

# LGBTIQ Inclusion Plan

## Summary of Survey Results



RMIT is working on a whole-of-University plan to support and promote the inclusion of staff and students who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex or Queer/Questioning (LGBTIQ).

### RMIT's LGBTIQ Inclusion Plan

The Equity and Diversity Unit is leading the development of the Plan, which aims to promote RMIT as a place where:

- diverse sexualities and genders are recognised and welcomed
- staff and students are free to be themselves at work and study.

In September we invited staff and students to share their experiences and thoughts on how to make RMIT a better place for LGBTIQ staff and students. **Over 1,100** staff and students completed the anonymous survey, and the responses have now been compiled. This information has provided a detailed insight into the experiences of LGBTIQ staff and students at RMIT, and will guide the development of the Plan.

This document provides a brief summary of survey results, and highlights some key issues and themes identified by respondents. It will also offer an update on RMIT's progress so far, including some key events and developments for 2016.

### Why we need an Inclusion Plan

RMIT has a legal obligation to provide a study and work environment free from discrimination and harassment. *Ready for Life and Work: RMIT's Strategic Plan to 2020* outlines a commitment to 'valuing and growing our diversity' and creating 'inclusive cultural and social environments within and beyond the classroom'.

Survey responses reflected a range of perspectives on why RMIT should or should not focus its resources on a specific inclusion plan for LGBTIQ staff and students. A small number of respondents did not support the development of the Plan, for reasons ranging from personal and religious beliefs to a view that the University's current policies and processes are adequate.

While we recognise the great work that is already being done by RUSU and other areas within RMIT, we need to adopt a whole-of-University approach to LGBTIQ staff and student inclusion for the following reasons:

- There are significant mental health and other impacts of homophobic and transphobic attitudes and behaviour among young people, including depression, social exclusion, withdrawal from studies and other sporting and social events, and suicide
- Further, additional recent research has documented continuing homophobic attitudes and behaviour by young people, which means we cannot assume that students are more accepting of diversity
- There are numerous potential benefits in relation to recruitment, retention, innovation and productivity of staff and students in an environment that celebrates and welcomes diversity.

### Audience and response rates

The survey was sent via direct email to 9,375 RMIT staff members and 48,433 students.

- 463 responses were from RMIT staff members (**41 per cent** of total responses)
- 654 responses were from RMIT students (**59 per cent** of total responses)

### Response rates by campus

We received 967 responses from City campus (**87 per cent**) and 99 responses from Bundoora campus (**8 per cent**), with the remaining **5 per cent** of responses coming from the Brunswick, Vietnam and Point Cook campuses.

## Identification

- 489 respondents identified as LGBTIQ (**44 per cent**)
- 121 respondents identified as LGBTIQ ally (**11 per cent**)
- 380 respondents identified as heterosexual/opposite or other sex attracted (**34 per cent**)
- 117 preferred not to say (**10 per cent**)

\* 10 respondents did not answer

## Key themes

### The need for RMIT to make a visible commitment to LGBTIQ staff and students

- A significant number of respondents recommended that RMIT increase the visibility of its commitment to LGBTIQ inclusivity
- Specific recommendations included posters that promote RMIT as a queer-friendly place to work and study, more diverse representation of gender and sexuality in University publications, running and/or promoting inclusive events, and a strong communications strategy to support the implementation of the Inclusion Plan
- Respondents asked that RMIT be mindful of the full spectrum of sex and gender identity when selecting a name for the Plan (not all respondents considered the acronym 'LGBTIQ' to be representative). We will be asking staff and students for input on possible alternatives during the consultation stage.

*“A simple rainbow on the corner of a flyer [...] could mean so much to a prospective student.”*

### Inclusive spaces, facilities and culture on campus

- Respondents signalled the need for gender-neutral toilets on all RMIT campuses to better support transgender, intersex and gender-queer students and staff
- Some concerns were raised about the location, condition and culture of existing queer spaces. While a significant number of respondents recognised the value in maintaining a safe and confidential space for queer students, there was also widespread support for increasing the visibility of these spaces to improve inclusion and campus culture

- The queer spaces were recognised for their important role in providing support to students, however some respondents also noted that their lack of visibility can make them seem unwelcoming.

*“It should be made very clear, visually, that RMIT is an LGBTIQ inclusive space so that staff, students, and visitors are left in no doubt.”*

### University administrative systems and personal information

- Respondents indicated the need for a revision and streamlining of processes to enable staff to include their preferred name and gender identity on official documents and systems
- The current need for staff and students to ‘justify’ their preferred name and gender results in “awkward” and “uncomfortable” interactions that could be avoided by simplifying systems.

*“A mechanism by which changes of name, etc, can be undertaken simply without excessive documentation [...] would be more supportive and inclusive.”*

### Discrimination and harassment

- While discrimination and harassment based on sexuality and/or gender identity does not appear to be common at RMIT, respondents provided examples of discrimination they have experienced or observed
- Cases include verbal harassment of LGBTIQ staff and students, unwillingness of academic staff to use students’ preferred names and pronouns, and cultures within specific units or academic schools that are generally unwelcoming for queer staff and students
- A number of respondents credited their unit or school as being very welcoming of diversity, but expressed doubts as to whether this positive culture extended to other areas of the University.

*“RMIT leadership needs to be more visible in its inclusion of LGBTIQ staff and students.”*

### A need for clear, documented reporting processes

- Some respondents indicated that they were unclear of the process for making a complaint about discrimination they had observed or experienced

— Staff and students expressed concerns about whether confidentiality and anonymity could be guaranteed when raising sex and gender-related issues

— A small number of respondents remarked that they would not currently report any ill treatment they experienced or observed because they were not confident that the staff member or student in question would be adequately supported.

*“Senior managers should have training in receiving complaints and how to handle them; including what not to do. Key issues are confidentiality and recognising power imbalances.”*

### **Importance of allies and bystander engagement**

— Respondents recognised the value of Allies in building an inclusive university culture. An Ally is a person who is informed about, sensitive toward, and understanding of LGBTIQ people and their circumstances, and who chooses to challenge the homophobic and heterosexist behaviours of others

— Respondents referenced successful Ally programs initiated by other institutions

— There was strong support for an Ally program to help raise visibility and inclusion, as well as promoting bystander intervention if bullying or harassment is observed.

*“More activities to enable people of all gender orientations; LGBT and 'straight'; to encourage open communication between staff and students of all orientations.”*

### **Objectives and initiatives for 2016**

— The Inclusion Plan has the support of the University Executive team, and is currently in draft form. Staff and students will be invited to provide feedback on the Plan in early 2016, with the final document to be launched in July

— RMIT is currently adapting its administrative systems to comply with the federal government's new Recognition of Sex and Gender guidelines. These guidelines recognise that individuals may identify and be recognised within the community as a gender other than the sex they were assigned at birth or during infancy, or as an indeterminate sex and/or gender, and this should be recognised and reflected in their

personal records. Human Resources and the Academic Registrar's Group are leading this project, which will make it easier for staff and students to modify the sex and/or gender information on their personal record, and ensure that any changes are reflected across all RMIT systems. The new policy will also include training for professional and academic staff, and clear systems for related complaints and queries

— Following strong campaigning from RUSU, Property Services has undertaken a review of toilet facilities on all campuses, and identified a number of bathrooms which will soon be redesignated as gender-neutral. This project is expected to be complete in early 2016, and we will update the staff and student communities once this is finalised

— RMIT is proud to be participating in Midsumma 2016. Representatives from the Careers and Employability team and RUSU's Queer Department will hold a stall at Carnival on Sunday 17 January, and staff and students from across the University will be invited to participate in the Pride March on Sunday 31 January. Further information, including registration details for those interested in participating, will be posted in the RMIT Update (staff) and RMIT social media channels in December

— This year RMIT's City and Bundoora campuses held events to mark Wear it Purple, a national day of celebration for rainbow young people. We will be continuing to support/deliver events to mark days of LGBTIQ significance and build links with key organisations including Globe and Pride in Diversity.

### **Get involved**

For further information about RMIT's LGBTIQ Inclusion Plan, contact:

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