

# FOUR WAYS TO GET ON POINT!

## PRACTICE POINTS

### EDITION 2: 'OUT' AT WORK

#### INSIGHTS FROM THE 2023 AWEI EMPLOYEE SURVEY

In 2023, 178 organisations and 41,157 individuals took part in the survey. Of these, 40,331 respondents are Australian-based, and 826 work in overseas locations for Australian employers.

In 2023, 24.7% (n9,972) of all respondents provided responses which indicated they were of diverse sexuality. A change in the method of asking this question was implemented this year in line with Australian Bureau of Statistics standards<sup>1</sup> which may equate for the 40.3% increase from 2022.

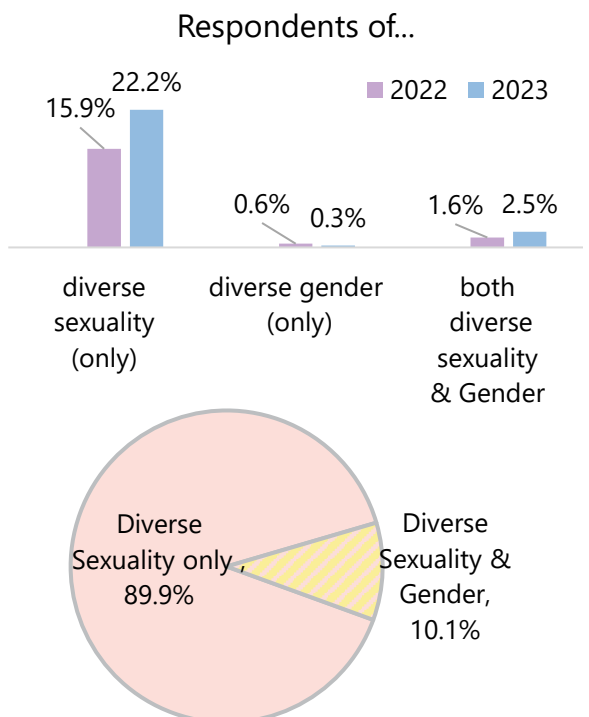
This Practice Point focuses on the experiences of Australian based employees of diverse sexuality and explores differences between cohorts of respondents where there is value, and data trends from the past 3 surveys (2021-2023). We explore the unique experiences specifically of the respondents who are of only diverse sexuality, or who are of both diverse sexuality and gender<sup>1</sup>, who work in Australia-based offices. Where there are significant differences, this data will be highlighted.

#### Demographics

Year on year, we have seen an increase in respondents who are identifying as being a person of diverse sexuality, and an even more significant increase in responses from people who are of both diverse sexuality and trans or gender diverse.

In 2023 respondents of only diverse sexuality (n8,966) equate to 22.2% of all responses, a 40.1% increase on 2022. Responses from people of dual diversity has increased by 58.9% to 2.5% of all Australian responses. This year we saw a decrease in the number of respondents who are identifying with only a diverse gender and/or trans experience which will be discussed in a future Practice Point.

Of all respondents of diverse sexuality 10.1% are also of diverse gender and/or trans experience.



<sup>1</sup> For determining people of diverse gender we implemented ABS standards ('two-step method') including optional categories.

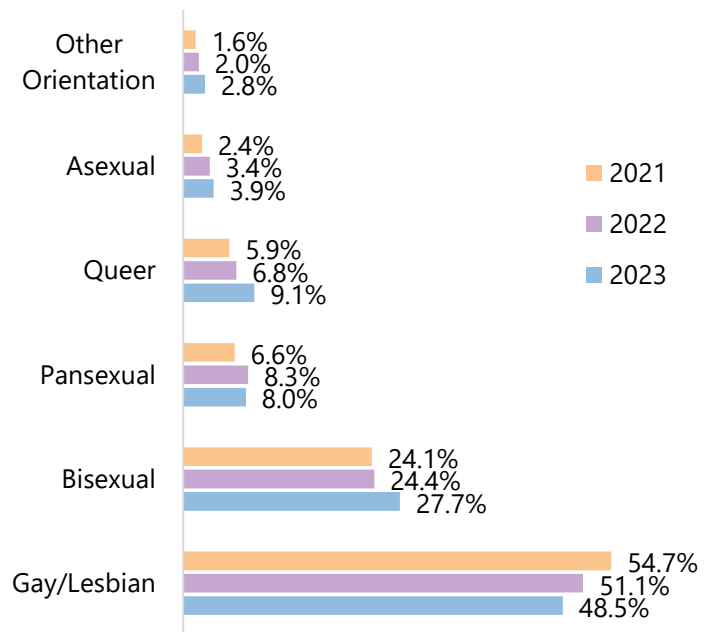
Sexual Orientation

For the fourth year, the reduction of the proportion of respondents identifying as gay/lesbian has continued. This year a drop of 9.0% occurred which takes the total reduction from 2021 to 15.7%.

We are also continuing to see an increase in respondents who identify with an orientation other than provided. We acknowledge that the survey implements the ABS standards and does not support an exhaustive list. Additionally, due to the possibility of small subsets of data identifying individual respondents, it has been considered inappropriate to ask in any more detail than is currently provided.

Since sexual orientation describes patterns of sexual, romantic, and emotional attraction we see an emergence of terminology for people to be able to self-identify an orientation which most resonates for them.

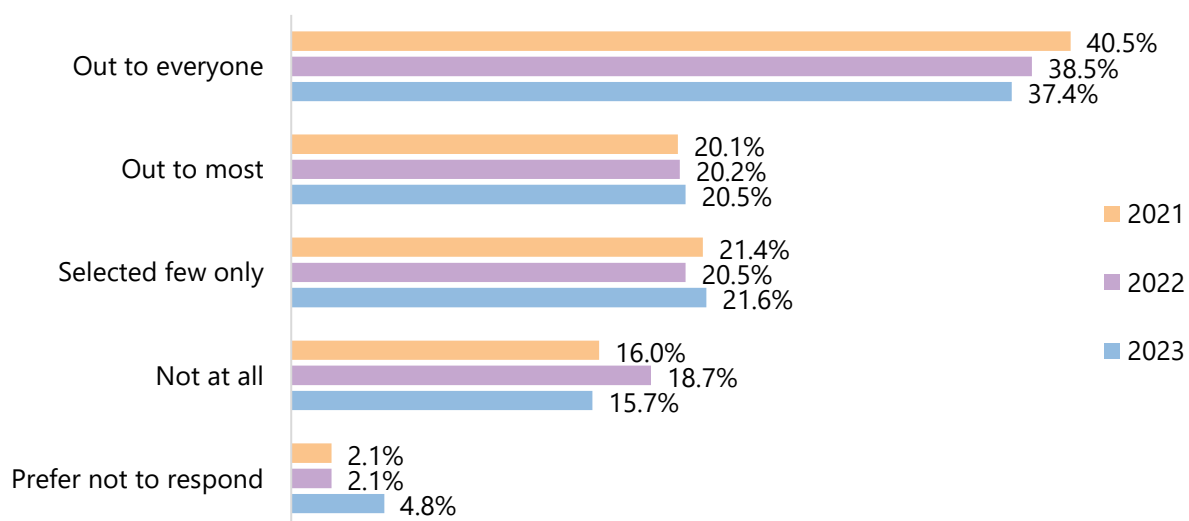
To understand 'outness' in the workplace, respondents who choose to provide their orientation, and identify in any way other than 'straight', are asked, "In regard to your sexual orientation, please indicate to what degree you are 'out' at work?". We received 9,011 individual responses, 1,224 more than last year.



Those 'out to everyone' at work has dropped by 2.8% from 2022, and 7.6% since 2021. For those 'out to most', the rate has been more stable, with small increases, equating to a 1.9% rise since 2021.

436 (4.8%) preferred to not respond to this question which is a 125.6% increase from last year but can possibly be explained as due to a change in the methodology of people receiving this question. This may need to be further analysed in future years.

What degree are you 'out' at work?



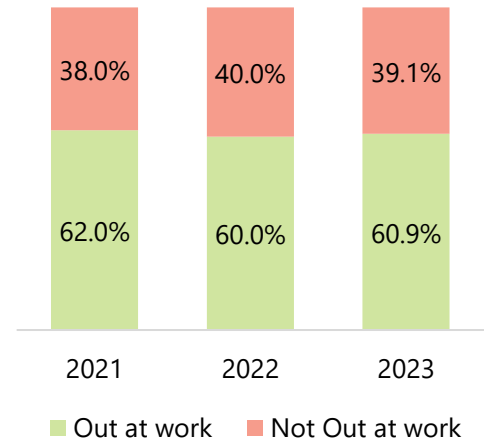
For the purpose of this Practice Point, those 'out to everyone' and those 'out to most' will be considered 'out' in the workplace, while those 'out to selected few only' or 'not at all', will be considered 'not out'.

These groups comprise 57.9% who indicated that they were 'out' ('out to everyone' - 37.4%; 'out to most' - 20.5%), and the 37.3% who indicated they were 'not out' ('selected few only' - 21.6%; 'not at all' - 15.6%).

By removing the prefer not to respond answers, we can analyse the remaining responses.

For the past three years, the proportion of people 'not out' has been increasing, this trend did not continue this year. In 2023 1.5% more respondents, are 'out' in the workplace compared to 2022.

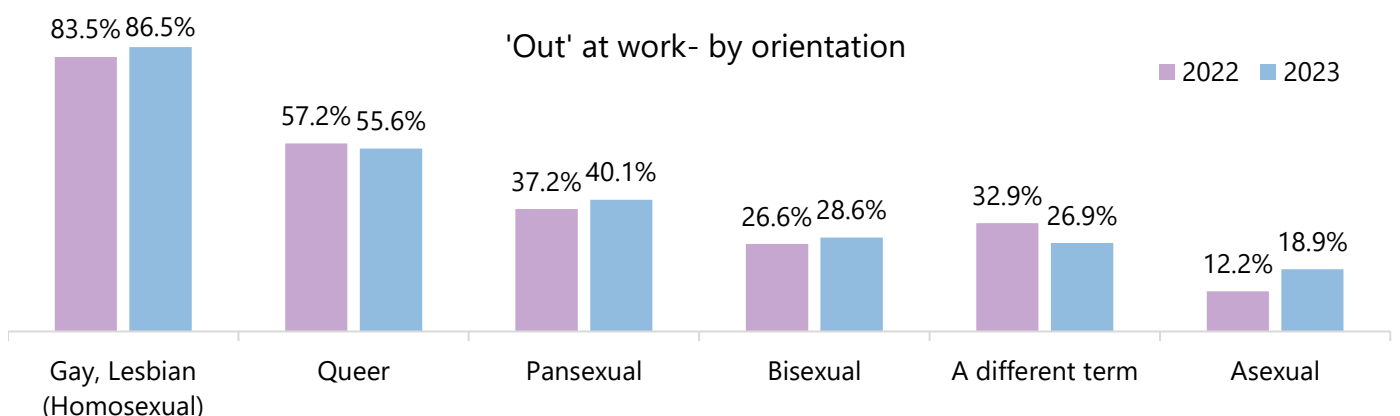
What degree are you 'out' at work?



### Who is more likely to be 'out' in the workplace?

Respondents who identified as gay/lesbian are the most likely to be 'out', with 86.5% agreeing, an increase from 83.5% last year. For those identifying as asexual, they remain the least likely to be 'out', but the rate of being 'out' has increased 55.1% between the last two surveys.

This year has also seen a reduction in those 'out' at work most significantly for those that identify with terms other than listed (by 18.1%) or as queer (by 2.8%).



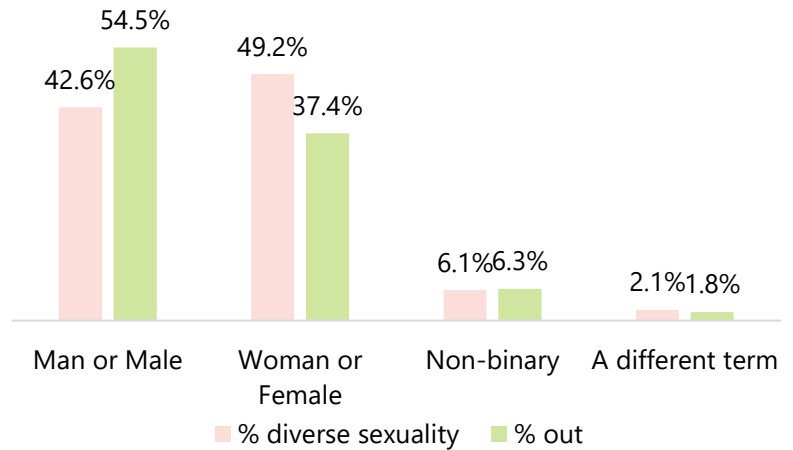
Gender identity

The data also shows intersectionality between gender identity and outness within the workplace. Respondents who identify as Man or Male make up 42.6% of all respondents of diverse sexuality, and 54.5% of all respondents 'out'. They are 217% more likely to be 'out' than 'not out'.

Conversely, Women or Female identifying respondents are less likely to be 'out' by 9.9%, and make up 49.2% of respondents of diverse sexuality, and only 37.4% of those 'out' in the workplace.

Respondents who identify as non-binary or a different term, proportionately make up the same percentage of respondents as those 'out'.

Those identifying with either of these non-binary identities are 73.2% more likely to be 'out' than 'not out'.

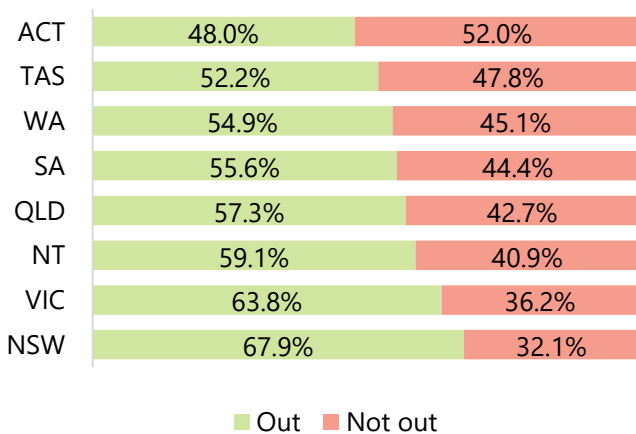


Location

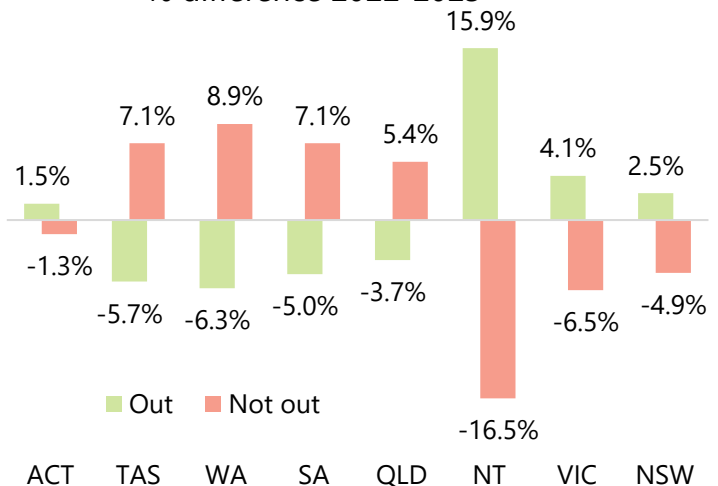
Respondents from the ACT were least likely to be 'out' at work and had the least change from 2022 (out: 47.3%). Though were 1.5% more likely to be 'out' than last year.

The Northern Territory had the most significant change, with respondents advising being 'out' 15.9% more than last year, moving it from the second lowest last year at 51.0%, to ranking third this year at 59.1%, though there was a significant reduction in the number of responses received (2022: 51 vs. 2023: 29).

Respondents by state

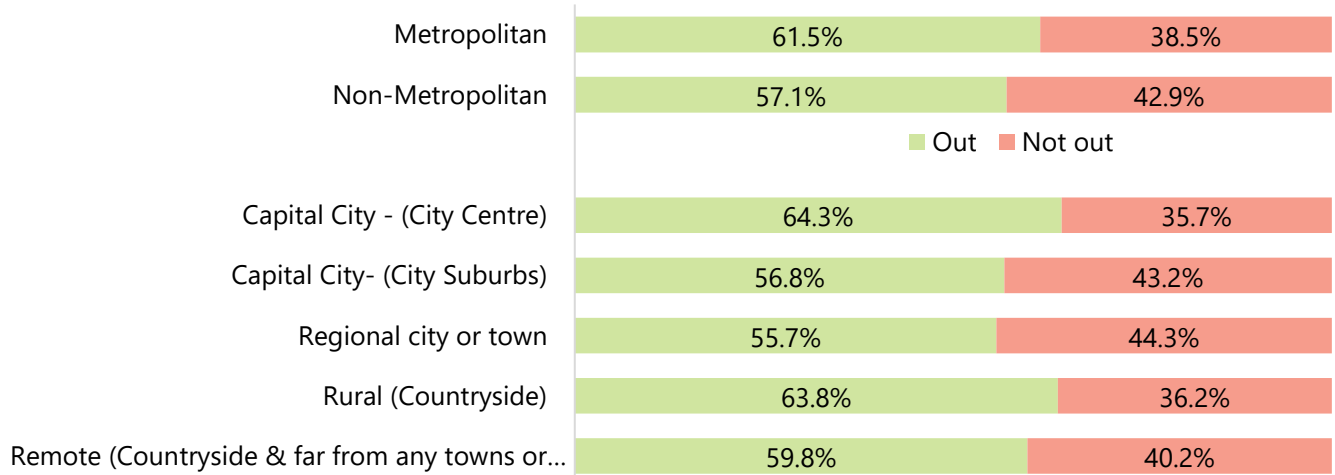


% difference 2022-2023



Comparing those 'out' by location within the state, non-metropolitan (regional, rural, or remote) respondents are 7.2% less likely to be 'out' than those working in Metropolitan (city centre or suburbs) areas.

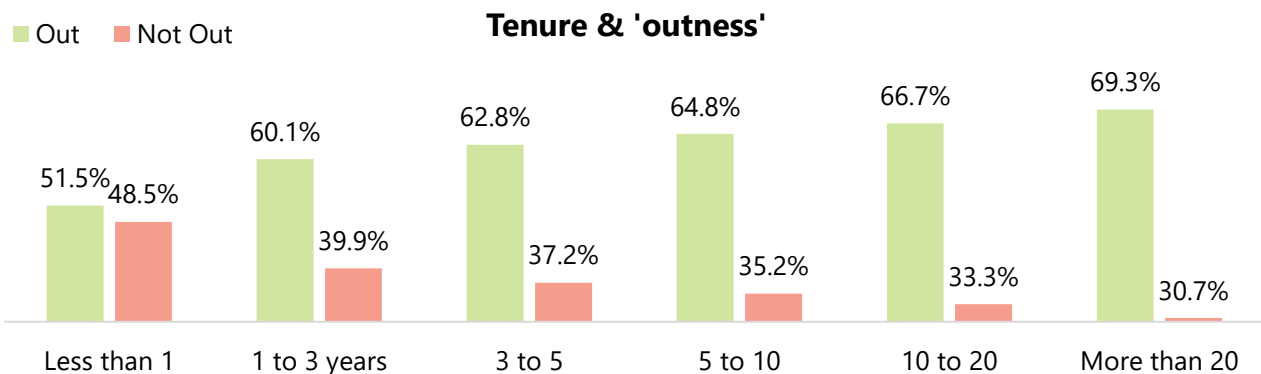
Those working in City Centres are only 0.8% more likely to be 'out' than those in rural areas.



Position, employment type and tenure

The relationship between a respondent's position and their 'outness' within the organisation is visible within several areas.

The time employed with an organisation affects employees' willingness to bring their whole selves to work. In 2023, the outness rate for people who have been with their organisation between 1-3 years has increased by 12.3% (2022: 53.5% vs. 2023: 60.1%). The data also shows that the trend of being 'out' increasing in line with employment tenure, continues right up to the 20+ year group. In fact, respondents who have been with their organisation 20+ years are 34.5% more likely to be 'out' than those employed less than 1 year.



A respondent's seniority in an organisation shows the greatest impact on being 'out' in the workplace.

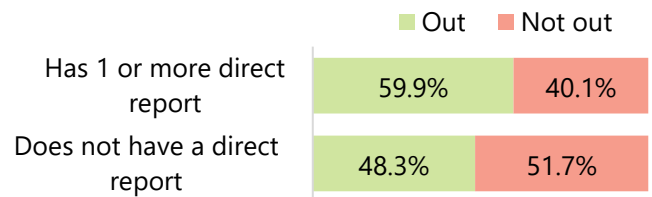
Employees in leadership team roles are 67.1% more likely to be 'out' than 'not out'. The further from the leadership team an employee sits the less likely they are to be 'out' in the workplace. This can be exacerbated further by the time a person has been in the organisation, which is shown with workforce

entrants are more likely to be 'not out' in the workplace by 21.6%, and also significantly more likely to have been with the organisation for less than 1 year (68.4% of new workforce entrants advised they have been with their org less than one year, whereas in all other levels of seniority, participants with this tenure is between 12.2% (level 1), and 20.2% (level 3).

Employees who manage others (have 1 or more direct reports) are 19.2% more likely to be 'out' in the workplace than employees without direct reports.

Respondents in Full time paid roles are 64.8% more likely to share about their diverse sexuality. Those in part time roles are the least likely to be 'out' at only 51.9% and are only 7.8% more likely to 'out' than 'not out'.

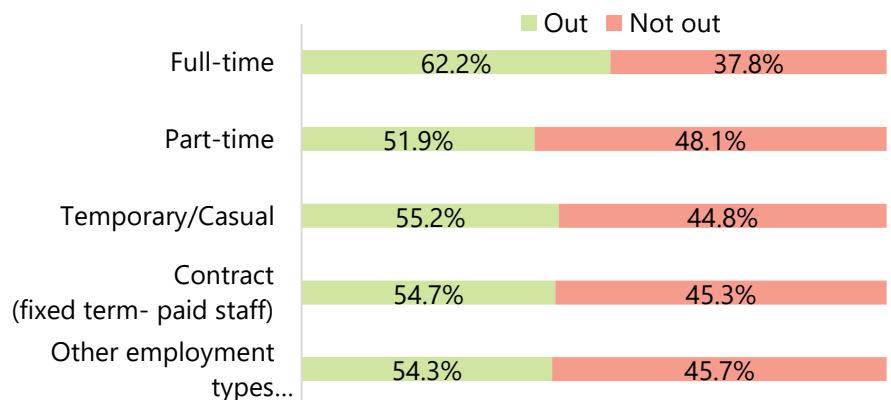
**Manager status & 'outness'**



Individually these statistics show some of the factors that contribute to a person's willingness to be 'out' in the workplace, and while it is difficult to look at all these factors holistically, the data shows that these factors are interconnected. Employees who have been with their organisation for less time, who are in less senior positions, and who are not in full-time roles are less likely to feel comfortable being 'out' in their organisation than those with long tenure, in more senior, in full-time roles, etc.

The impact of Leadership members being 'out', or active allies will be explored in a later Practice Point.

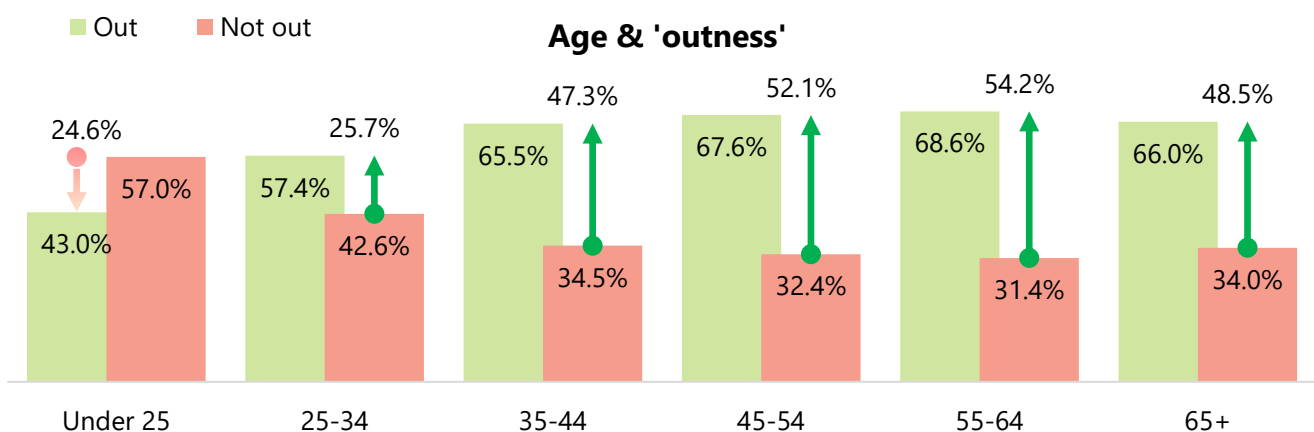
**Employment basis**



**Age**

Respondents of diverse sexuality within the AWEI Employee survey are most likely to be 'out' when aged over 45. All age groups over 25 are more likely to be 'out' than 'not out', though those under 25 are 24.5% less likely to be 'out' in the workplace. This remains the same trend as has been seen in the past 2 years.

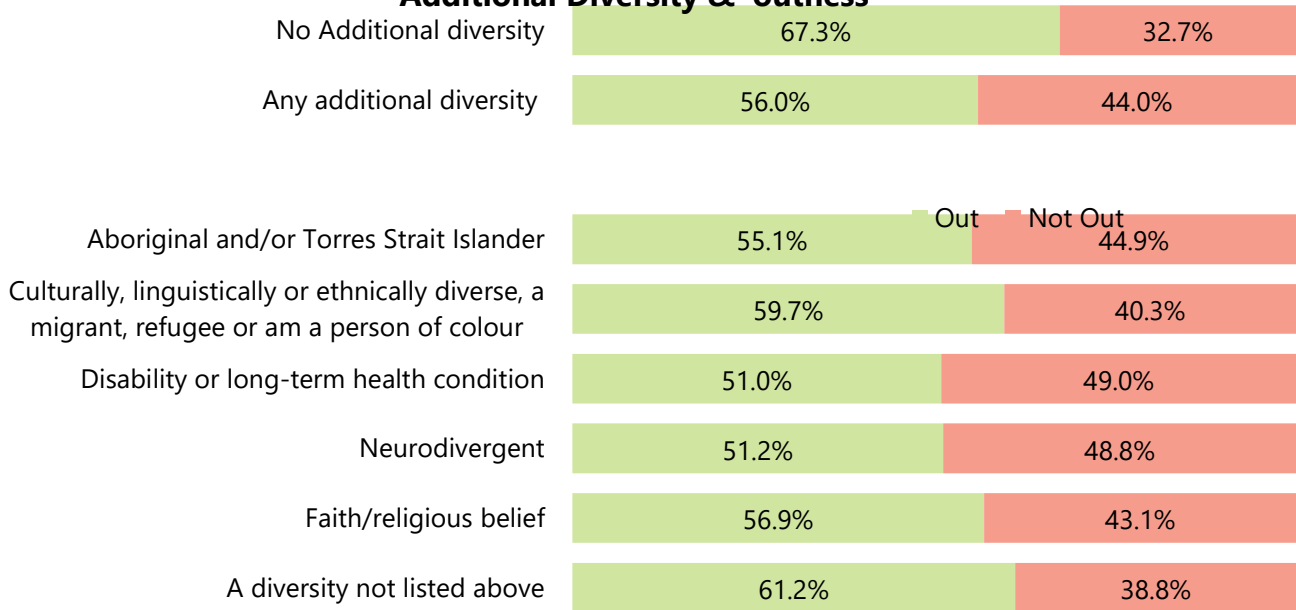
**Age & 'outness'**



Intersectionality with personal attributes

Of respondents of diverse sexuality, 57.2% also identify with another personal attribute or background of diversity. While the majority of these people are 'out', the presence of the additional attribute reduces the likelihood of being 'out' by an average of 20.1%.

Additional Diversity & 'outness'



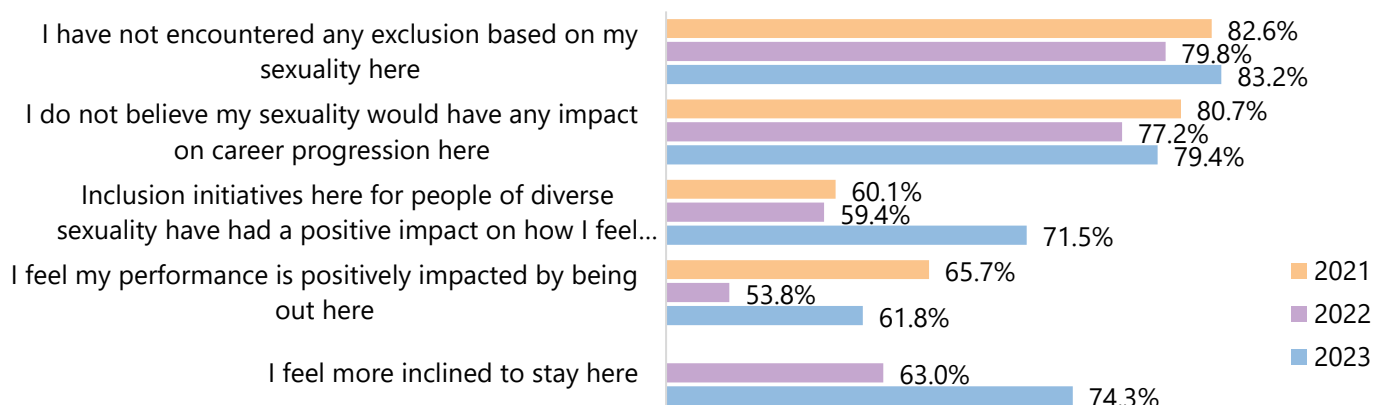
Effects of being 'out' or 'not out' at work

The benefits for people 'out' in the workplace are changing year on year. After a drop last year for those who felt their performance was positively impacted, this metric has returned to higher than 2021 levels.

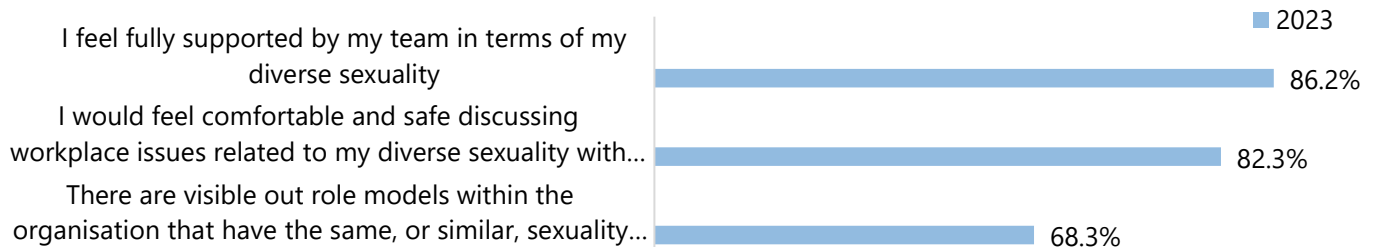
The greatest improvement was people feeling their organisation's inclusion initiatives have had an impact on how they feel about their own sexuality, up 20.4% from 2022.

Feeling inclined to stay with their organisation has also increased from 63.0% to 74.3%.

Benefits of being 'out'

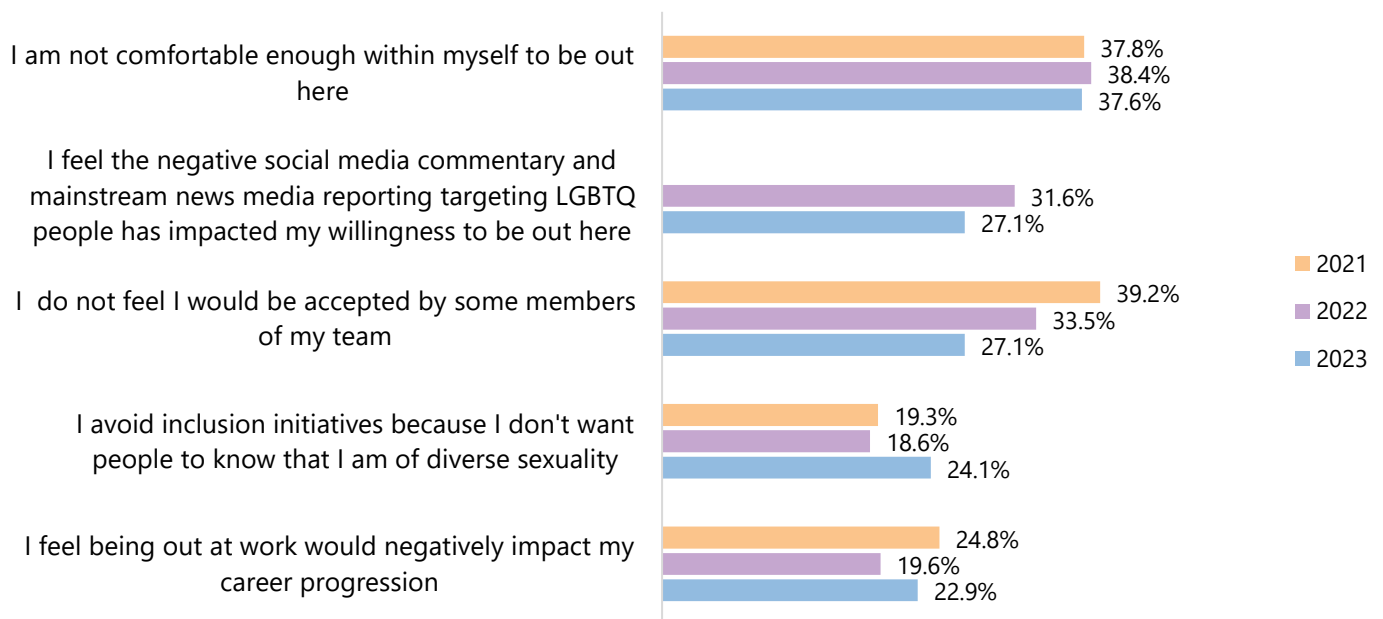


This year we asked respondents to consider 3 more factors, 86.2% of respondents agreed that they felt full supported by their team.

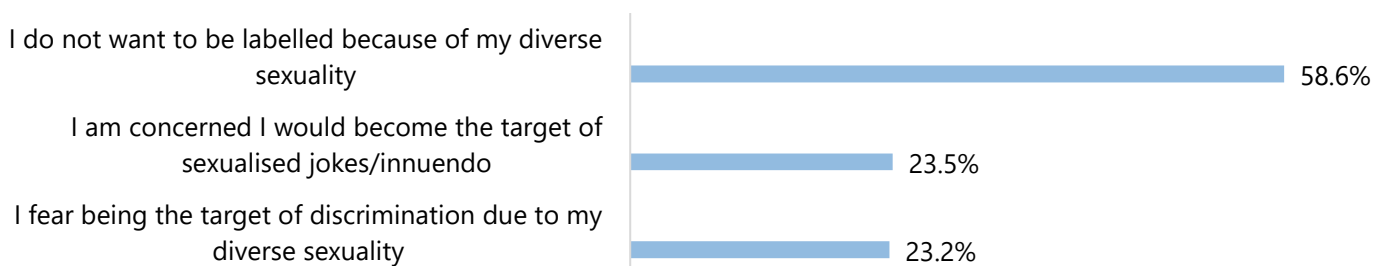


Not being comfortable in oneself remains as the largest and most consistent reason for not being 'out' over the past three years. This is followed by the impact of negative social media and mainstream media reporting impacting their willingness to come 'out' which has dropped 14.1% from 2022 but remains high with over a quarter of respondents agreeing to this statement.

### Why respondents are 'not out'



For the 3 added factors, 58.6% of respondents agreed that they were 'not out' because they did not want to be labelled by their diverse sexuality.





45.6% of those 'not out', and 20.5% of those 'out' in the workplace are still spending time editing conversations or hiding who they are in the workplace. For many, the experience of coming 'out' is not singular, and occurs constantly in line with career progression, changes in staff and with every conversation which references personal life.

### *Beliefs on inclusion*

When looking at the personal beliefs toward inclusion within organisations, respondents of diverse sexuality agree at a higher rate than heterosexual respondents about the importance of organisations working on this area of inclusion (95.6% vs. 87.0%), personally supporting the organisation's work in this area (90.0% vs. 83.4%) and most significantly the believe that there are more than 2 genders (81.3% vs. 56.8%).

Heterosexual respondents are more likely to believe that a person of diverse sexuality or gender would be welcome in the team, and that a person affirming their gender would be supported by the team, and that their organisation is genuinely committed to LGBTQ inclusion.

Respondents of diverse sexuality are more likely to feel their organisation should put more effort into this area. Whether a person is 'out' or 'not out' also changes beliefs, with those 'not out' agreeing a lower rates than others.

Those 'out' are more likely to feel that there is visibility of initiatives, (out: 77.4% vs. 'not out': 69.8%), are more aware of training being made available (out: 66.9 vs. 'not out': 57.2%) and 24.1% more likely to have attended the training within the year.

89.1% of respondents of diverse sexuality feel that training should be mandatory for managers, while only 75.6% of heterosexual respondents agreed.

## Coming out

*"I'm aware of the impact of poor representation and visibility and also of bullying and stigma.*

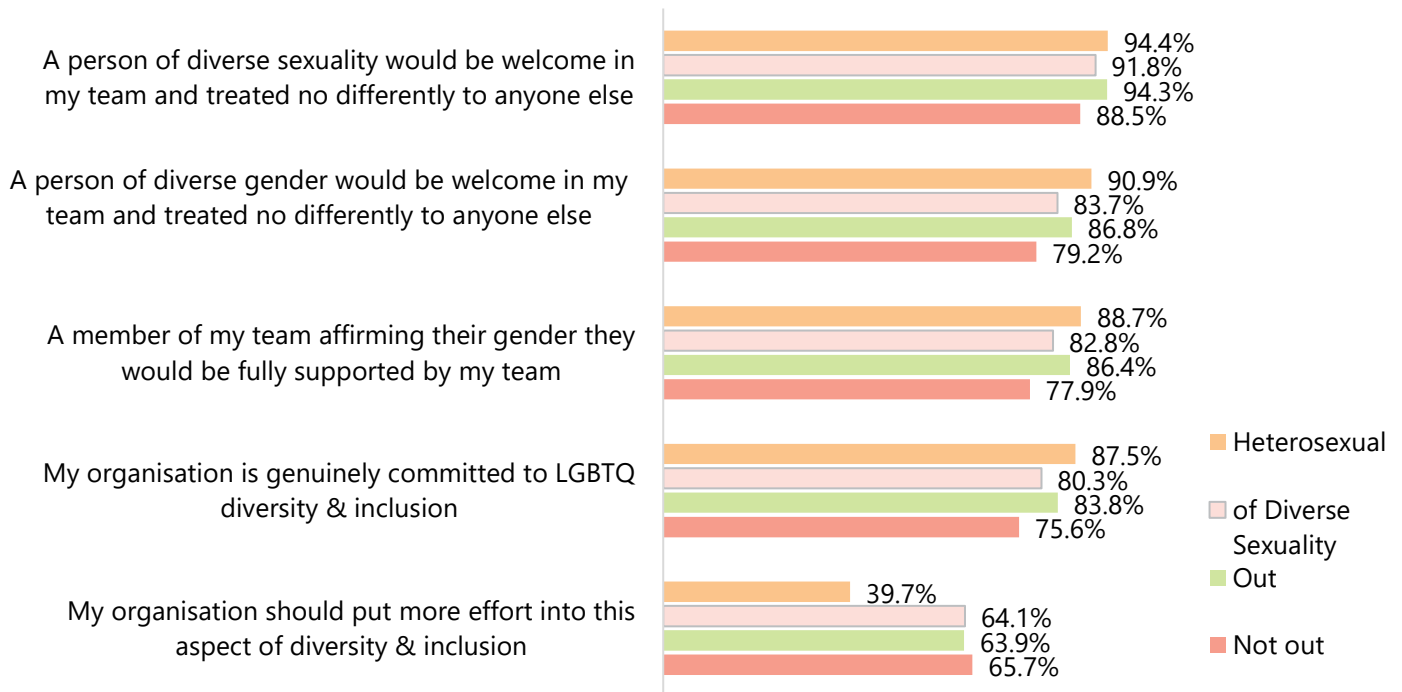
*I am conditioned to self-edit. It occurs naturally as a second-hand response/reflex.*

*I am becoming better and more aware of this and make concerted effort to be openly visible in my sexual identity, in the workplace, whilst still keeping behaviour professional and approachable.*

*Every day that I have a conversation that in any way refers to my sexual identity, I am constantly risk assessing the audience and my safety. In many ways, I'm always coming out, I just get better and faster at the risk assessment."*

*Comments from 2023 – AWEI Employee Survey*

**Beliefs - Heterosexual vs. Diverse sexuality**



*Working with others*

98.1% of respondents of diverse sexuality, compared to 91.3% of heterosexual respondents are comfortable with colleagues talking about their same gender or gender diverse partners at work. When considering colleagues bring their same-gender/ gender diverse partner to work events there is a 5.3% difference.



There is no significant difference between those 'out' or 'not out' to these questions.

*Health and Wellbeing*

As an entire cohort, people of diverse sexuality are still reporting lower levels of safety, health, and wellbeing than heterosexual respondents with between a 3.0% and 9.5% difference.

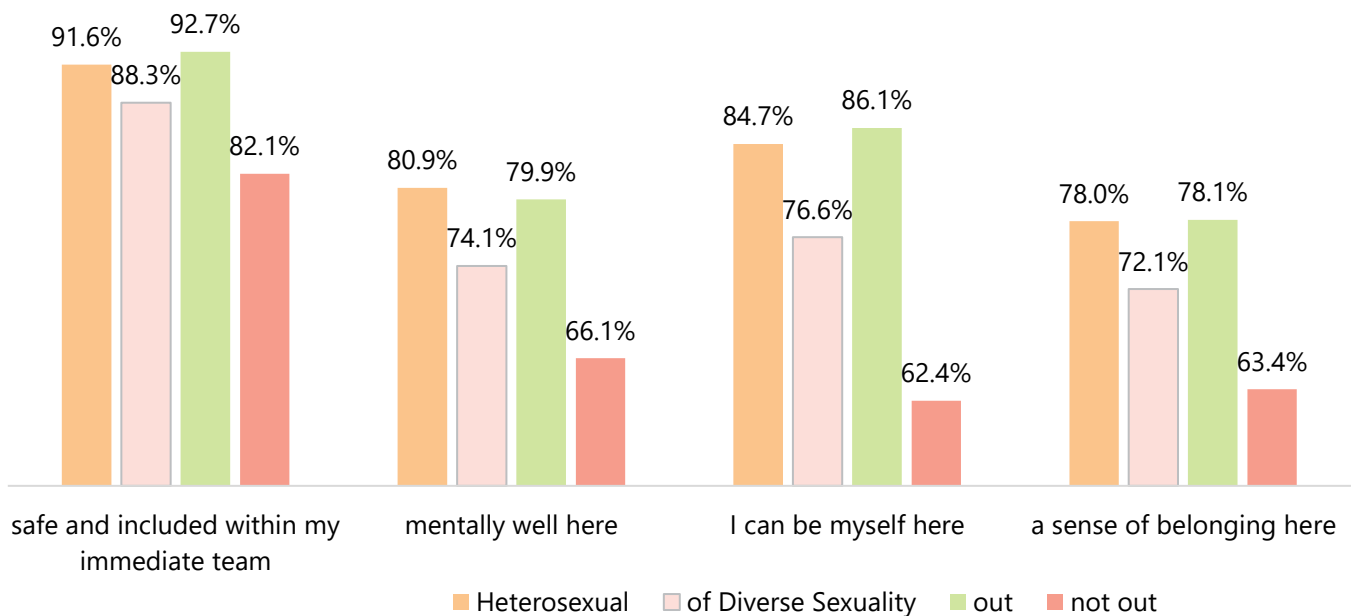
These feelings are further affected by not being 'out' in the workplace.

Those 'not out' are 27.5% less likely to feel they can be themselves, 18.8% less likely to feel a sense of belonging and 17.2% less likely to feel mentally well.

Compared to last year, those 'out' are advising greater levels to all questions, while there are mixed results for those 'not out' where 3 of 4 questions have had a reduction in agreement.

Importantly, those out in the workplace are advising the same or better levels of health and wellbeing than heterosexual colleagues.

**I feel...**

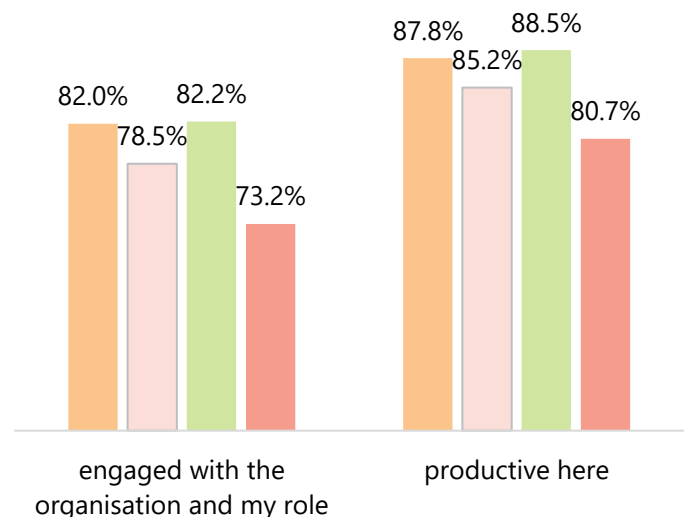


*Productivity and Engagement*

Feelings of productivity and engagement with organisations has stayed steady for the past three years. Again, we see that heterosexual employees are experiencing higher levels of engagement and productivity compared to their colleagues of diverse sexuality.

When looking at the experiences of those 'not out', this year's respondents. We see a decline of 0.5% feeling engaged with their organisation, but a rise of 1.9% of respondents feeling productive.

**I feel...**

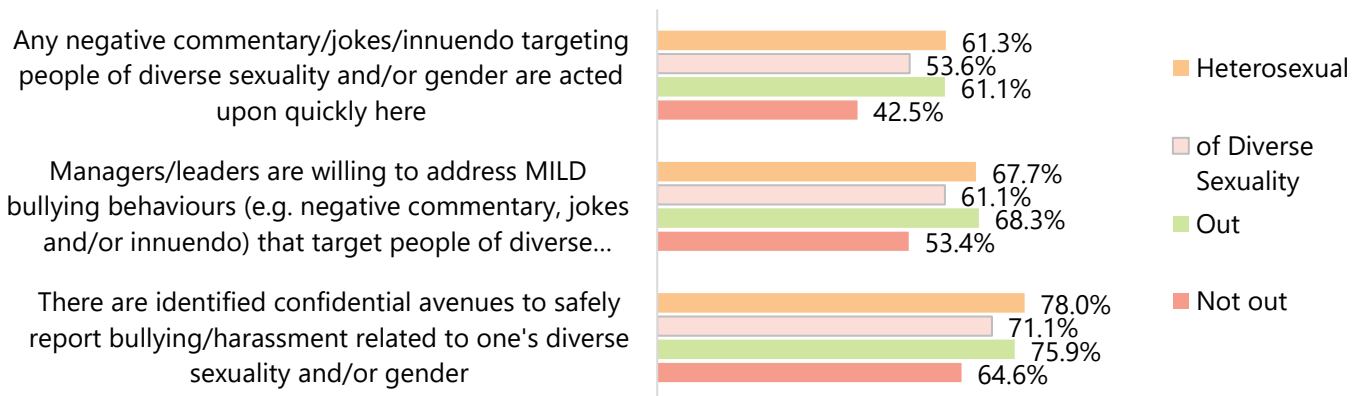


*Discrimination, Bullying & harassment.*

Within the last year, 12.0% of those 'out' in the workplace, and 9.9% of those 'not out', have been the target of mild bullying in the workplace (workplace incivility<sup>ii</sup>) targeting their diverse sexuality. Additionally, 2.2% of people of diverse sexuality have been the target of more serious bullying and/or harassment.

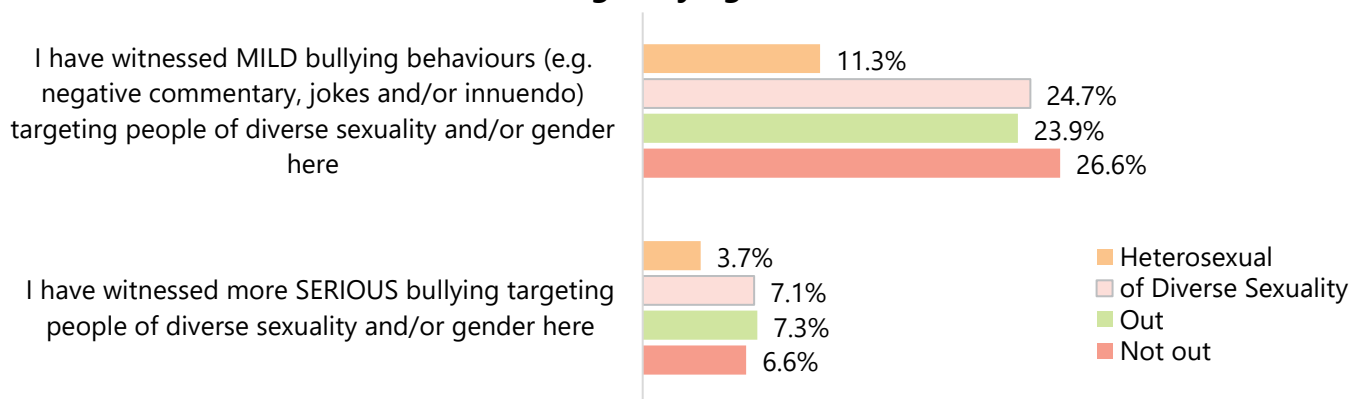
People of diverse sexuality are 12.6% less likely to feel that their organisations quickly address negative commentary/jokes/innuendo targeting people of diverse sexuality and/or gender. This rate rises to 30.7% less likely when the person is 'not out' in the organisation.

**Addressing bullying and harassment**



People 'not out' are also more likely to agree to having witnessed mild workplace incivility behaviours, and to feel that there was no action taken when they last witnessed this, while for those 'out' in their organisation 54.6% said that they personally called out the behaviour. 53.2% of 'out' respondents also advised calling out more serious behaviours when seen.

**Witnessing bullying and harassment**



Overall, 18.6% of people of diverse sexuality have experienced discrimination in the past due to their diverse sexuality (and /or gender) in their current organisation. For those 'out' in the workplace this comes in 64.2% more likely at 22.4% compared to those 'not out' at 13.6%.

Further analysis on negative behaviours, action when witnessed or experienced, and reporting of these experiences will be contained in a future Practice Point.

Feelings on organisation inclusion

74.4% of respondents agreed they have had a positive experience of inclusion within their immediate work area. 87.5% of those 'out' agreed to having a positive experience, while, for those 'not out', this falls to 55.3%.

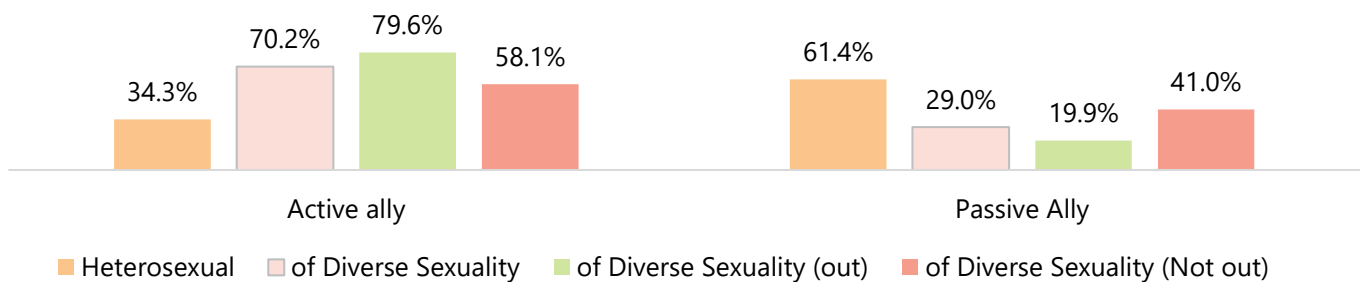
This year there was a 4.6% drop around agreement to positive executive endorsement of sexuality and/or gender diverse inclusion initiative. Those 'out' in the organisation agreed 25.5% more than those 'not out' ('out': 77.5% vs. 'not out': 61.7%)

Allyship

People of diverse sexuality are 104.5% more likely to be an active ally than heterosexual respondents. (Diverse Sexuality: 70.2% vs. Heterosexual: 34.3%).

Those 'out' in the workplace, are 37% more likely to be an active ally. Those 'not out' at work are 105.7% more likely to be a passive ally. Less than 1% of all people of diverse sexuality consider themselves 'not an ally' ('out': 0.5% vs. 'not out': 0.9%)

Allyship & Outness



The main factor for not being an active ally across all groups is lack of time.

After this, comparing those 'not out' to those 'out', those 'not out' in the workplace are more likely to agree by:

- 175.7% to " People thinking that I am of diverse sexuality or gender" ('out' 8.3% vs. 'not out': 22.8%)
- 177.5% to "Concern of being ridiculed or the target of jokes..." ('out' 7.9% vs. 'not out': 21.9%)
- 84.8% to " would be frowned upon by someone/people with influence over my career" ('out' 7.9% vs. 'not out': 14.6%)

The impact of allies in the workplace is significant for people of diverse sexuality. 63.0% of respondents agreed that active allies have positively impacted their sense of inclusion within their workplace, 17.3% greater than last year and 27.6% more than 2021. This correlates to the increase in respondents who feel they are active allies. As we have also seen an increase this year in the number of active allies responding to the survey, further analysis on this and other impacts of Allyship will be covered in a future Practice Point.

## Conclusion

The AWEI Employee Survey for 2023 sees fewer people of diverse sexual orientations out to everyone in the workplace in percentage terms, but also fewer people out to no one. People who identify as gay or lesbian are more likely to be out at work than other sexual orientations.

People with diverse sexualities in metropolitan areas are still more likely to be out at work compared to those in regional Australia. People with longer tenure, those who are older and those with more senior positions are more likely to be out at work. Conversely, people with an additional diversity are less likely to be out at work.

The data shows that employees with diverse sexual orientations have poorer health and wellbeing outcomes than heterosexual employees. However, those who are out at work report better outcomes and are more engaged and say that they are more productive.

The top three reasons for not being out at work are not wishing to be labelled, not feeling comfortable within themselves, and fears of not being accepted by colleagues; the effects of negative social and mainstream media is also a significant contributor. A visibly inclusive workplace environment can make real strides in changing these.

## Actions

1. Ensure that your workplaces have visible signs of LGBTQ inclusion, including posters, lanyards, ally pins, media backgrounds.
2. Ensure that your external facing website includes visible examples of your LGBTQ inclusion, especially on your careers pages.
3. Promote your LGBTQ employee network to all employees.
4. Increase your number and visibility of active allies by providing more training, creating ally guides and providing ally lanyards and pins.
5. Celebrate LGBTQ days of significance and encourage senior leaders to attend and share their ally stories at them.
6. Capture LGBTQ inclusion data and use it to inform your inclusion plans and activities.
7. Report externally and internally of the successes you have made in increasing LGBTQ inclusion.

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<sup>i</sup> [Standard for Sex, Gender, Variations of Sex Characteristics and Sexual Orientation Variables, 2020 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/standard-for-sex-gender-variations-of-sex-characteristics-and-sexual-orientation-variables-2020)

<sup>ii</sup> Workplace incivility refers to “mild” behaviors- is a low-key, low-intensity act of negative treatment that includes, but is not limited to, jokes, innuendo, insults, rude comments, use of inappropriate language, etc.

More serious bullying and harassment - is all other behavior's including, but not limited to, direct verbal attacks, psychological (threats, manipulation or stalking), social (spreading rumors etc. that are deliberately mean, humiliating, or exclusionary), physical (pushing, tripping, or hitting), cyber (using email, mobile phones, chat rooms and social networking to abuse, humiliate or threaten.)