

**Media release, November 2016**

**Otago LGBTAQ university students experience harassment on campus but are well supported**

A survey of University of Otago students commissioned by the Otago University Students' Association (OUSA) has revealed that harassment is experienced by one in four students who identify as lesbian/gay/ takatāpui, bisexual/pansexual, trans, asexual, questioning and/or queer (LGBTAQ).

Despite these experiences of harassment, the majority of survey respondents felt the University of Otago provides visible resources on support for LGBTAQ students.

University of Otago Vice-Chancellor Professor Harlene Hayne commented: "We want all of our students to feel safe and valued at the University of Otago. I am pleased that, by and large, LGBTAQ students have a positive perception of life on campus, but I am also keen to make sure that these students, like all students, feel supported here."

Based on the findings of the University of Otago campus climate survey, the report makes five recommendations:

1. Ongoing training for all University of Otago support services and staff about appropriate ways to support LGBTAQ students
2. Call for initiatives to raise awareness of queer\* issues on and off campus
3. Draw attention to the importance of gender-neutral toilets available throughout campus to ensure equitable access to facilities
4. Emphasis how sexual orientation and gender identity are distinct but related areas of marginalization and call for efforts to address discrimination experienced by all people with diverse sexualities or genders
5. Highlight the ongoing importance of the OUSA Queer\* Support service.

Former OUSA Queer\* Support Coordinator Neill Ballantyne instigated the University of Otago campus climate survey during his time in the job in order to benchmark students' experiences and perceptions of campus responses and the OUSA Queer\* Support service. The accompanying report was subsequently completed by Dr Gareth Treharne of the Department of Psychology and Dr Melanie Beres of the Department of Sociology, Gender and Social Work, with input from four postgraduate students.

It is the first survey of its kind at a New Zealand university. Prior to this report, the only published campus climate survey of a tertiary education provider in New Zealand was carried out at the Unitec Institute of Technology in Auckland in 2012, revealing similar experiences of harassment among LGBTAQ students there.

The University of Otago campus climate survey was completed by 356 LGBTAQ students, of whom 13 have 'non-binary' gender identities including people who identify as transgender, genderqueer, gender fluid, or agender. The LGBTAQ students experienced significantly more harassment and discrimination compared to 878 students who identify as heterosexual and a binary gender (i.e., identifying as female or male) who also completed the survey.

The survey found that:

- One in four LGBTAQ students reported experiencing harassment on campus over a 1-year period. The survey defined harassment as experiencing situations that interfered considerably with the person's ability to work, learn, feel successful on campus or that created an intimidating, unfriendly, hostile or offensive environment.
- The survey respondents said that harassment of LGBTAQ students was most commonly perpetrated by other students and most likely to occur in public spaces on campus or in a hall of residence.
- Five survey respondents reported that they had been harassed in a campus office, two of whom were students with non-binary gender identities. No specific campus offices were named.
- Over half of LGBTAQ students had felt they had to hide their identity to avoid harassment over the past year.
- One in 10 LGBTAQ students had reported on the survey that they had feared for their physical safety in the past year and nearly one in five thought they would fear for their safety in the future.
- Five of the 13 surveyed students with non-binary gender identities had feared for their physical safety over the past year.

Current OUSA Queer\* Support Coordinator Hahna Briggs took over the OUSA Queer\* Support Coordinator role at the end of 2014. Together with a group of Queer\* Support interns, Hahna runs a range of support activities for queer\* students and educational initiatives such as the Queer101 workshops for various groups, including staff of the University of Otago and Otago Polytechnic.

Most students who completed the University of Otago campus climate survey felt that the OUSA Queer\* Support service is open, inclusive and safe, and most would use the service themselves or recommend it to others.

Hahna is using the findings of the survey to plan future development of the OUSA Queer\* Support service to help address the forms of harassment and discrimination reported by survey respondents. For instance, Hahna highlighted "this year we ran a campaign to highlight some of issues transgender and gender diverse students face when using gender segregated toilets. My aim was to encourage respectful and informed conversations amongst the campus community, and the campaign has led to increased awareness and increased availability of gender-neutral toilets in parts of campus including the OUSA Clubs and Societies building."

Dr Treharne says: "This report provides us with robust information about the importance of the OUSA Queer\* Support service. Hahna and the Queer\* Support interns do an amazing job of providing support for individuals and speaking up for the whole community."

The full report on the University of Otago campus climate survey can be accessed on the OUSA Queer\* Support [website](#).

**Contact:**

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If seeking further comment from the University on the report, please contact Senior Research Communications Adviser Simon Ancell at [simon.ancell@otago.ac.nz](mailto:simon.ancell@otago.ac.nz) (03 479 5016) to facilitate.

The logo for OUSA (Otago Uni Students' Association) is presented on a green ribbon graphic. The word "ousa" is written in a large, white, lowercase sans-serif font. Below it, the words "otago uni students' association" are written in a smaller, white, lowercase sans-serif font.

**ousa**  
otago uni **students'** association

The logo for "ousa | queer\* support" features the word "ousa" in a green sans-serif font, followed by a vertical bar, the word "queer" in a black sans-serif font with a small multi-colored asterisk, and the word "support" in a black sans-serif font.

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