



Ministry of Education

RAINBOW INCLUSION FINALIST

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THE STORY

The education system touches every person, whanau and community in New Zealand and plays a major role in improving our society, however the Ministry of Education recognised it wasn't actively supporting its Rainbow staff.

To address this, the Education Rainbow Network was formed, providing a safe and inclusive staff-driven network to celebrate and support Rainbow staff. The network, led by a committee, aligns with the Ministry's wider Diversity and Inclusion framework.

Education Rainbow Network Committee Member Kieron Mottley says, "The network enables all temporary and permanent Ministry staff to come together, support each other, share information and work to promote an inclusive work environment where we can each reach our full potential."

The network provides a voice for LGBTIQ+ staff, advises on Rainbow equality and diversity issues, works with leaders to meet specific needs of LGBTIQ+ staff, connects the Ministry with Rainbow organisations and the broader Rainbow community, and advises on Rainbow equality and diversity issues

Kim Shannon, Head of Education Infrastructure Service, is the executive sponsor of the network.

"I feel very proud to be working alongside the Rainbow Network team to identify and overcome obstacles for Rainbow staff and to support the growth of the network. Networks like these celebrate the different experiences people bring to our workplaces – a crucial component for fostering creativity and increasing staff engagement."

In March 2020 a hui brought members of the network from different regions of New Zealand together to discuss issues and co-design the next steps for the network.

"I listened as the members shared their experiences working for the Ministry, and I look forward to supporting them in initiatives to bring about better inclusivity for Rainbow staff members at the Ministry. At the end of the day, we want all our people to feel valued, supported and respected," says Kim.



The network extended its reach to the communities it works with and organised two sessions with the Minister of Education's Youth Advisory Group to lead the group's first-ever discussions for Rainbow youth across New Zealand.

Other achievements have included participation in the Cross-Agency Rainbow Network, and the launch of a website for the network on the Ministry intranet, along with a Yammer page.

Diversity and Inclusion Lead Evelyn Lawrence says the network has helped shape HR policies to become more inclusive and ensure positive outcomes for staff.

"Our Education Rainbow Network has also been instrumental in assisting myself and HR with reviewing our HR-related policies and processes, to ensure they are inclusive of all genders and sexual orientations," she says.

"Our employee network groups have played a crucial role in helping to build a more inclusive culture and helping to drive our diversity and inclusion initiatives at the Ministry of Education, which we are very proud of and grateful for. Our Education Rainbow Network, in particular, is one of our strongest, dedicated and impactful employee network groups. Although they only formed early last year, they have raised the profile of our Rainbow employees and have helped to build a safe and more inclusive workplace for our LGBTIQ+ staff."

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THE CHALLENGE

In fulfilling its role shaping the education system to deliver equitable outcomes for children and young people in New Zealand, the Ministry of Education needed to provide an equally positive environment for its Rainbow staff.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- The Education Rainbow Network (ERN) was formed to focus on the health and well-being of Rainbow staff
- Network activities include:
 - creating a positive and recognisable presence at the Ministry, with hundreds of lanyards handed out to staff, and providing a voice for LGBTIQ+ staff and increasing the visibility of LGBTIQ+ issues in the workplace
 - working with leaders to meet specific needs of LGBTIQ+ staff
 - connecting the Ministry with Rainbow organisations and the broader Rainbow community, and advising on Rainbow equality and diversity issues
 - arranging events such as workshops, external speakers, and social activities to raise awareness and celebrate diversity
- An executive sponsor from the Ministry's senior leadership provided support for the network, serving as its advocate and providing advice and counsel

RESULTS AND BENEFITS

- The network has started engagement with Rainbow Tick and other organisations to investigate ways of improving the workplace environment
- Network members have formed professional relationships across the Ministry and other agencies, including the Cross-Agency Rainbow Network
- The network has organised two sessions with the Minister of Education's Youth Advisory Group to lead its first-ever discussions about Ministry support for Rainbow youth across New Zealand
- The network has actively shaped a number of HR policies, ensuring LGBTIQ+ concerns are explicitly included and addressed.
- The network reached agreement with the Ministry allowing staff to use gender pronouns in their email signatures.

KEY LEARNING

To effectively drive a more diverse and inclusive culture and practices, the responsibility needs to sit across the whole of the organisation.

**DO WORKPLACE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION WELL
AND DO WELL BECAUSE OF IT.**

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