

Report on GEAR Forums for Women – October 2024

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. GEAR Forums are confidential, with the GEAR Coordinator producing a de-identified report that summarises the issues discussed across the Forums. GEAR Forum reports are used to inform the ongoing work of JCU in achieving gender equity.

On the 28 and 29 October 2024 approximately 18 JCU women joined a GEAR Forum hosted by GEAR Coordinator, Dr Ryl Harrison. The majority of the attendees were employed as ongoing (71%), and full-time (78%). Half the attendees were Academic, and half were Professional and Technical staff. 80% of attendees had attended a previous forum. The forums began with an update on gender equity activities that had occurred at JCU in 2024, and on the activities of the GEAR team. There was then space for open discussion on matters women wanted to raise. Below is a summary of the discussion at the Forum.

Update to the GEAR Forum from the GEAR team:

Information was shared on activity relating to the following topics:

- Academy:
 - Staff availability for Teaching process
- Human Resources:
 - Institutional Meeting Hours
 - Equity and Diversity Reference Group
 - WGEA – Pay gap and 6 Gender Equality Indicators
 - Wattle Women's Leadership Program
- Research Division:
 - Caring Support at Conferences & Women's Continuity grant scheme
- Reporting and Analytics:
 - Workforce gender breakdown in staff tab on Cognos
- GEAR team:
 - Has provided a gender analysis of policy, procedure and practice:
 - Transition to Retirement Policy and Procedure
 - Early Retirement Policy and Procedure
 - Market Loading Policy
 - Flextime Policy and Procedure
 - Special Studies Policy and Procedure
 - Parental Leave Procedure
 - Domestic & Family Violence Procedure
 - SAGE/Athena Swan (accreditation process) / Cygnets
 - 2024 Review of the value of JCU's 9-year membership.
 - Promotions – Academic Lead Professor Stewart Lockie – analysis in progress.
 - Culture & Leadership CSE. A/ Professor Karen Joyce – halted due to data access barriers.
 - Integrated Dynamic Planning
 - JCU objective of at least 50% women in Levels D/E by 2030.
 - Strategic Workshop Q1, 2025 relevant to embedded gender equity KPIs.

Summary of Forum Discussion:

Exit Interviews

Forum participants noted:

- the importance of exit interviews in identifying patterns of unacceptable behaviours in the workplace, and the importance of JCU engaging/acting on the information shared.
- a participant had difficulty finding information online on how to organise an Exit Interview.

- Information on Leaving JCU is available on the [Employee Lifecycle Hub](#) – including the opportunity to complete an [Exit Survey](#) and to request follow-up.
- There is a Service Now [Knowledge Base article](#), outlining process for requesting an exit Interview.
- the benefits of holding exit interviews after finishing specific roles (for example, after serving a term as Chair of a Group, or in an Associate Dean position) was discussed given women often have very different experiences in these roles. Interviews are useful to:
 - Provide debrief opportunities.
 - Ensure that experiences in a particular role can inform PDP discussions in supporting the woman's longer-term career trajectory.
 - Ensure that insights on how to improve the position/experience are garnered to the benefit of incoming candidates and other areas of the university, working as a feedback loop.

Workplace Supervision

- The Forum discussed issues related to Supervisors and the processes for addressing and monitoring unacceptable behaviours. The Forum also noted the [Staff Reporting and Complaints Portal](#), and discussed [Sexual Harassment processes](#).

Extended Leave

- The impact of extended leave on women's access to opportunities was noted. The ROPE process for academic women was highlighted, with women noting subtle processes can impact on women's experiences, including the feeling that women returning from leave can be seen to be less experienced than when they left to go on leave.

Change Processes

- Participants noted the disproportionate impact of change processes on women, noting women make up the majority of Professional and Technical staff. The four senior leadership positions impacted in the change process are currently held by women, with the current senior leadership group at JCU gender-balanced.

Promotions

- Women noted that committing to a Promotions process represents a significant commitment for women requiring resilience and self-belief, and that the decision-making process can still be a mystery and is subjective. The importance of high-quality mentoring was noted.

SAGE Athena SWAN / Integrated Dynamic Planning

- The group discussed the university's membership, noting the resource requirements of accreditation and alternatives. The need for embedded action within the University's Integrated Dynamic Planning process was recognised.

Women confidentially raising issues with GEAR

- Women discussed that it is possible to confidentially contact the GEAR Coordinator to have a matter brought to the GEAR team's attention confidentially/anonymously. The Forum also discussed the roles of the [Sexual Misconduct Officers](#), [Equity Contact Officers](#), and the [Staff Reporting and Complaints Portal](#).

Horacek's cartoon "The difference between being assertive and aggressive" was shared by a Forum participant.



This report has been prepared by GEAR Coordinator:

Ryl Harrison, PhD, Strategic Policy Adviser, Office of the Vice Chancellor.

E gear@jcu.edu.au

<https://www.jcu.edu.au/gender-equity-action-and-research>