

Report on GEAR Forums - March 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 3rd and 9th March, approximately 50 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 thanked outgoing GEAR Coordinator, Kristin Perry, for her support since 2020 when she took on the GEAR Coordinator role, and wished her the best as she returns to her substantive role as HR Manager, Talent.
- We reviewed JCU Workforce gender diversity data (fixed-term and ongoing positions):
 - In 2021, women made up 68.5% of P&T staff, and 53.3% of Academic staff.
 - Women are overrepresented amongst teaching-only academics (69%) and underrepresented amongst research-only academics (42.5%).
 - Women make up just 29.5% of Level E academics across JCUA – a proportion that varies considerably between Colleges.
- We summarized key 2021 actions, and priorities for the year ahead. Actions in 2022 focus on operationalizing work completed in 2021, using data to inform strategic decision-making, monitoring the impacts of policy changes, and developing a more systematic process of reviewing the reasons staff leave the University.

Forum Discussion Summary

Recruitment and Workforce Planning

- There was discussion about workforce planning in uncertain times, and the importance of proactive strategizing to mitigate potential constraints. Succession planning, forward thinking about vacancies, and strategic thinking about equity and diversity in hiring can all make a difference to the people affected by these decisions and their own ability to career-plan.
- Women noted that they want to be included in discussions around strategic recruitment goals. They indicated that decisions about resignations and recruitment are quite ad hoc and opportunistic, and are largely driven by budget constraints. Attention to staff profiles in particular work areas can impact on retention.
- Women noted the importance for students of having visible women role models, particularly women from diverse backgrounds.
- Women identified that is not sufficient to recruit people into 'women-specific' or 'Indigenous specific' roles; there also needs to be structured support for those staff to ensure retention. Clear communication is needed, to existing staff as well as to postgraduate students, about the rationale and process of strategic hiring.
- In clinical teaching, volunteer patients engaged for student assessments tend to be older, white Australians and this lack of diversity impacts on student experience.

Respectful Communications

- Women expressed concerns about abusive communication from academic staff towards professional & technical women, particularly with regards to research and promotions processes.
- Women discussed the ongoing practice of sexist references and “jokes” being included in some teaching material. The participants agreed that ongoing vigilance is required to address these issues and it will take some time to ensure this is no longer practiced – encouraging each other to be aware and rectify where they can.

Professor Lisa Kewley’s modelling

- Professor Lisa Kewley was contracted to model CSE workforce into the future. Women were pleased to see the work being done and taken seriously, with expert input. Women provided summaries and discussion of the Prof Lisa Kewley work presented to the College of Science and Engineering:
 - Prof Kewley spoke about the importance of having women in leadership, but ensuring that leaders have visible work-life balance.
 - Retention of women is a key issue, and one that requires complex approaches to improve.
 - Prof Kewley’s presentation included examples of everyday implicit bias, or outright prejudice, in communications and actions. Women at the Forum indicated that they have experienced many of the examples she gave here at JCU.
 - Women discussed the difficulty of addressing such experiences in the moment, and the importance of having difficult conversations, supporting each other, and/or raising issues later on with appropriate people.
 - Prof Kewley indicated her work unit addresses some gender inequity by, for example, engaging women from outside the work unit for committee work to ensure gender balance without over-burdening women within the unit.

Book launch: Professor Marcia Devlin’s Beating the Odds, A practical guide to navigating sexism in Australian universities.

- Participants were curious whether senior leaders attended the Marcia Devlin book launch however these numbers were not available at the time of the forums.
- Women discussed the strategy that Professor Devlin had identified men in the workplace employ of ‘being a bit bad at something’ that frees them up, also known as [weaponized incompetence](#). Women are frequently in the position of taking on more and more additional tasks – where this is seen to be demonstrating competence and productivity but leaves little space for creativity and innovation.
- The recording of the launch will be available shortly with a link being published on the GEAR website once available. The forum were encouraged to read the book as it is freely available to download from the Library’s website and the group may find it beneficial or interesting.

Progression

- There was some discussion about supporting women academics to make publications count, including more education and mentoring for women to determine the best places to publish their work which will align to the achievement of career goals.
- P&T women expressed concern about career progression where progression to higher levels requires “independence”, which is valued over collaboration. The discussion related to how to ensure women are not disadvantaged by displaying non-traditional styles of leadership which may be equally effective but not sufficiently recognized or value.

- Other women spoke of a lack of opportunities to act in leadership roles and gain the necessary institutional experience to progress their career. Women often have a variety of leadership skills and roles exercised outside of the workplace but these are not considered as sufficient evidence when appointing to academic university positions. They were keen to understand what pathways were available to women, other than Academic Promotion, to gain leadership experience or progression.

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