

Being myself at UNE

Report of the Queer Allyship Steering Committee

2019 - 2023



**UNE Ally
Network**



Acknowledgement of Country

UNE campuses, students and staff around Australia are located on the unceded lands and waters of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This report was researched on Anaiwan country, who share caring responsibilities for the land with the Gumbayngirr, Dhunghutti, and Kamilaroi peoples.

The research team acknowledge that we are the beneficiaries of the ongoing caring for this country by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as their continued dispossession. We pay our respects to their Elders, past and present.

“I do not feel like I can be who I am at UNE...”

You can either be out and proud and risk being hurt, or you can keep your head down, get on with your life and keep your business to yourself. I do not feel like I can be who I am at UNE. I wear the mask I always have and I just do my job. My sexuality has been discussed openly by staff in front of students just out of earshot of myself...

In my mind, UNE is not inclusive.”

Acknowledgments

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Allyship is a constant practice. We will never get it right all the time, but we are all learning (and making mistakes!) together.

Terminology, Acronyms and Key concepts

The authors acknowledge that language evolves, and that it is never possible to capture and reflect the great diversity of experience in any society, and that the diversity of culture and identities outside the dominance of Western, English language cannot be captured here.

We have tried to ensure the language we use is intentional and accessible, but also depathologising and rights-based. This report is our contribution to supporting marginalised members of the wider UNE community, and we continue to learn from UNE's diverse communities, and strive to build a more inclusive institution.

AFAB	Assigned/presumed female at birth
AMAB	Assigned/presumed male at birth
Blak	A term coined by Destiny Deacon, an Erub/Mer (Torres Strait) and K'ua K'ua (Cape York) artist. In 1994 the curator Hetti Perkins described the collaborative First Nations exhibition <i>Blakness; Blak City Culture</i> : “Destiny Deacon developed the term ‘Blak’ as part of a symbolic but potent strategy of reclaiming colonialist language to create means of self-definition and expression.” ¹
BIPOC	Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour. It is an acronym which has been used in recent years to “address the erasure of Black and Indigenous Peoples and centre their unique struggles while promoting solidarity.” Like all attempts to collate the experiences of disparate and discrete groups of people, BIPOC can “amalgamate distinct experiences of racism and colonialism and misses those that do not fit within one category, like individuals of mixed ancestry.” ²
Cis	Short for cisgender, describes a person whose gender identity corresponds to their sex assigned at birth. The Latin prefixes cis and trans have a long history in the sciences, indicating ‘one the same side as’, and ‘on the opposite side as’. Cis as a prefix is useful because it makes visible a more common gender identity without using words like ‘normal’ which position trans or gender diverse people as ‘abnormal’. By being able to differentiate between trans and cis people, we can talk about the experiences we have that differ, and the many more experiences we have that are similar. ³
COO	Chief Operating Officer
DAC	The Diversity Advisory Committee of the University of New England
EY	The consulting firm (also known as Ernst and Young)
Int.	Used in this report to indicate an excerpt from a deidentified interview
Intersectionality	Intersectionality is a way of examining how different forms of oppression overlap and interact to create complex experiences of discrimination. This can be by understanding how one person’s gender, race, ability, sexuality, age, class or immigration status makes their experience different to someone else’s. Intersectionality goes further than acknowledging that these different forms of oppression exist, and examines how, together, they create particular patterns of discrimination in a person’s life. ⁴

¹ Munro, Kate. “Why ‘Blak’ Not Black?: Artist Destiny Deacon and the Origins of This Word.” NITV, November 28, 2022. <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/why-blak-not-black-artist-destiny-deacon-and-the-origins-of-this-word/7gv3mykzw>.

² McGuire, Michaela M. “Why We Should Stop Using Acronyms like BIPOC.” *The Conversation*, September 21, 2023. <http://theconversation.com/why-we-should-stop-using-acronyms-like-bipoc-211472>.

³ ACON, “What does Cis mean?,” 2021, <https://www.transhub.org.au/101/cis>

⁴ Amnesty International. “Explainer: Why Intersectionality Is Important for Women’s Rights.” Amnesty International Australia, December 1, 2021. <https://www.amnesty.org.au/explainer-why-intersectionality-is-important-for-womens-rights/>

LGBTQIA+	<p>LGBTQIA+ (or variations of it) is an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual. It is used to refer collectively to these communities, and all people with a diverse sexuality or diverse gender. The ‘LGB’ refers to sexuality/sexual identity; the ‘T’ refers to gender identity including trans and gender diversity; the ‘I’ to intersex, or differences in sex characteristics; the ‘Q’ can refer to gender or sexuality; and the ‘A’ for asexuality (which is an umbrella term to describe people who may have little interest in having sex, even though they desire emotionally intimate relationships. Within the ace community, there are many ways for people to identify). The ‘+’ represents the complexity and diversity of sexual orientation, gender identity and expression cannot be comprehensively contained in any acronym or definition.</p> <p>Similar terms to refer to the overall population include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • person of diverse sexuality and/or gender • people of diverse sexualities and genders • DSG (diverse sexuality and gender) • DGSS (diverse genders, sexes, and sexualities)
Neurodiverse and Neurodivergent	<p>Note regarding terminology: the authors acknowledge that the term neurodivergent has emerged as a more appropriate as a descriptor for individuals whose neurotype is atypical or marginalised, for example, Autistic people. The term ‘neurodiverse’ has been retained in this report as it was the terminology used in the demographic component of the survey. The authors note these demographic questions were sourced from ACON in 2021, when the use of the term neurodiverse in place of neurodivergent was a more common practice.</p>
S	Used in this report to indicate an anonymous survey response
T	Participant feedback given during or following Allyship training sessions
Trans and Gender diverse	<p>Trans and Gender diverse describes people whose gender differs from what was presumed for them at birth (sometimes referred to as “assigned at birth”). Trans people may position ‘being trans’ as a history or experience, rather than an identity, and consider their gender identity as simply being female, male or a non-binary identity. Some trans people connect strongly with their trans experience, whereas others do not. Processes of gender affirmation may or may not be part of a trans or gender diverse person’s life.⁵</p>
UNE	The University of New England (Australia)

⁵ACON, ‘Language’, Transhub 2021, <https://www.transhub.org.au/language#presumed-at-birth>

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of landmark research conducted at UNE into the experiences of our LGBTQIA+ staff and students. It also outlines the steps that were taken to establish the Queer Allyship program of research and advocacy at UNE.

As individuals we are members of multiple communities and hold many identities simultaneously. We may be parents, children, partners, teachers, students, sportspeople, dancers and artists – but we may also be neurodiverse, have a disability, from a low socio-economic background, single parents, migrants, people of colour, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and people of faith (among so many other identities!). Allyship is a commitment to a lifelong process of learning, listening and self-reflection which helps us understand and support people who do not share the same privileges as we might. Being an ally is required of all of us, and recognises that we all experience some privilege, but also experience setbacks and disadvantage. But it is important to remember that people holding multiple marginalised identities experience much greater disadvantage than people who hold fewer marginalised identities.

“It is also important to remember that Allyship is needed from people outside marginalised communities, as well as *from within and across* marginalised communities.”

For example, while people who are heterosexual seek to be allies to LGBTQIA+ folk, allyship is also needed within the complexity and diversity of the LGBTQIA+ rainbow – for instance, people of colour within queer communities can often experience discrimination and exclusion. Allyship can also mean different groups coming together to work toward common goals, where for example, “lesbians, gay men and transgender people joined with Black Panthers and civil rights activists in New York City to protest against police brutality.”⁶

Allyship is a constant practice. We will never get it right all the time, but we are all learning (and making mistakes!) together:

⁶ Cumming-Potvin, Wendy Marie. “What Is Allyship? A Brief History, Present and Future,” May 16, 2024. <https://theconversation.com/what-is-allyship-a-brief-history-present-and-future-220668>.

⁷ “Allyship Resources - Amnesty International Australia.” Accessed July 31, 2024. <https://www.amnesty.org.au/allyship-resources/#section1>.

“As allies, we advocate within our community, challenging ignorance and mobilising more allies. As allies, we understand we are there in a support role. We turn up when needed and know when to step back — never taking the spotlight, respecting boundaries, and supporting the community to be empowered in their need to act”.⁷

Unlike many universities across Australia, in 2019 UNE had no services in place to support LGBTQIA+ students and staff. While there had previously been a network for students this had become defunct in 2014, as had the Ally Network around the same time. To remedy this significant gap, in early 2019 the office of the Vice Chancellor put out a call for membership of a Queer Allyship Steering Committee, which was established later that year. The goal of the Committee was to create a policy framework for the University to finally understand and support the needs of LGBTQIA+ students and staff. Since the establishment of the Steering Committee, work has been underway to redress the lack of support for LGBTQIA+ staff and students, including the dissemination of a survey to all staff and students, as well as re-establishing the UNE Ally Network.

The survey and research component was delayed by a combination of factors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, and a disruptive program of restructuring and redundancies that took place in 2020 – 2021. These systemic factors, as well as significant illness experienced by members of this research team, have delayed the publication of the research findings in this report.

Although the report has been delayed, in the interim, we have been able to use preliminary findings from the survey and interviews to contribute to policy reform and cultural change across UNE’s campuses and online spaces since the completion of the survey in late 2021. These contributions include the establishment of the Ally Network and the Queer Space (in Dixon Library), the change to the email policy to include optional pronouns and funding for visibility and events which promote LGBTQIA+ inclusion.

We continue to be humbled by the significant efforts of UNE staff and students in participating in Allyship training, the survey and in-depth interviews; as well as the progress in policy reform since the inception of the Steering Committee and are proud to share the culmination of this work.

Our findings and recommendations are foundational in building a more safe and inclusive campus for staff, students and visitors, including supporting safer and vibrant online communities and spaces.



Understanding and Supporting UNE's LGBTQIA+ Communities

The Queer Allyship Steering
Committee undertook three
key projects:

1. Comprehensive research

Comprehensive research into the experiences of LGBTQIA+ staff and students, as well as the attitudes within the broader UNE community towards the LGBTQIA+ people. This research was the first survey to collect demographic data regarding UNE's LGBTQIA+ communities, and the first invite to the UNE community as a whole to share with UNE their intersectional experiences around gender and sexuality.

This research was the first survey to collect demographic data regarding UNE's LGBTQIA+ communities, and the first to invite the UNE community as a whole to share their experiences at UNE with regard to intersectional themes around gender and sexuality.

The Research consisted of:

- a. **Survey of the UNE community** (staff, students and alumni) which received 1,300 responses (Appendix 1)
- b. **Focus group discussions** (50 participants)
- c. **In-depth research interviews** (13 participants)

2. The establishment of the UNE Ally Network, which included:

- a. The provision of **Allyship training for 106 staff and 51 students** (initially funded by UNE Life, and later through a UNE Diversity Advisory Committee grant) that was tailored to UNE based on preliminary research findings. This training included a range of areas from initial awareness and Allyship 101 training, to 'train the trainer' events which took place in 2022 to build capacity for UNE to continue offering this training each year in-house. The training was provided by Ananda Training and Consultancy, Budi Sudarto and Dr Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli, and was offered each year 2019 – 2022.
- b. The **establishment of the Ally Network in 2022**, consisting of staff and students who had completed the allyship training program. The Ally Network has secured modest event and mechanise funding through the Diversity Advisory Committee for 2024, but funding is not yet guaranteed in future years.

3. Establishing membership for UNE of ACON's Pride in Diversity (PiD) workplace program

PiD is the national not-for-profit employer support program for LGBTQ workplace inclusion specialising in HR, organisational change and workplace diversity. Pride in Diversity publishes the Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI), Australia's national

benchmarking instrument for LGBTQ workplace inclusion from which Top Employers for LGBTQ⁸ people is determined. UNE is participating in the AWEI survey in 2023-24.

⁸ Due to their focus on sexual health and wellbeing, ACON uses the LGBTQ acronym in their work to reflect that the experiences of asexual and intersex people are distinct from those of LGBTQ people. In this Queer Allyship report, we use LGBTQIA+ and are deliberate in our inclusion of asexual and intersex people, and people of diverse sexualities and gender identities.

Key Findings

The results of this research demonstrate that many LGBTQIA+ staff and students do not feel safe to be themselves at UNE. Intolerant attitudes and behaviours continue to shape the learning and working environment at UNE and there are **significant unmet needs for support, acceptance and tailored services for this population.**

1. Many students and staff do not feel safe to be themselves

Students and staff reported experiencing direct and indirect discrimination at UNE, including bullying and harassment. Between 30 – 40% of LGBTQIA+ respondents to the survey felt that disclosing their identity would have a negative impact on their studies or career at UNE, and 30% of these respondents stated that they were not out at UNE. More than 50% felt that they would not be accepted by colleagues, classmates and peers as a result of their LGBTQIA+ identity.

Furthermore, students and staff were unsure how to address issues of intolerance, discrimination, harassment and bullying as they arose. Just less than half (48%) of respondents believed that there was a confidential avenue to report harassment based on their LGBTQIA+ identity. More than half (53%) of respondents stated that they did not know where to seek support and report discrimination.



2. Lack of Visibility Communicates Lack of Acceptance

Until recently, UNE has not actively communicated acceptance towards LGBTQIA+ students and staff. This research shows that in a context where other universities, corporations and institutions have taken significant steps to communicate acceptance of LGBTQIA+ people, UNE's *lack of visible acceptance* is understood as an absence of acceptance. This is reinforced by negative experiences in learning spaces or workplaces, and unclear and unsatisfying avenues for reporting and support.

Less than 40% of respondents felt that LGBTQIA+ inclusion was clearly communicated during recruitment and enrolment. Only 21% of respondents who selected a sexuality option other than heterosexual felt that there were visible allies at UNE. Less than 30% of all respondents felt that LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences were included in their curricula.

This shows that UNE has important work to do in communicating acceptance of LGBTQIA+ people.

Significantly, these results demonstrate that when asked, students and staff are willing to anonymously disclose their LGBTQIA+ identity as well as other important demographic information including ethnicity, religious background and beliefs. This indicates that previous UNE surveys that are overly cautious in either requesting this information, or not published it are doing a disservice to the community as this nuanced information is important in driving cultural and policy change.

Building on these findings, UNE is re-commencing annual Engagement Surveys, beginning with the 2024 benchmarking survey which covers respect, support, wellbeing, leadership, training and opportunities. These surveys will also include optional demographic questions which are informed by best practice. This will be complemented by smaller 'pulse' surveys, including one on equity and diversity.

⁸ Due to their focus on sexual health and wellbeing, ACON uses the LGBTQ acronym in their work to reflect that the experiences of asexual and intersex people are distinct from those of LGBTQ people. In this Queer Allyship report, we use LGBTQIA+ and are deliberate in our inclusion of asexual and intersex people, and people of diverse sexualities and gender identities.

3. Transgender and Gender Diverse Students Most Vulnerable

The research found that transgender and gender diverse students experienced the most exposure to discrimination, and are most vulnerable to mistreatment and marginalisation.

In the survey, free-text survey responses were used by some participants to make transphobic comments. Some UNE community members completed the survey in order to express their views that “there are two genders, all others are mental illnesses”, or similar. The lead researchers

also received emails protesting the utility of the survey on transphobic and homophobic grounds.

Transgender and gender diverse students reported harmful experiences, including being deliberately misgendered and being the target of unwanted jokes and negative commentary. Some students also expressed difficulty with finding appropriate gender-neutral bathroom facilities, which can be an important safety issue for some transgender and gender diverse people.

4. Opportunities for a more inclusive UNE

While UNE has been slow to join Pride in Diversity, and the research shows that there has not been enough support for LGBTQIA+ people at UNE.

“We have a unique and important opportunity to build this support and embed inclusivity within UNE’s culture.”

Significant work, based on preliminary findings from this research and feedback from participants in the Ananda training program, has already been undertaken to establish an inclusive and intersectional Ally Network in 2022, and a Queer Space in the Dixon Library in 2023.

Allyship involves creating learning and professional environments where all staff and students not only feel safe to be themselves – but also feel like these spaces were created with them in mind.

⁸ Due to their focus on sexual health and wellbeing, ACON uses the LGBTQ acronym in their work to reflect that the experiences of asexual and intersex people are distinct from those of LGBTQ people. In this Queer Allyship report, we use LGBTQIA+ and are deliberate in our inclusion of asexual and intersex people, and people of diverse sexualities and gender identities.

Creating learning and professional environments that build in inclusion means:

1. Building online and in-person spaces that are safe and welcoming

Creating visibility communicates acceptance and a welcoming environment for LGBTQIA+ students and staff. The recent establishment of a Queer space on campus is an example of communicating acceptance and safety through visibility. Creating safe and welcoming spaces also includes creating UNE policies and procedures that consider the needs of LGBTQIA+ people, particularly transgender students and staff.

In 2024, UNE revised the organisation's Equity and Diversity Rule and created affiliated procedures and guidelines. The University also revised the Terms of Reference of the Diversity Advisory Committee and commenced a thorough review of UNE's recruitment policies and practices.

2. Appropriate resourcing of UNE staff to develop LGBTQIA+ inclusion activities

Inclusion is important work and requires drawing on the expertise and lived experience of appropriately trained individuals. The work that has been conducted so far to establish the Ally Network has largely been dependent on the goodwill and support that exists among UNE staff and students who volunteer their time and expertise, and a limited budget.

In 2023, the Ally Network secured a small amount of funding through the Diversity Advisory Committee to promote activities, merchandise and to support UNE's participation in regional events including Tamworth Pride and the Winter Blooming Festival.⁹ This funding was also available in 2024 but future, recurrent funding is not yet secured.

3. Designing course and unit content that is inclusive and recognises the diversity of the human experience, including LGBTQIA+ identities

Human experience has always included the diversity that we now recognise under the banner of intersectional LGBTQIA+ experiences. Educators have a crucial role to play in recognising LGBTQIA+

experiences as part of the spectrum of human diversity. This will be an incremental and nuanced project working with staff across the institution, to build discipline specific content which supports inclusion.

⁹ Winter Blooming is a regional festival held in Armidale that showcases the region's diverse communities, including Queer community, First Nations community and multicultural communities. See, for example <https://www.neram.com.au/event/winter-blooming-festival-24/>

4. Challenging ourselves as shapers of UNE culture to be accomplices and allies in struggles for equality at UNE, and the wider community

Universities have an historic and ongoing mission as drivers of progressive change and social inclusion. Our institutions bring together people of all walks of life and experiencing this diversity is an important part of the value of university education. UNE has a unique and important opportunity to drive social inclusion through our cultural leadership in our region.

There are significant costs associated with failing to meet the needs of LGBTQIA+ staff and students. Discrimination, bullying and harassment are important student retention issues in the context of the classroom, and are workplace health and safety issues in our professional environments. Students from our region and beyond may choose to enrol at more inclusive institutions with better support for LGBTQIA+ people. With the existing rates of non-disclosure of identity and fears regarding LGBTQIA+ identity negatively affecting careers at UNE, it is also likely UNE is experiencing staff recruitment and retention issues.

There is a great deal of good will and support for this work, across all levels of the University – 61% of survey respondents expressed that they would participate in LGBTQIA+ allyship activities. It is encouraging that the visibility of LGBTQIA+ allies, including through the UNE Ally Network and the Queer Space, has increased substantially in 2024 from 21% to 54% (2023-24 AWEI Survey Results). The progress that has been made since the establishment of the Queer Allyship Steering committee in 2019, and the significant contributions of so many staff and students to these efforts, shows that it is possible to make significant inroads over a short period of time.

While there is more to be done, the goodwill and commitment of the UNE community provides hope that a more inclusive university is within reach.



Recommendations

Safety and wellbeing

1. Clear and well-disseminated information regarding LGBTQIA+ inclusion policies
2. All UNE and UNELife student services, including the UNE Medical Centre, to create visible and accessible messaging to foster trust and respect, thereby reducing vicarious trauma.
3. LGBTQIA+ leadership and visibility in mental health and wellbeing strategies and engagement.
4. Update the sexual health information services and information provision at campus medical services to ensure they are intersectional LGBTQIA+ inclusive.
5. Seek to promote intersectional LGBTQIA+ staff role models and mentors for students and student peer groups. LGBTQIA+ students need staff role models and mentors who share personal stories and build relationships.
6. Establishing accessible and victim centered complaints reporting and support processes for staff and students including deidentified reporting to Executive and the university community to ensure transparency and accountability.

Policies, Procedures and Facilities

7. Establish a protocol which assesses any policy or other university instrument as they are reviewed or developed which sits under the Diversity Rule. This protocol should ensure the development and renewal of intersectional LGBTQIA+ inclusion policies including in student enrolment, People and Culture, trusted and reliable grievance and reporting procedures, student services and support and medical facilities.
 8. Continue to develop more effective strategies to enhance visibility across social media and other forms of messaging, events, building inclusive services and facilities that foster trust and accessibility.
 9. An established and active Ally Network to initiative LGBTQIA+ inclusive and intersectional practices, run events, participate in policy reviews and advocate for LGBTQIA+ inclusive services and facilities, led by allies, and LGBTQIA+ staff and students.
 10. Inclusion of LGBTQIA+ awareness training in induction programs for staff, students and external contractors.
 11. Provide clear, streamlined and accessible complaints information and procedures, for straightforward and confidential reporting processes. The University has commenced a thorough revision of staff and student complaints mechanisms following the 2023 UNE Safety Culture and Wellbeing Review.
 12. LGBTQIA+ Awareness and/or Allyship training to be mandatory for all staff and students, including Executive, upon joining UNE (as part of staff induction and student orientation, in particular, students holding leadership positions), with a refresher course to be completed every three years.
 13. UNE's demographic data collection processes need to be reviewed in regard to intersectional LGBTQIA+ staff and students, noting gender identity and/or sexuality is currently not collected.
 14. Update the language in policies to reflect respectful and inclusive terminology for people of diverse sexual orientation and/or gender identity and expression. The development of an inclusive language guide is currently underway: www.une.edu.au/staff-current/people-and-culture/about-us/equity/inclusive-language-guides. 
 15. Develop procedures to accommodate gender affirmation, as well as name changes for those and other reasons in staff and student records.
 16. Security staff to be given training as first responders to likely incidents. Security staff should be familiar with referral pathways, and be given training as first responders to incidents. UNE should have a signed agreement with contractors regarding expected behaviours and accountability.
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17. The Ally Network to:
 - a. develop its own set of guidelines/code of conduct, and
 - b. have its own Teams, and
 - c. Facebook page [these three items have been achieved in 2023-24]
18. The Ally Network should be a member of, and report to the Diversity Advisory Committee.
19. The importance of this work needs to be recognised through time allocation for participating staff, particularly recognising the contribution of professional staff who are not allocated a 'service' component to their workload, as well as adequate resourcing of meetings, and committee projects

Terms of Reference have subsequently been developed (see QR code): Ally Network Terms of Reference - University of New England (UNE).



Curriculum and Pedagogy

20. Induction programmes for both staff and students regarding intersectional LGBTQIA+ inclusive course content as is discipline appropriate, behaviours on campus and online classes.
21. Curriculum inclusion working groups within each School and Faculty to audit course content and build programs to ensure course materials are inclusive where necessary.
22. Online classes to begin with statements for students to e-sign regarding awareness of respectful conduct.

Residential Colleges

23. Induction programmes for residential leaders in relation to intersectional LGBTQIA+ inclusion and allyship.
24. Develop visibility strategies and community events to foster intersectional LGBTQIA+ college inclusion.
25. Establish an intersectional LGBTQIA+ committee for student residences to contribute to strategies which promote inclusion and safety.
26. Establishing accessible, transparent and victim centered complaints reporting and support processes for staff and students.
27. Update the sexual health information services and information provision at the colleges to ensure they are intersectional LGBTQIA+ inclusive.

UNE in the wider community

28. UNE Ally Network to engage with feeder schools to undertake collaborations and preparations for intersectional university life.
29. UNE to lead and collaborate in intersectional LGBTQIA+ community engagements, events, councils and schools in Armidale and other regional areas.



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