

Report on GEAR Forums – June 2021

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 2021. 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 24th and 29th June, approximately 50 JCU women joined two GEAR Forums. Each Forum began with a brief update on the actions currently in progress, and then broke up into smaller breakout groups 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

The Coordinators gave a presentation providing responses to a number of issues that were raised at the previous Forum in April. These were grouped into the priority areas as identified in JCU's Gender Equity Action Plan.

Recruitment

- Procedures have been implemented where all applicants are notified about the outcome of their applications. This was in response to some women reporting that even with internal applications, they did not receive a notification.
- The Recruitment, Selection & Appointment Policy is due for revision, and feedback from the April Forum will be considered in that process. Feedback included the consideration of performance relative to opportunity (ROPE) in recruitment, and transparency around hiring decisions with regard to flexible, remote, and/or part-time work.
- The checklist for selection panels has been updated to include a prompt to consider gender balance of shortlists.

Retention

- Communications with JCU's Senior Management Group have included the importance of role modelling and clear communication about gender equity actions, especially from men in leadership, that are happening in local areas and across the University.
- In response to issues raised in April about timetabling, especially of online classes, communications with the Deans, DVCs, and Provost have highlighted the perception of an emerging culture of constant availability.
- HR are working through a cost/benefit analysis of partner leave in order to support men to take on caring responsibilities in their families.

Career Progression & Promotion

- There was an Academic Promotion success rate of 92% for women in the recent round. Congratulations to those women who were promoted.
- In the next round of academic promotions, the form will collect less data about attendance at training workshops. Further, there will be more information on the website about how the promotion panel members are trained, and how their deliberations proceed.
- Communications with the Senior Management Group have focused on career development pathways for professional & technical staff, and the importance of proactively considering skills development for staff.

Governance & Implementation

- The GEAR Coordinators have developed a Register to keep track of specific feedback we receive from the Forums and in other formats, and how it has been communicated to relevant managers.

Forum Discussion Summary

Each Forum was divided into two break-out groups to allow for smaller group discussions. Several topics were raised in multiple sessions, and others were more specific.

Leadership

- Men in senior leadership were encouraged to be more visible in gender equity work.
- Women sought more transparency in the process of appointing Associate Dean and Academic Head roles. Some of these leadership positions are seen to hold considerable influence and access to information, and women suggested monitoring data of the gender balance of each type of position (for example, ADR, ADLT).
- Women asked for assistance in encouraging managers to enable their participation in GEAR Forums. This might include avoiding scheduling important meetings at the same time as GEAR Forums, and releasing staff from normal duties to attend.
- Women told the Forums that some parts of the University have committees dedicated to progressing gender equity locally, including CBLG and the ARC CoE Coral Reef Studies.

Recruitment, Induction & Exit

- When hiring entry level academics, attention should be given to ensuring there are no invisible barriers for women, particularly those entering academia from clinical and/or professional backgrounds.
- Women who viewed the films *The Bystander Moment* and *Picture a Scientist* told us they were excellent films for generating discussion and promoting reflection.
- Women reported that induction processes could be more welcoming, which would support retention. Specific suggestions included streamlined information; mentors for new staff; face-to-face induction sessions. When new staff begin, leaders should consider how they will announce their role to the group to avoid assumptions based on stereotypes and gender bias that women are in junior roles.
- The importance of exit interviews was raised as a mechanism to uncover patterns in why women are leaving the University.

Career Progression & Promotion

- Women asked for clarity in how ROPE (relative to opportunity performance expectation) is practically assessed. This was especially important in light of COVID-19 and the increased caring and teaching responsibilities that many women experienced.
- There was discussion about the importance of contribution to University service in promotion applications. Some women asked whether certain kinds of committees or roles were valued more highly than others. Other women shared their experience that it is more important to demonstrate your contribution to the committee or role.

Retention

- Women again raised concerns about application of the remote and flexible working policies. Some worry they will be seen as less committed to the institution. Others reported unintended consequences of working remotely. In some instances the expectations of 'making an appearance' are inflexible.
- Open-plan workspaces were viewed by many women as detrimental to their productivity and performance. Women reported a lack of privacy in such spaces, which impacts on their ability to participate in forums like the GEAR Forum. Privacy was also an issue for returning parents who need to leave their workspace to express or breastfeed.
 - Open-plan workspaces were particularly raised as an issue for neuro-diverse staff, for example those with sensory processing issues.
- Women who work in areas where they are underrepresented noted their increased workload as the "woman representative" on a number of committees.

Safety, Bullying, and Harassment

- There was feedback about the procedures for reporting bullying; women are concerned about the risk of retaliation and thus are reluctant to follow formal processes.
- Discussion of HDR student experiences of sexual harassment and gender discrimination was raised, with concerns about how these complaints are handled.
- Women asked to be included in decision-making about design issues like lighting, access to parking, and security, particularly when buildings are being planned or refurbished.

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