project’ that is ongoing, will go some way toward addressing this.

Further action

RMIT identified key barriers to accessibility for staff who identified as living with disability and neurodiversity, focusing on the built environment, digital tools and systems, experiences of exclusion and a lack of workplace flexibility.

To address these barriers, RMIT implemented various initiatives under its *Accessibility Action Plan*, *Athena Swan Bronze Action Plan* and in response to recommendations from the Australian Disability Network. Campus accessibility improvements were made, including infrastructure upgrades and the development of inclusive design standards. We delivered staff capability programs, engaging nearly 3,000 participants in training on inclusion, diversity, equity and access. Awareness campaigns and changes under the Disability Confident Recruiter program also aimed to foster a more inclusive culture.

Outcomes show mixed progress. Workplace adjustments have increased, but accessibility in physical environments remains a challenge, particularly for neurodiverse staff and students. Some staff reported positive experiences with accommodations, while others highlighted ongoing barriers, including sensory overload in open plan offices and exclusion from in-person meetings. Moving forward, RMIT aims to further strengthen accessibility efforts, including improving the built environment, access to assistive technologies and inclusive communication, to ensure equitable opportunities for all staff and students.

Ref	Rationale/ Evidence	Actions & Outputs	Timeframe (start & end)	Person/Group responsible for implementing action	Senior Leader accountable for action delivery	Desired Outcomes/ Targets/ Success Indicators
Built environment						
1	Staff noted a need for dedicated spaces for staff who identified as living with disability and neurodiversity:	Complete hybrid work project to understand peoples' needs/how they use office space. ¹	Sept 2025-Sept 2026	People and Culture	Vice President, People and Culture	Hybrid work meets the needs of the University, as well as staff. Staff understand that hybrid work is an example of reasonable workplace adjustments.
2	“Having a dedicated space where... staff can have 'floor time' to stretch, lie down and sit on the floor during short breaks would be great.” It was also noted that open plan offices can lead to sensory overload and reduced productivity:	Partner with Property Services to assess and implement property and facility-related individual workplace adjustments, such as a low sensory environment and the private use of "focus rooms" (beyond meetings)	Ongoing – case by case basis	IDEA team	Vice President, People and Culture	Feedback from staff reflects that the built environment needs of people living with disability and neurodiversity are being met.
3	“Years ago, RMIT moved to open plan office spaces. As someone with ASD, ADHD and dyslexia, I find these spaces virtually impossible to be productive in...”	Inclusive design in onboarding—including identifying workplace adjustments requirements during recruitment process or when a new staff member is appointed	Q4 2025 - ongoing	Talent Acquisition	Vice President, People and Culture	Workplace adjustments are identified and arranged early.
4	These experiences demonstrate the need for further efforts with respect to accessibility of the built environment, particularly in response to the needs of neurodiverse staff.	Action recommendations from the Accessibility Audit 2024—and create a dashboard tool that prioritises recommendations	October 2025	Property Services	ED, Property Services Group	Dashboard tool created and utilised to support the road to a more accessible and inclusive campus
5		Complete a review/gap analysis of sensory-friendly spaces across campuses	Sept 2025-Jan 2026	Property Services	ED, Property Services Group	IDEA Audit completed as part of PAW 2024. Gap analysis to inform PAW IDEA prioritisation for 2026 by Q1 2026.
6		Make high level Property Plan available publicly so staff and students can see work being planned and provide feedback	Jan 2026-Dec 2026	Property Services	ED, Property Services Group	Published Living Master Plan by Q2 2026. Prioritisation of IDEA Program for Property Annual Works including stakeholder feedback by Q1 2026. Delivery of spaces to support the RMIT community as prioritised by

¹While we have included this as an action in this action plan, we acknowledge that, if a flexible work arrangement is sought by a person with a disability, this request should be managed through a reasonable adjustment process. A reasonable adjustment is about removing barriers for people with disability (providing assistive technology, adjustment to lighting, equipment or modification for physical accessibility, changes to instructions, etc). Flexible/hybrid work can be changes to work hours, where someone works, or the location.

						PSG aligned with audit risks and stakeholder engagement by end 2026.
Digital tools and systems						
7	With respect to digital accessibility, the Staff Pulse Survey found that experiences of digital enablement had worsened for both staff with and without disability—there was no change in the ‘gap’ between cohorts (16 percentage points). Additionally, staff who identified as living with disability have noted that they have had difficulties getting the assistance they needed with technology in a timely way.	Introduce Digital Accessibility Self Service training on Workday	September 2025 – Ongoing	Digital Accessibility	Director, Digital and Experience	Outcome: staff create accessible digital documents and resources. Target: 100 staff per year complete the training (based on numbers from our current synchronous offering) Success indicators: reducing costs of accessibility remediation. Rise in staff confidence and awareness of accessibility
8		Improvements to all available training to ensure accessible learning	Mid-2026 – December 2027 (then ongoing)	Employee Experience and Capability	Vice President, People and Culture	Post-training evaluation shows satisfaction with accessibility improvements.
9		ITS to partner with IDEA team to enhance communications about/access to digital tools	Working Group commenced May 2025 and will continue into 2026	ITS	Interim, Executive Director, Technology	Consistent, maintainable sources for staff and students to find out about digital tools.
10		Identify needs at time-of-appointment and pre-approve assistive technology	Ongoing – case by case basis	HR Operations	Vice President, People and Culture	Ensure individuals receive timely and appropriate assistive technology by identifying needs during appointments and pre-approving solutions to avoid delays.
11		Deliver Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Podcast	May 2025 – September 2025	Digital Accessibility	Director, Digital and Experience	Outcome: delivering practical podcast that breaks Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into manageable, meaningful strategies for more inclusive teaching. Target: 30% of STEM educators access the resource within the first year. Success indicators: reduced number of ELPs
12		Roll out a greater suite of accessibility-focussed hardware from Get IT.	October 2025 – ongoing	ITS	Interim, Executive Director, Technology	All staff have access to enterprise-licenced assistive technologies.
13		Review availability of timely support for assistive technology users	Working Group commenced May 2025 and will continue into 2026	ITS	Interim, Executive Director, Technology	Staff provided with timely assistance, without the need to disclose why they use the tech.

14		Make support and training materials available for Dragon (and potentially other tools, such as AI)	Completed July 2025	ITS	Interim, Executive Director, Technology	Tailored support materials for Dragon, NVDA and Microsoft's AI tools are available through dedicated SharePoint sites.
15		Provisioning AI tools for those with accessibility needs, including pursuing outcomes of Copilot trial	Completed August 2025	ITS	Interim, Executive Director, Technology	Teams Premium and the paid version of MS Copilot are available to those with accessibility requirements.

Inclusion

16	In terms of the representation of people with disability, data show that RMIT currently employs 285 staff who identify as having a disability. This is a relatively small proportion of the just over 12,000 staff RMIT employs, globally. It is clear this is an under-reporting of the number of staff who identified as living with disability—this data is self-reported, either at recruitment or through our workforce management system Workday. Further efforts are needed to improve this dataset to ensure confidence in our disability data. In terms of staff experiences of inclusion, since 2019, agreement with the statement 'People from all backgrounds have equitable opportunities to succeed at RMIT' declined slightly for staff who identified as living with disability to 58% (-4 percentage points), but stayed relatively stable at 78% for staff without disability (+1 percentage point). Some staff reported a lack of inclusive communication, especially from their managers.	Build capability of leaders to support the wellbeing of staff living with disability and/or neurodivergence by embedding this in leader programs, as relevant	Q2 2026 - ongoing	Employee Experience and Capability	Vice President, People and Culture	Measurement: Staff engagement feedback results in an improvement in wellbeing year on year.
17		Communications to partner with People and Culture to better profile diverse employees, including those with disability and/or neurodivergence	Q2 2026 - ongoing	Communications	ED, Communications	Greater inclusion in communications of employees living with disability and/or neurodivergence
18		Continuous improvement in workplace adjustment process to create a better user experience for staff and supervising managers	Ongoing	IDEA People team	Vice President, People and Culture	Feedback from staff requesting adjustments and Staff Survey items on wellbeing show improvement, year-on-year
19		Communications to partner with People and Culture to continue/amplify communications campaign to encourage personal information updating in Workday	Ongoing	IDEA People team	Vice President, People and Culture	Baseline to be taken on current completion of personal information in 2025 and improvement target to be set in 2026.
20		Undertake accessibility testing of RMIT websites with students who identified as living with disability	July – Dec 2025	Digital Accessibility	Director, Digital and Experience	Outcome: deliver truly accessible services to students accessing the RMIT website. Target: 12 students who identified as living with disability as usability testers Metric: higher customer satisfaction from everyone accessing RMIT services online
21		Set up a "workplace challenges register" for members to share case studies and also "upvote" them, so these aspects can be fed back to the University.	Ongoing	Disability and Neurodiversity Staff Network	Vice President, People and Culture	Workplace challenges identified and responded to in a timely way.
22		Improve the provision of individual adjustments and systemic inclusion for students with disability, by implementing annual workplans developed under the <i>IDEA Framework</i> and the	Ongoing	Student Equity	VC Education and Executive Director, Students	Continued improvement in key metrics (student access, success, completion, evaluations in surveys, graduate outcomes).

		<i>Education Plan</i> (as set out in the <i>IDEA Annual Workplan</i> and <i>Universal Design for Learning Action Plan</i>).				
Flexibility						
23	Some staff emphasised that flexible workplace arrangements, or reasonable adjustments, led to greater work productivity and physical, neurological and mental wellbeing. Some staff also reported difficult interactions with colleagues who either did not understand or were unwilling to accommodate needs for workplace flexibility, or reasonable adjustments.	Hybrid work project to consider and incorporate diverse needs, ensuring lived experience of disability and neurodiversity is a key consideration and consultation point.	Sept 2025 – Sept 2026	People and Culture	Vice President, People and Culture	Less than 3% reduction in satisfaction with hybrid working arrangements amongst staff who identify as having disability, or are neurodivergent in Staff Survey 2027
24		Academic workload project—looking at how to address academic workload issues—to include in scope the experiences of employees living with disability and/or neurodivergence	Q1 2026 – Q2 2027	Employee Experience and Capability	Vice President, People and Culture	Reduction of staff who identified as living with disability and/or neurodivergence who answer always or often to the Staff Survey item: 'In your work area over the past 12 months, how frequently have you witnessed or experienced excessive workload demands, where allocated workloads exceed available time and/or resources?' (2027 measure)
25		Consider feasibility of an 'all roles flex' approach at RMIT	Q3 2026 –	Employee Experience and Capability	Vice President, People and Culture	Recommendations submitted to University Executive Council/PWR for consideration.