

## Positive Inclusion Award Entrant: Auckland University of Technology



Auckland University of Technology's progress as New Zealand's first Rainbow Tick-certified tertiary organisation is strongly evidenced by the wellbeing of its rainbow staff who are more highly engaged than their non-rainbow colleagues.

More than 80 per cent believe the person they report to treats people with respect, have a sense of commitment to AUT, and believe AUT has a clear vision of where it's going and how to get there. Overall they are 7% more engaged than non-rainbow staff members, who are 78% engaged.

AUT, which employs more than 3,000 staff and has more than 28,000 students, gained certification in 2011. Rainbow Ticks are awarded to organisations that complete a Diversity and Inclusion certification process to test whether a workplace understands, values, and welcomes sexual and gender diversity.

The platform for AUT's commitment to Rainbow Tick was set by the rainbow community who successfully argued, earlier in 2011, for the recognition of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community within the organisation's strategic plan. The inclusion paved the way for new initiatives and staff empowerments. All of the initiatives at AUT are based on a single, simple idea: "The Dignity of Inclusion."

A staff member comments: "Being included in the Strategic Plan has really helped to raise awareness of our rainbow staff. It's now so much easier to get the support and funding we need from the university to participate in important community events. Nearly all of my

immediate non-LGBTI colleagues have helped out at, or attended, one of our events. It's so great to have their support, and it really helps me to feel like I can be myself at work."

The Rainbow Tick has had a positive effect in several ways.

Firstly, on staff recruitment.

"Whilst AUT was already an employer of choice for me, the fact that AUT held the Rainbow Tick, along with their presence at the Auckland Pride Parade and other LGBTI community events, definitely strengthened my decision to seek employment and ultimately become an employee of AUT. On my first day, I was pleasantly surprised to see the AUT rainbow stickers on a number of my colleagues' desks; showing that diversity is acknowledged and supported. It is important for me to know that I can be my whole self with my colleagues and at my workplace; and that my same-sex partner will be treated the same as others' opposite-sex partners," said another staff member.

AUT also learned from focus group feedback that the Rainbow Tick has also had a positive effect on students, with feedback being given by some staff that students had mentioned the Rainbow Tick as a reason for either making AUT their initial choice, or for staying on for post-graduate work.

New initiatives as part of the process have included all-gender bathrooms being introduced in each new building being developed across all three campuses. A permanent LGBT student support role is going to be created. Previously provision of this support relied heavily upon the goodwill of the network members.

AUT also participates in community events including having a float in the Pride Festival and having a presence at the Big Gay Out, of which it has been a platinum sponsor since 2014. AUT sponsors a scholarship programme through GABA (Gay Auckland Business Association) for LGBT students. In 2015, AUT hosted the Annual Queers in Tertiary Hui. Staff from all levels and communities across the organisation have supported rainbow initiatives.

Progress is summed up by a non-rainbow staff member: "We started our story from the premise of the dignity of inclusion, but over the past five years have grown from that to the celebration of inclusion. As a result of having the diversity statement included in the strategic plan, the dignity and celebration of inclusion has been embedded into the culture of AUT and the ethos of its staff."