

# Supporting Early Career Research for Women in Academia

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# Supporting early career research

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Women's research careers are slower to develop than their male counterparts

Women are under-represented in doctoral degree completions and take longer to get their degrees



# Supporting early career research

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A number of Australian universities over the past 10 years have put into place professional development research initiatives which are in support of women and are often part of an equity agenda.



# Supporting early career research

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## Curtin University of Technology

- Western Australia's largest university
- 40,000 students (17,000 are international offshore and onshore)
- Has over 2000 research students
- 42% of academic staff are women

# Supporting early career research

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Curtin has 5 research foci

1. Resources and Energy
2. Health, Ageing and Wellbeing
3. ICT and Emerging Technologies
4. Sustainable Communities
5. Growth and Prosperity





# Supporting early career research

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- Curtin's research vision
- *"To establish productive partnerships that will facilitate high impact research that will respond to real world needs"*



# Supporting early career research

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- Curtin's nearest neighbours are the countries of Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia.
- Perth is closer to Singapore than Sydney (a four/half hour plane journey!)



# Supporting early career research

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## Barriers to women's advancement with research

- Interrupted and fragmented employment
- Patriarchal and gendered employment systems
- High teaching loads, heavy student contact and administration (academic housekeeping)



# Women and Research Program

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ATN-WEXDEV is a cross-institutional collaborative program for senior women within the Australian Technology Network group of universities since 1996

- ATN-WEXDEV aims to advance the status of academic and professional women who are still under-represented at senior levels within their universities



# Women and Research Program

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- Curtin has 2 funding schemes for academic staff which assume some prior research experience
  1. Those who have completed their PhDs in the past 5 years
  2. Mid career researchers who have never been first investigator on an Australian competitive grants proposal



# Women and Research Program

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- Recognition by the PVC Research and Development that there are *constraints associated with both external and internal factors*. The latter, can be changed with appropriate support and professional development opportunities



# Women and Research Program

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Commenced in 2000 with a small grant of  
A\$ 15,000 from ORD

## *Aims of Program*

- To provide seeding grants
- To provide workshops on research
- To identify network of supportive colleagues
- To profile other women researchers
- To raise the research profile of women



## Workshops in 2007

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- Research at Curtin – what are the challenges (PVC presentation)
- The ATN-WEXDEV research leaders' experience
- Starting the doctoral journey
- Creating a research culture within a School/Department



## 2006/7 Seeding grants

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- Over the course of the program up to 8 grants have been awarded each year (six rounds so far) – very small amounts of around A\$1000
- Money can be used for small scale pilot program, buy out of teaching to write papers to be submitted to refereed journal



# Evaluation

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- A report is provided to ORD annually
- Seeding grant applicants have to give a mid year presentation on their progress and an end of year report on outcomes relating to further research activities and promotion



# Feedback

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- *"The seeding grant has benefited me by allowing me to evaluate my current work patterns and priorities within the context of the expectations of the role of an academic, and to establish writing as part of my academic output"*



# WIR Program Outcomes

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Developing research profile and beginning to create research teams

- *"I have moved from being a sole researcher to having a post doctoral researcher, 2 PhD students and one honours' student in this field to supervise"* (biomedical science)



# WIR Program Outcomes

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## Developing collegial research networks

- *"Aspects of this work will be used in a collaborative project involving staff of Princess Margaret Hospital and the Institute for Child Health Research, we are currently awaiting the outcomes of an application for funding"*



# WIR Program Outcomes

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- Awareness raising of research issues within the sector (RQF)
- Profiling successful women researchers to act as role models and mentors
- To raise research profile of women  
*(I have received other Curtin grants and it is possible that the WIR grant helped in terms of track record)*



# WIR Program Outcomes

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- Increase in number of conference presentations
  - Increase in number of research proposals
- “the seeding project has informed an Australian Research Council discovery grant submission – unsuccessful in the first instance, it is currently being reworked for submission as part of a larger project for 2008”*



# WIR Program Outcomes

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- Greater success in academic promotions
- Success in achieving higher position

*One of the most successful seeding grant applicants has acquired additional funding of A\$285,000 with the minerals resources sector.*



# International Research Conference

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- ATN WEXDEV initiative held at Curtin in 2003
- Opportunity for many staff to prepare abstracts/papers and present at a conference for the first time
- Outcome: refereed conference proceedings



# Institutional Impact

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## Organizational learning:

- Further research workshops for all staff
- Research Leaders' Conference 2004
- Additional workshops – “Developing a research career” in 2005/6



## In conclusion:

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At a time when universities in Australia are suffering from reduced government funding and declining student numbers, organizational initiatives such as the WIR program which is a collaboration between a core business area (ORD) and a staff development unit, has demonstrated that a minimally funded initiative can be successful in supporting women to achieve research outcomes.