

Report on GEAR Forums - August 2022

GEAR Forums provide an opportunity for the GEAR team to update women in the JCU community on JCU's actions towards gender equity, and to provide a space where women are welcome to raise and discuss equity issues that are important to them, and share their views and experiences. Forums are scheduled quarterly during 2022. GEAR Forums are confidential, with the GEAR Coordinators producing a de-identified report that summarises the kinds of issues discussed across the Forums. GEAR Forum reports are used to inform the ongoing work of JCU in achieving gender equity.

On the 28th July and 2nd August 2022, approximately 40 JCU women joined two GEAR Forums. Each forum began with a discussion of the next steps in the SAGE Athena Swan process, the SAGE Cygnet awards, and summarised the key findings of the research that was conducted in late 2017, and what has been found in GEAR Forums over 2021-2022. There was then space for open discussion to talk through whatever issues women wanted to raise. Below we give a brief summary of the discussion at the Forum.

Update to GEAR Forum from Coordinators

We outlined the SAGE Cygnet process, which is the next step for institutions seeking to progress to a SAGE Athena Swan Silver award. Institutions must have five successful Cygnet awards in order to progress to a Silver application, and for JCU the Silver application is due in March 2028.

Each SAGE Cygnet award identifies a key barrier to recruitment, retention, or progression of women staff in the institution. They must be evidence based, report and reflect on work done thus far to address that key barrier, and identify further actions needed to remove or reduce that barrier. Each Cygnet award is focused on a single barrier but will have multiple causes and proposed actions. The Cygnet process is a chance to reflect on what has been done so far, bring in actions undertaken outside of the formal GEAR process, and consider further work to be done.

A key part of the work to decide on key barriers for JCU's Cygnet applications is reviewing the research that has been done thus far. We reviewed the qualitative data analysis that was undertaken in 2017, based on open-ended, anonymous questionnaires open to all staff; nine focus groups with women staff; and nine individual interviews with staff in senior roles. At that time, the following key themes were identified, and they have all recurred as regular topics of discussion in the GEAR Forums during 2021-2022.

- Recruitment
- Induction
- Academic promotion
- Career progression
- Flexible work and career breaks
- Organisation and culture
- Meetings and committees
- Visibility of role models
- Leadership
- Retention (not identified explicitly in 2017, but intertwined with previous themes and explicitly discussed in GEAR Forums).

Further detail on these themes will be provided to the University Executive later this year for decision-making about JCU's approach to the Cygnet applications.

Forum Discussion Summary

Recruitment

- Women commented that a focus on transparency is of utmost importance.
- A woman reported seeing this statement on recruitment advertisement as an example of best practice: "Don't meet every single requirement? Studies have shown that women and people of color are less likely to apply to jobs unless they meet every single qualification. At (firm name) we are dedicated to building a diverse, inclusive and authentic workplace, so if you're excited about this role but your past experience doesn't align perfectly with every qualification in the job description, we encourage you to apply anyways. You may be just the right candidate for this or other roles."

Promotion

- Women identified that the promotion form is very onerous. It is not clear for anyone with non-traditional career trajectories how the requirements of the application form can be best addressed.
- A part-time woman was actively discouraged from applying from promotion until she had resumed full-time work, with the advice being it would be too complicated to demonstrate achievement, and for assessment to be made, in a part-time promotion application. Part time staff also have less available time to actually prepare promotion applications.
 - It was recommended that a specific group be established for providing support and mentorship to part-time women seeking promotion, and that additional training be provided to Managers, and Promotion Panel members, on assessing ROPE for performance related to aspects other than publications.
- Women noted individual Deans can have a major impact on the promotion process, and this can create blocks for women, where advocacy is needed.
- Women considered it important that panels, Deans and DVCs are familiar with the disciplinary norms of the applicant's field in order to judge what are reasonable expectations in publication and other outputs within that field.
- Active consideration of age-bias where women may be reaching career milestones at an older age than men, during to career breaks for time with children, or working in fields where it is common for women to work as practitioners prior to joining academia.

Institutional culture and leadership

- Helpful if managers and leaders consider hosting events and team building opportunities at times and in ways that ensure participation by diverse staff groups, including normalizing day-time events which recognise the value of networking opportunities.
- Women were interested to know how the Professional Services Review team were considering gender equity as part of the change work currently underway.
- Women were interested to know if explicit gender equity initiatives had led to any measurable polarization at JCU.
- Women asked whether men could more visibly advocate for practices and attitudes that benefit women (and men), for example, make clear when they are taking leave if it is for school holidays, or caring responsibilities, to normalize this as something that is expected and not "women's work". This would lead to men being 'role models' not for *gender equity* which men may tune out of as not-applicable to them, but for practices that make a difference to everyone broadly.
- Women observed that appearances are still being policed in gendered and racialized ways, with feedback being provided to women that their jewelry or natural hair is unprofessional, distracting, or inappropriate.

- Women noted that in some contexts/work settings, the use of informal language, such as the use of nicknames, or men addressing each other as 'mate', can shift the workplace from a more professional space towards creating in-and-out groups, in ways that do not recognise that women often rely on norms around professional interactions as key to being included as equal participants.
- A woman recommended the UA Women sponsorship document (that addresses systems of influence by making them visible and equitable) as an excellent resource
<https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/UAEW-Sponsorship-Guide.pdf>

Flexible work practices

- A woman suggested that wherever possible roles could be advertised to be filled on any Australian Tropical Campus without forcing location to be either Townsville or Cairns, this enables P&T women, in particular, more opportunity to apply for higher positions.

Intersectionality

- Women were interested in understanding how the experiences of women of colour, and the experiences of HDR candidates, were captured within qualitative and quantitative equity data collection.

ROPE – Relative Opportunity and Performance Evidence

- Women noted the difficulty in ROPE assessment on activity other than research publications, and its limitation, as an individual level assessment, to impact on structural bias that affects women's career trajectory across a range of indicators and stages.

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