

## Report on GEAR Forums - June 2022

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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 31<sup>st</sup> May and 2<sup>nd</sup> June, approximately 40 JCU women joined two GEAR Forums. Each Forum began with a brief update on the actions currently in progress, and then shifted to 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 summarised the first GEAR team meeting for 2022, including updates from the Action Plan:

- A new staff Learning Hub has been launched which will assist in training and development as well as data actions.
- In CSE, 56% of continuing appointments since 2019 have been women. Equity in fixed-term positions is more stubborn due to things like direct appointments of research staff.
- A Diversity & Inclusion Group has been formed in CSE.
- All parenting rooms on both main JCUA campuses are now accessible by swiping staff cards.

### Forum Discussion Summary

#### *Workforce Planning*

- There was discussion of issues around staff taking long periods of leave (ie Long Service Leave, Parental Leave) and backfilling arrangements, with inconsistencies in backfilling practices identified across the institution.
  - A common experience for women across the university is feeling like it is the individual's responsibility to manage their workload during their absence, for example by finding staff to replace them for certain tasks.
  - Women also suggested that in the absence of appropriate backfilling, it is often other women who pick up the invisible work that must be done in colleagues' absence.
- Where job opportunities (including backfilling) are advertised, it can be difficult to attract staff – particularly when it involves relocating to northern Queensland for a fixed-term position.
  - Women asked about succession planning, including graduate programs and growing our own. This requires buy-in from managers who need to plan ahead, and appropriately resource training and career development.
- Workforce planning is important and needs to account for the lean-ness of the existing workforce – for example, that academic staff who need to take sick leave or carer's leave on teaching days have no relief teachers available, and this often reflects badly on the individual academic via Student Evaluations of Learning and Teaching.
  - Women noted that these are constant issues but exacerbated by COVID-19 and JCU needs a strategy for flexibility and contingency planning to support staff and ensure good student outcomes.
- In some parts of the university women noted shifts away from employing casual teaching staff as *tutors*, giving them roles instead as *support staff* who are not paid for preparation time. Given the prevalence of women in JCU's casual workforce, this likely has long-term impacts on women's careers.

- One woman noted a very positive experience for her colleague upon return from parental leave, with consideration given for her to work flexibly and with a reduced teaching load.

#### *Career Development*

- In one Forum, there was a lot of discussion about the new Staff Learning Hub. Women noted the importance of having training in one place, especially to support new staff.
- Women continued to note the challenges of career development, particularly for Professional & Technical staff. For many women, the only way to advance their careers is to leave the University.
  - Women noted the importance of regularly having discussions about career progression with their managers, which connects to the discussions about workforce planning and the need for manager buy-in.
- The importance of a range of skills was discussed, with women in some areas feeling undervalued for what their managers consider 'soft skills'. These skills are essential for the success of the university, and culture change is necessary to ensure that women are recognized for their contributions in areas like mentoring, communication, collaborative leadership, and so on.
  - Women seek transparency in recruitment processes, including internal appointments, to allow for open conversations about hiring decisions and what attributes were valued in recruitment decisions.
  - Women also noted that they and their women colleagues are still often asked to take minutes in meetings, when they are not attending in an admin support capacity.

#### *Men as Allies*

- Women again noted the low visibility of men taking the lead in gender equity conversations. Some women asked about best practice examples to engage men in workplace culture change – for example, the Male Champions of Change program.
  - Women in CSE did acknowledge the important work being done by men who are HDR candidates, but noted that they also operate from a less-privileged position as students.

#### **This report has been written by GEAR Co-ordinators:**

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With thanks to GEAR Team members Kristin Perry and Jane Addison for their assistance

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