



## **Actions speak louder than words: The UWS MyVoice Journey and Achievements**

Most universities now conduct staff engagement or organisational climate surveys. The University of Western Sydney (UWS) held its first staff engagement survey in 2012 with responses from 83% of academic and professional staff providing feedback on a range of organisational and HR practices. Overall, the level of satisfaction with working at the University was 1% higher than the sector average. This was particularly surprising given the organisational restructuring that had occurred in the six months prior to the survey. Responses highlighted a number of areas for improvement at both the organisational and local level.

Gaining the buy-in of employees and senior management in actively engaging in university initiatives is important for changing organisational culture. The UWS MyVoice Staff Engagement Project demonstrates the benefits and challenges of adopting a whole-of-institution, top-down, bottom-up approach. This paper provides a case study for utilising the staff engagement or organisational climate survey as a launching pad for engaging senior management, Schools and Divisional Units, and academic and professional staff in addressing areas for improving organisational culture and HR and management practices at the local and organisational wide levels. The paper will also describe some of the tangible outcomes of the project to date.

The paper explores how a tertiary education institution has responded to the staff survey results by implementing innovative ways of engaging senior management and staff in identifying and actioning improvements in organisational, management and HR practices. MyVoice Working Groups were established to support sustainable change in eight key areas – senior management communication, inclusive decision-making, cross-unit collaboration, career development for academic and professional staff, recruitment and selection, supporting new staff and responding to workplace bullying – all challenging but critical areas for maximising employee engagement in alignment with the organisation's strategic goals. The Working Groups are each mentored by a member of the Executive and Dean.

The paper outlines some of the significant achievements from each of the MyVoice Working Groups and discusses lessons learned along the way for engaging the Executive and staff in successfully implementing a complex organisation-wide exercise. Some tangible outcomes include 'Meet the Executive' campus forums; email etiquette tips; an improved welcome pack for new staff; an online module on 'Career Development for Academics'; a Checklist for Academic Portfolios of Achievement; speed mentoring sessions for early career academics; an improved Professional Development Policy; and postcards, website and information sessions for responding to workplace bullying.

A second survey will be conducted in May 2015. This will prove to provide interesting results over a three-year period of continued organisational change since the first survey, particularly with a change of Vice-Chancellor in January 2014. The key challenge remains is in how to create sustainable change while maintaining motivation and momentum in employee engagement.