



Griffith University



Education and Training Services



7,181 employees



61% female



39% male

Challenge

To address a persistent gender imbalance in senior management roles, Griffith University is working to increase the number of women entering leadership roles, by developing the leadership skills of existing staff.

Strategy

The university has put in place programs to develop the leadership experience and capability of its female workforce.

“A conscious decision was made to invest in the university’s own staff and grow its own future leaders.”

Actions

Women’s lower rate of entry to leadership roles was first identified as a matter of concern in the 1980s. Since 1986, the university’s annual reports have provided a snapshot of the workforce and have included programs and initiatives to increase the representation of women in senior roles.

Goals and targets to increase the proportion of women in senior academic and professional staff positions were first included in the university’s strategic plan more than a decade ago, ensuring transparency in reporting against the targets.

In 2015 the university strengthened its commitment to increasing the number of women in senior roles by hiring an executive with a specific responsibility for advancing Griffith’s Women in Leadership agenda.

Griffith University Developing women leaders

The university's 2013–2017 Strategic Plan sets out targets for women to fill 40% of senior academic roles and 50% of senior professional staff roles. In March 2016, of the 495 senior academic staff (associate professor and professor) 39% were women, and of the 100 senior professional staff, 43% were women.

Leneen Forde Future Leaders Program

When a number of senior women moved towards retirement, a conscious decision was made to invest in the university's own staff and grow its own future leaders, a plan that was championed by Vice Chancellor and President, Professor Ian O'Connor.

Since 2003, Griffith University has offered a Women in Leadership Program with three workshops over a year for women in academic or administrative positions, where participants learn from successful leaders and network with fellow aspiring leaders.

In 2014 the Leneen Forde Future Leaders Program was introduced to support the development pathway of women already succeeding in a leadership role. Unlike the Women in Leadership Program, which is based on self-nomination, participants are nominated by their executive as having potential to grow into senior leadership roles and the executive also commits to providing sponsorship to the participant over two years. Fourteen women were offered a place in the first program.

The program also offers events where participants can meet and interact with senior leaders and undertake career planning sessions with senior members of the university. This sees the participants complete a 360-degree evaluation to get a true sense of their leadership style and traits, and understand how they are seen by their peers and leaders.

Whole-of-cohort networking sessions and interactive workshops with guest speakers allow the participants to discuss and develop an understanding of how to evolve their own leadership in different areas.

“Participants receive one-on-one career development sessions with their sponsor and workshops on topics such as personal branding and career resilience. Funding of up to \$3,000 is also available for external personal development.”

Participants also receive one-on-one coaching sessions with their sponsor in topics such as personal branding and career resilience. Funding of up to \$3,000 is also available for investment in external personal development.

Outcomes

All 14 participants completed the initial program in 2016, and 10 were successful in gaining promotion.

Across the university, the response to the program has been overwhelmingly positive. Staff who are interested in taking part are encouraged to 'lean in' by raising potential participation with their leaders and executive as part of their performance and mentoring discussions.

In reviewing the first program, the university found that individuals' outcomes are strongly influenced by their own career goals and aims, and that one of the main strengths of the program is that the flexible framework – for example how participants choose to spend their external development funds – works well to support these individual goals.

Employee experience

Professor Elizabeth Cardell joined Griffith University five years ago when she was approached to set up the Master of Speech Pathology postgraduate course. She was subsequently nominated for the Leneen Forde Future Leaders program and has since been promoted to professor level, and into the role of Deputy Head of School of Allied Health Sciences.

“When I was nominated as a ‘future leader’ I was completely taken by surprise. I had come from clinical practice to academia quite late and never saw myself as a leader, and in accepting the place in the program I felt a bit like an imposter. I grew up in the 1960s and studied speech pathology in the 1980s and as a speech pathologist you were either a clinician or an academic, with nothing in between. I always had the drive to do something more in all positions that I undertook, but never saw a role model or a potential pathway to something more substantial.

When I was appointed by Griffith to set up the Master of Speech Pathology postgraduate program, it was the biggest, high-stakes challenge that I had ever undertaken, but I had never named this work as ‘leading’.

My ‘aha’ moment during the Leneen Forde program came when I realised that what I had been doing for the last few years was actually ‘leading’.

The program helped me realise that I have a natural leaning towards being a leader – I’m always strategising, I see the big picture and future opportunities, and get great personal satisfaction from making things happen – but I had never recognised or labelled this as ‘leadership’.

During the program we met some interesting and inspiring people from business and academia who spoke to us about a whole range of topics from personal branding to the fundamentals of managing people.



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One of the most interesting things for me – which I had not thought about much, was the difference between management – running day-to-day operations – and being a leader, which is about influence, vision, reach and strategy.

It was great being surrounded and supported by amazing women in the program who all had their own different paths to leadership. There were so many common themes and experiences that it was reassuring and confidence building.

As part of one of the workshops we had to list each other’s characteristics and someone said a positive quality of mine was being ‘vibrant’. I’d previously felt that a leader should tone down and be serious but I’ve since realised that it’s important for a leader to be authentic and true to yourself and your values.

Coming from an evidence-based background I’m interested in the ‘science’ of leadership and have been reading widely around the subject – picking up tips to apply in the future and understanding where I may have gone wrong in the past and

The Athena SWAN Charter

In 2016 the university also began participating in The Athena SWAN Charter, an evaluation and accreditation program that has been running in the UK for over a decade. The Charter recognises excellence in employment practices that advance and promote the careers of women and gender minorities in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine (STEMM).

To participate in the Awards Program, institutions must first accept the ten charter principles, then begin the process of collecting and analysing data, developing and implementing action plans, and monitoring progress.

Results are submitted for peer-review, to qualify for Bronze, Silver or Gold awards. Achieving these awards is a major challenge that takes at least two years before an organisation will become eligible for an award.

how to do it better next time. It’s become such an interest for me now that I am currently doing some research in that area.

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