

# WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY'S LGBTIQ CONSULTATION & EARLY BENCHMARKING REPORT

## Background

Western Sydney University is developing a 3 year whole-of-university LGBTI inclusion strategic plan, as part of the LGBTI Benchmarking and Accreditation Project. The project was approved by Executive Committee in March 2016. To ensure the plan responds to the current status quo of LGBTI inclusivity across the University we have collected information from several sources including:

- key stakeholder consultation;
- baseline benchmarking results measuring our performance as an LGBTI inclusive and equal opportunity workplace via the Australian Workplace Equality Index; and
- analysis of our performance in the LGBTI Uni Guide.

## Key Stakeholder Consultations

Equity and Diversity facilitated two group meetings with members of the Queer Collective to seek student views on our inclusivity practices. The following key issues arose:

- Transgender students described facing considerable difficulties including being harassed by other students in on-campus residential services and regularly feeling unsafe within the residences; the University processes and staff publicly using students' legal rather than preferred name and therefore publicly disclosing the person as transgender and causing distress; a lack of gender neutral toilet amenities (not also assigned as disabled toilets).
- The Queer Collective across the University has recently experienced substantial internal difficulties which seems to have seriously negated the group's capacity to engage and effectively represent LGBTI students. Each group asked for more and better connection with other University activities, processes, groups and networks. The group appears to need assistance to rebuild their structures and membership to better support and broadly represent students in any substantial way. The students demonstrated strong commitment to the University and the Queer Collective, and were especially articulate and constructive in their suggestions of future directions for the University.
- The students highlighted that they find it difficult to identify which staff are likely to be LGBTI aware and 'friendly' and explained they have experienced wide variance in staff's approaches to LGBTI inclusion. The group requested that the University consider mandatory LGBTI awareness training for staff.
- The Queer Collective members also observed that overall the University's pedagogy lacked inclusive curricula and materials reflecting LGBTI individuals, communities and/or issues. The members suggested this puts our graduates at a disadvantage by failing to prepare them for the increasing visibility and presence of 'out' LGBTI colleagues and clients in their future professional contexts.

The Director of Equity and Diversity also held consultations with key staff across the University to collect their views on our current performance and priority issues, representatives at the meeting included both Co-Convenors of the Ally Network, other Ally Network members, 'out' staff members, staff from crucial organisational functions within the University, and covered Professional and Academic staff including senior leaders. The following issues were identified by the party:

- A request that the University ensure that any benchmarking and accreditation be undertaken with a firm values-basis and commitment to effect measurable and structural improvement to lived experience for LGBTIQ students and staff;
- The importance of providing executive support where the University acts to progress a more visible position on LGBTIQ inclusion;
- Concerns about possible recent unwelcomed intrusions into the Queer Rooms and impact on students using this space.
- An ongoing need to communicate to students and staff the expectation to demonstrate respect and inclusion of LGBTIQ individuals.

- The need to provide career support to LGBTIQ staff because staff experience being 'out' professionally as a career disadvantage.
- A recommendation to consider ways the Ally Network could be more visible and strategic across the University.
- The growing need to improve awareness of transgender people, the issues they face at Western and broader, particular in relation to the need for more gender neutral toilets on campus.

## Australian Workplace Equity Index Benchmarking Results

- There is a 10% gap between WSU's baseline performance and the Higher Education sector average, and about 20% gap between WSU and the average performance of employers recognised by a bronze award.
- It is crucial to note that this is a **baseline measure** only. It captures only Western's performance in the 2015 calendar year, therefore pre-dating our significant progress in 2016. For example, our latest Mardi Gras participation, VC efforts to promote LGBTIQ inclusion, improvement in LGBTI Uni Guide results, and the Australian Ally Conference will only be reflected in the next submission (March 2017) and benchmarking results (July 2017).
- Western's strongest areas of performance are our:
  - community engagement through our teaching and research in issues affecting LGBTIQ communities,
  - significant contribution to academic knowledge in the area,
  - work of the Ally Network, and
  - inclusive Staff Agreements.
- The University's performance was lower in the areas including:
  - visible signals of LGBTIQ inclusion,
  - executive sponsorship of LGBTIQ activities and commitment,
  - LGBTIQ-related strategic planning, and
  - absence of LGBTIQ-related content in compulsory managers' training and/or generally across the staff development programs.
- We anticipate the additional efforts being made across the University in the 2016 calendar year will help Western to substantially gain on the sector average and those employers recognised for high results. However, it's important to recognise that whilst Western is making significant strides, so too is the overall performance and number of benchmarked employers. PID report a marked increase in the standards of LGBTIQ inclusion across all participants last year.
- Pride in Diversity are working closely with us to assist with our next AWEI submission, including a detailed analysis of Western's baseline performance and a set of recommendations of steps forward. Attachment A lists the key suggestions by PID and corresponding actions we've already made in the 2016 calendar year.
- In summary, PID suggest we develop an overall LGBTI strategic plan including targets, accountabilities and regular reporting mechanism and include in the plan a commitment to embed LGBTI inclusion into existing structures such as: policies, staff development programs, staff engagement monitoring, and talent tracking. It also recommends we generate new and additional strategic directions such as, to:
  - produce policy and guidelines for support to transitioning students/staff,
  - designate an Executive Sponsor/Champion for the LGBTI strategic plan;
  - hold a background briefing for executive/senior managers re LGBTI inclusion;
  - develop a communications plan that includes public and internal communication by VC; communication to staff and student about the strategy and expectation of LGBTI inclusion, and promotion of visible signs of LGBTI inclusion;
  - install more visible signals of LGBTI inclusion externally and internally;
  - expand the University's engagement with LGBTI community and community groups;

- support the Ally Network to develop their own strategic and activity plan, designate organisational responsibilities to key members, and allocate a budget, and
- mentor other organisations on LGBTI inclusion.
- Between January and July the University has already progressed some of this work, including:
  - LGBTI Strategic Plan in development
  - Communication Strategy in progress and increased communication already happening to students and via social media channels
  - Policy audit in progress to identify any gaps in current policy
  - New and expanded visible signalling instituted throughout the year including to date: larger Mardi Gras float, Rainbow flags on campus, IDAHOT Day Staff Competition, more Ally Network promotional materials.
  - VC has communicated across the year about LGBTI inclusion at Western, within the Higher Education sector, and across the broader community.
  - Inaugural Australian Ally Conference co-hosted by the University in June which progressed the objectives of mentoring other organisations, making a public stand on issues affecting LGBTI communities, and creating visible messaging of LGBTI inclusion.
  - Improvements to LGBTI Uni Guide results moving Western up from 2<sup>nd</sup> last position on league table to middle range on par with institutions similar to this University.

## LGBTI Uni Guide Benchmarking Analysis

- When the *LGBTI Uni Guide* was published in 2014 it measured all Australian universities against a 15 point criteria. It evaluated each institution's compliance with anti-discrimination legislation obligations, and the inclusion and safety for sexuality and gender diverse individuals. It assessed each University's performance based only on existing publicly available online information.
- At the time of publication the Guide showed Western Sydney University as one the lowest performing universities in NSW, indicating we met only 4/15 criteria. Subsequently the University has improved its results, we now meet 7/15 criteria and perform at par with other similar institutions. However, there is still work to be done.
- This benchmarking tool is relatively rudimentary and its methodology was controversial across the sector. However, it's a valuable indicator of areas to improve student engagement and safety plus a source of information for prospective LGBTIQ students choosing their university. Therefore it is important we continue to improve Western's published results in this publication.
- Western's Mental Health and Wellbeing Promotions Team recently conducted a student-led project through its Ambassador Program which considered our *LGBTI Uni Guide* performance. The report '*LGBTIQ+ Engagement Initiative*' made recommendations on how the University could improve a portion of its results and the lived experiences of sexuality and gender diverse students.
- Summarily, this initiative recommended that the University:
  - Increase student participation in Ally Network and Ally Training
  - Strengthen the connection and collaboration between the Ally Network and Queer Collective
  - Rename the Queer Rooms to 'Ally & Queer Room'
  - Develop a single resource (available online and in-print) which collates 'orientation' type of information for sexuality and gender diverse students about Queer-friendly services, facilities, activities, webpages, student groups, and relevant policy at Western plus details of community-based support services.
  - Revamp Western's other web-based information for LGBTI students to improve visibility, navigation to important information, links to external agencies, and to add 'news' items of current events, activities, etc.

- Furthermore, Western's results in *LGBTI Uni Guide* suggest these other issues also need consideration:
  - Inclusion, support and quality of service to transgender and intersex students.
  - Better clarity and visibility of process for consultation of LGBTIQ students
  - Provision of gender neutral toilet and sporting facilities on campus
  - Options, feasibility and value of collecting student data on the basis of sexuality and gender diversity
  - Promotion of existing support for LGBTIQ-relevant health needs on-campus

## Recommendations

1. Continue to develop a Strategic Plan that takes into account as many of the above issues as possible to address over the next 3 years across the whole University. The plan to include specific actions, timeframes, accountabilities, and an agreed regular reporting mechanism. Development of the plan to incorporate feedback and contribution directly from students, staff, the Ally Network, Queer Collective, and other key stakeholders. A sponsor from the Executive Committee to be appointed to oversee the progress of the strategic plan implementation.
2. Consider effective ways to embed LGBTIQ inclusion and issues into current policy, organisational development programs, staff promotional mechanisms, and student administrative processes.
3. Support the Ally Network to develop its own action plan setting out how it will continue to contribute to advancing LGBTIQ inclusion, issues, and the implementation of the above strategic plan. Within this plan address ways to ensure the sustainability of the network, build the Network's profile, strengthen student participation and links, and respond to above identified student and staff needs.
4. Identify ways to refresh and strengthen the University's Queer Collective to help better support those students already involved and extend the group's engagement to a broader segment of students, existing University activities and programs, and maximise the value of the support this group provides to students.
5. Scope options for improving the appeal, impact, and wider engagement of the current Queer Rooms.
6. Investigate current practice and opportunities for providing gender neutral toilets, change rooms, showers, and other facility options for students and staff across Western's campuses.
7. Continue to develop a Communications Plan that incorporates messaging to students, staff, external LGBTIQ communities, and broader community stakeholders. The plan should promote the University's commitment to and efforts to progress LGBTIQ inclusion, safety, and equal opportunity on campus, across the sector, regionally and in the wider community.
8. Establish an advisory group on transgender issues to help steer the University's development of a policy, guidelines, an awareness raising campaign, and staff development programs and resources to improve inclusion and service to transgender and intersex students and staff.
9. Undertake a curriculum mapping exercise to identify where the University's teaching practices are already LGBTIQ inclusive and ways to extend exemplar teaching across all areas of learning and teaching at Western.
10. Develop a Research Plan which articulates how the University will maximise the impact of our research to advance 'real life' improvements to LGBTIQ communities, and opportunities to forge mutually beneficial partnerships with LGBTIQ-related community organisations and other stakeholders through our research activity.