

WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY



EQUITY AND DIVERSITY WORKING PARTIES
Annual Progress & Impact Report
2023

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School Acronyms

SoM	School of Medicine
SoNM	School of Nursing the Midwifery
SoB	School of Business
SoEDBE	School of Engineering, Design and the Built Environment
SoCDMS	School of Computing, Data, Mathematics and Statistics
SoL	School of Law
SoHS	School of Health Sciences
SoP	School of Psychology
SoSS	School of Social Sciences
SoHCA	School of Humanities and Communication Arts
SoS	School of Science
SoE	School of Education
MARCs	MARCs Institute

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

With respect for Aboriginal cultural protocol and out of recognition that our campuses occupy traditional lands, Western Sydney University acknowledges the Darug, Eora, Dharawal and Wiradjuri peoples. We thank them for their support of our work in their lands.

Introduction

The Equity and Diversity Working Party (EDWP) initiative is a collaborative platform originally conceived by Equity and Diversity and the Western SAGE team, which has led to a widespread University Network, embedded across Schools, Institutes and Divisions. The EDWP Network continues to bridge the gap between strategy, policy and practice ensuring local implementation reflects the overall vision and objectives of the University. A key strength of the EDWP Network is its capacity to provide a conduit for receiving and disseminating information on emerging and/or local issues and in facilitating quick and responsive action when needed.

Western Sydney University was recently ranked number one in the world in the 2024 Times Higher Education Impact Rankings for the third year in a row. This includes being recognised as number one in the world for SDG 5 – Gender Equality for the second year in a row and 9th in the world for SDG 10 - Reduced Inequalities. The University has also been recognised as a WGEA Employer of Choice for over 20 years. As a sector leader in this space the work of the EDWPs continues to have a pivotal role in supporting the University in championing equity, diversity and inclusion across the institution. The EDWPs align directly with the University's overarching *Sustaining Success 2021-2026* Strategic Plan under Principle 2: Equity Goal 2: *As a globally recognised university of and for the Western Sydney region, we will set the benchmark for diversity, inclusiveness and equity.*

The work of the EDWPs also align with:

- Office of People Strategic Priorities, Priority 1: To build an inclusive community that reflects diversity of opinion, ideas, experience, and circumstances.
- Equity, Safety & Wellbeing Portfolio Plan: Embed inclusion and equity in policy, procedure and practice; lead collaborative partnerships to build inclusive practice across the University and the sector; identify opportunities and gaps in inclusion.
- Gender Equity Strategy and Action Plan 2021 – 2026.

The EDWP Network is also foundational to Western's recognition as an Athena Swan Bronze Institutional Award recipient, and in our endeavours to move towards Silver Award status.

The following report provides a range of examples outlining the key focus areas and activities of the EDWPs across 2023.

Year in Review

In 2023, 14 EDWPs were operational across Western - 12 within Schools, one within an Institute, and one representing the Divisions. Reporting EDWPs convened at least four times annually, often supplementing with additional informal meetings and online discussions via email and Microsoft Teams. The EDWP network engages over 90 members, using an active shared mailing list to facilitate additional pathways for collaboration and information exchange on events and priorities.

Equity and Diversity provided advisory and administrative support to the EDWPs with Western SAGE also providing additional advisory and project support throughout 2023, facilitating collaboration around emerging themes. Two EDWP Chairs meetings were held in June and October, co-hosted by Ms. Michelle Falconer (Director, Equity, Diversity & Wellbeing) and Assoc. Professor Chloe Taylor (SAGE Academic Lead), focusing on EDWP progress, emerging issues, and collaborative opportunities.

Membership within EDWPs underwent regular turnover due to staffing and/or organisational changes across 2023. Following disruptions to the EDWP initiative throughout 2021 and 2022, members were offered the opportunity to extend their term for an additional 12 months to enable continuity in the progress of activities.

EDWP Chair Reporting – 2023

EDWP activities, experiences and emerging trends are captured via a biannual 'Chair Reflections' survey and through deliberations within regular Chair meetings. These forums allow Chairs to report on the various challenges and opportunities experienced by each EDWP, and data collected is used to inform this Annual Report. The Annual Report is provided for the information of the Vice Chancellor's Gender Equity and Respectful Relationships Advisory Committee, Deans, Institute Directors, Divisional Vice Presidents and to the broader EDWP membership to ensure ongoing visibility and accountability for the Initiative.

As part of the Chair Reflections survey delivered in November 2023, participants were also invited to comment on specific challenges and barriers for their members. A total of eight responses were received for these questions from 14 Chairpersons. A summary of these responses is outlined below:

- Some EDWPs indicated difficulty in attracting new members, but the majority noted they felt their membership effectively represented staff within their local area.
- Challenges noted by EDWP Chairpersons included ensuring equal engagement from members (often related to member capacity), consistent visibility of EDWP activities within the School Executive and the broader School, Division or Institute context, and lack of access to funding sources to support ongoing activities.
- The majority of respondents felt that workload allocation currently outlined for Academic members within the Terms of Reference (ranging from 1% to 3% depending on EDWP role) was not adequate for the work involved, with five suggesting a further increase of 1-3% in workload allocation and two recommending more than a 4% increase. Professional staff workload management is individually negotiated with line managers.

Emerging EDWP Themes Across 2023

In reviewing responses to the Chair Reflections survey and from discussions at EDWP Chair meeting, the following themes have been identified across the Network:

Supporting Career Progression for Academic & Professional Staff

Several EDWPs again reported a focus on academic and professional staff career development and progression. This has been a trending theme of the EDWP Network since its inception.

EDWP's across the network highlighted a focus on Professional and Academic Staff mentoring to support career development and/or promotion opportunities, discussed barriers to staff equity in employment and highlighted the impact of power imbalances for staff engaged via precarious forms of employment.

Of significant note the "Spring Forward" program, first piloted by the SoNM three years ago, continues to expand and was delivered in multiple Schools and Institutes in 2023 including SoSS, SoHCA, SoNM, SoP, SoE, SoHS and MARCS. There is intention that delivery of the Spring Forward program be expanded to all School-based EDWPs in 2024. This program is designed to reduce intimidation and dispel misconceptions about the promotions process, and to offer staff interested in applying for Academic Promotion an opportunity to ask targeted questions about promotions in a safe, localised context. This program is supported by the Western SAGE team and Academic Promotions Coordinator.

Other individual EDWP examples include:

- SoSc EDWP reported providing promotions workshops, investigating job shadowing opportunities, holding mock interviews and assisting staff to plan for promotion and where to seek support.
- SoB EDWP highlighted championing measures to support colleagues from disparate career backgrounds in promotion and competitive grant applications.
- MARCS Institute noted an increased focus on transparency in appointment processes within the Institute, highlighting the power imbalances that impact early career staff who are engaged in precarious employment.

Respectful Relationship Education and Awareness

In 2023 there was a persistent institutional and sector-wide focus on addressing sex-based harassment and discrimination, driven by legislative changes like the Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Legislation Amendment (Respect at Work) Act 2022. This also saw the introduction of a positive duty responsibility for employers in preventing workplace sexual harassment.

Across the University, EDWPs have taken proactive steps to raise awareness of the available support and reporting avenues available to students and staff in this space. All EDWPs were mobilised through email communications to implement 'We Support You' campaign materials in their respective Schools and learning and teaching-focused capacities, which included an informational slide for display in all lectures and tutorials. Examples of other initiatives undertaken by individual EDWPs include:

- SoHCA EDWP introduced Classroom Safety and Respect materials to support casual staff, which were deployed across all course platforms and learning guides starting from Autumn 2023.
- SoEDBE EDWP conducted a workplace safety survey focused on women's safety.
- SoP EDWP promoted gender equity channels for reporting issues and fostering open dialogue amongst staff.
- SoM EDWP pursued initiatives and raised awareness to address issues of harassment during student placements.
- MARCS EDWP organized workshops on respectful relationships, developed a code of conduct, and raised awareness of informal grievance reporting systems for staff.

- SoB EDWP partnered with staff from School and Respectful Relationships team to develop a work-integrated learning (WIL) opportunity framed around respectful relationship principles for undergraduate students completing the Bachelor of Business (Sport Management).

Gender Equity and Diversity

Across 2023 the EDWP network continued to invest in initiatives to support gender equity and diversity for our students and staff. The design of the Network allowed for each EDWP to reflect on emerging research, particularly as relates to the Vice-Chancellor's Gender Equity Fund, and use their local networks and contexts to devise tailored initiatives. Individual EDWP activities included:

- SoHCA and SoSS EDWPs partnered to deliver a Higher Degree Research (HDR) Parents Morning Tea. This event aimed to raise awareness of the equity challenges faced by International HDR candidates who are parents. Much of this was initiated by findings of Gender Equity Fund report *Leaving no parent behind: International student and newly arrived academic staff parents negotiating migration, parenthood, study, and work in Australia* by Dr Sharlotte Tusasiirwe on the experiences of International student parents at Western. SoHCA also trialled a pilot funding scheme to assist with childcare costs for international student parents recognising this as one of the key pressure points for students.
- The SoHCA EDWP developed a discussion paper and recommendations modelled on the supplementary peer review process within in the SoSS as relates to Academic workload. This was submitted to the Dean and the School's Workplan Committee to consider developing appropriate compensatory research workload allocations for women staff returning from parental leave. This was in response to a staff member in SoHCA raising the issue with the EDWP.
- SoHCA staff raised an issue with the EDWP over the diversity and inclusion profile section of the University's all staff survey and its exclusion of LGBTQI+ staff. The EDWP Chair raised these issues at a subsequent VCGERRAC meeting and it was endorsed that future staff surveys should come through that Committee for review before being circulated.
- SoB EDWP continued its research and engagement initiatives designed to address period poverty in the context of higher education experiences.
- SoEDBE was actively working on increasing the profile of women within the School, given the traditional male-dominated discipline areas.
- MARCs implemented an Institute-wide Code of Conduct and removed the use of gendered titles on internal forms.
- SoNM EDWP focused on LBGTIQA+ inclusion and engagement within the School, with a particular focus on the need for SoNM staff to engage with issues related to LBGTIQA+ classroom safety, LBGTIQA+ health outcomes, and trans and gender diverse inclusion in clinical practice.

EDWP – Projects in Focus

EDWPs continue to drive innovative and important equity and diversity initiatives in their local areas. The table below highlights a selection of activities undertaken by EDWPs across 2023. It should be noted that this is not exhaustive, but focuses on those initiatives which have developed a process or framework with potential to be adapted across other EDWP contexts.

School of Law - Indigenising the Curriculum	Led by EDWP member Dr Souheir Edelbi the SoL undertook a project to indigenise the Contract Law subject curriculum across 2023. The comprehensive redesign and revitalisation allowed the embedding of Indigenous knowledges and agency into various aspects of learning and teaching, including lecture materials and authentic assessment design. The redesign aimed to de-colonise contract law curriculum by fostering deep learning and reflection on Indigenous contracting contexts. The curriculum prioritises Indigenous voices in case study readings and legal analysis. Feedback from non-Indigenous students indicated that these changes are not only welcome but necessary to create an inclusive and engaging learning environment where social and racial justice is given priority within the curriculum. Feedback from Indigenous students indicated that they feel included and well supported in Contracts.
School of Nursing and Midwifery – LGBTIQ Inclusion and Engagement	In 2023 the SoNM EDWP focused on LGBTIQ+ inclusion and engagement. In particular, the need for SoNM staff to engage with issues related to the LGBTIQ+ community, recognising they are the teachers of the next generation of nurses and midwives who will be caring for and supporting people from this community. The first activity was a Dean's Seminar about LGBTIQ+ inclusion in Nursing and Midwifery education and clinical care, held in collaboration with Ms Michelle Corbett from Equity and Diversity, speakers from Pride in Diversity and colleagues from the SoM and SoHS. Following this workshop the SoNM presented a workshop for staff on "Queering the Curriculum". Presenters included Assoc. Prof Laurretta Luck, Prof Brahm Marjadi, Assoc. Prof Lucy Nicolas, Ms Michelle Corbett and Dr Diana Jefferies. Feedback on the session was positive and another longer session was requested which included more time for discussion. The SoNM EDWP plan to continue and expand this project into 2024.
School of Humanities and Communication Arts - Classroom Safety and Respect	The SoHCA EDWP consulted various Gender Equity Fund reports regarding the experiences of casual staff in the classroom, especially during COVID and took up one of the recommendations in Dr Erika Smith's report <i>Precarity, Pandemic and Gender</i> to develop a Classroom Safety and Respect School statement for publication on vUWS sites and Learning Guides. This Statement was developed across 2022 and embedded in all course frameworks by Autumn 2023. In addition to the School Safety and Respect in the Classroom statement, a video message from the Dean and a set of scaffolded support materials for staff outlining how to support casual staff in the classroom and managing instances of harassment, abuse, or difficult behaviour were also provided to staff. The project and materials were subsequently presented to and shared for adaption with all EDWP Chairs.

EDWP – Planning for 2024

EDWPs continue to be an important mechanism for the University's recognition as an industry leader when addressing equity, diversity and inclusion across the institution. Using Chair survey responses, discussions held across the EDWP network, and discussions with Executive Officers within Equity and Diversity, the following focal points for future development have been identified:

Administration & Governance

- Investigate possible adjustments to workload implications of EDWP members across the network and resourcing gaps to help identify measures to mitigate member overload.
- Continue to align the EDWP network scope and Terms of Reference to better align with the changed format for the Vice Chancellor's Gender Equity and Respectful Relationships Committee.
- Undertake a full audit of EDWP membership and processes to ensure it aligns with the ToR and continues to be inclusive of the diversity of Academic and Professional staff perspectives.
- Continue to support EDWPs in implementing casual staff and student representation within their individual EDWPs, in alignment with recent discussions by select EDWP Chairs.

Research, Training and Supports

- Deliver an Inaugural EDWP Forum to upskill members and foster collaboration and network invigoration across all EDWP members.
- Consider opportunity for an expanded rollout of induction information for new members building on original introductory information provided on equity and diversity contexts by Equity and Diversity and Western SAGE and framed around induction materials recently developed by our Divisional EDWP.
- With oversight from the Office of the DVC Indigenous Leadership, support collaboration between EDWPs who have been actively working on Indigenous inclusion activities, and those who have expressed interest/identified a priority to upskill their EDWP in this space across 2024.
- Strengthen collaboration and partnerships across the network for training and research opportunities. For example, in the area of Indigenous inclusion and engagement, cultural diversity and LGBTIQ+ inclusion.