


LAKE
MACQUARIE
CITY



**DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND
BELONGING STRATEGY
2023-2025**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Lake Macquarie City Council dhumaan Awabakala ngarrakal yalawaa, yalawan, yalawanan.

Lake Macquarie City Council acknowledges the Awabakal people and Elders past, present and future.

Dhumaan ngayin ngarrakalu kirraanan barayidin.

We remember and respect the Ancestors who cared for and nurtured this Country.

Ngarrakalumba yuludaka bibayilin barayida baaduka.

It is in their footsteps that we travel these lands and waters.

Wording by the Aboriginal Reference Group and translated by Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre.

CEO'S MESSAGE

Lake Macquarie City Council is an organisation with people at its heart. From the 217,000 residents who call our city home, to the 1300 staff who deliver the projects, programs and services our diverse and vibrant community need each day. Every one of us has unique skills, perspectives and stories to share.

We all benefit from this difference. There are countless workplace studies that demonstrate that diverse workplaces not only enjoy positive and inclusive cultures, but they also deliver greater outcomes for customers. A diversity of knowledge and ideas, coupled with a commitment to collaboration, fosters innovation and unlocks new and creative ways of overcoming the complex challenges our city faces now and into the future.

A more diverse and equitable Lake Macquarie City Council means we are better placed to deliver on our vision of creating 'an even better Lake Macquarie City'.

Our city is growing. We are welcoming more people from different parts of the world and different walks of life to enjoy the unique lifestyle and opportunities Lake Mac has to offer. To provide the best possible service to our city, Council's workforce should reflect the community we serve. Belonging, both at Council and in our wider community means that people

feel respected for who they are, connected to the people around them, and able to make a meaningful contribution to their community.

Our Diversity, Equity and Belonging Strategy will help us to achieve this. The strategy will guide our systems and processes to ensure they are fair and equitable and that we are able to recruit and retain a broad cross-section of our community. Encouraging our leaders to be inclusive and to foster a sense of belonging will ensure that our employees feel welcomed, safe and valued, and are able to deliver the meaningful contributions that will continue to drive all that we do.

A commitment to diversity, equity and belonging is reflected in our organisational values. It's about how we work together every day. It requires us to lead at all levels by demonstrating the behaviours that will help shape the future of our organisation and our city.

I encourage you to take the time to explore this strategy and consider the role you can play in making Lake Macquarie a more welcoming, inclusive, diverse and equitable city and council.

Morven Cameron
CEO Lake Macquarie City Council



VISION AND GOALS

OUR VISION

Here at Lake Mac, our vision is to build a culture where we celebrate the diversity in our workforce and community and encourage our employees to bring their whole self to work and feel connected to our organisation and city. Our goal is to create a workforce that reflects the community we serve.

To build the culture for all, we need to address diversity, equity and belonging at all levels- individual, team, leader and our systems and processes. In order to achieve, four strategic priorities have been identified for the current three-year plan.

1. Inclusive workplace culture

Build a culture of diversity and belonging where all employees feel respected, supported and engaged; feel they have a voice and are encouraged to be themselves at work.

2. Diverse, vibrant teams

Create diverse vibrant teams where all members feel psychologically safe, experience transparent decision making, encourage different perspectives and focus on continuously improving.

3. Organisational systems and processes

Design organisational systems and processes that align with diversity and equity throughout the employee lifecycle including recruitment, onboarding and induction, performance management, development and remuneration.

4. Inclusive Leadership

Develop leaders who enable inclusion and a sense of belonging by promoting and advocating for the value of diversity within the organisation while consistently and consciously role-modelling inclusive behaviours.



LAKE MAC DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND BELONGING ROADMAP

In order to achieve the vision of a diverse and inclusive culture here at Council, the following roadmap will be followed for each of the next three years



2023-2024

Build awareness and commitment



2024-2025

Provide skills and capability



2025-2026

Embed and evaluate

Year 1

Build awareness and commitment

The first year will focus on building leader and employee commitment to diversity, equity and belonging through growing awareness and understand why diversity, equity and belonging is important to Lake Macquarie City Council and our community.

Year 2

Provide skills and capability

The second year will leverage on the awareness and understanding of diversity, equity and belonging, by providing the skills and capabilities that individuals, teams and leaders need to build a culture of belonging throughout Council.

Year 3

Embed and evaluate

The third year will continue to embed skills and capabilities while allowing time to monitor and evaluate the progress of the organisation, whilst preparing Council to create a new strategy for the following three years.

WHO WE ARE

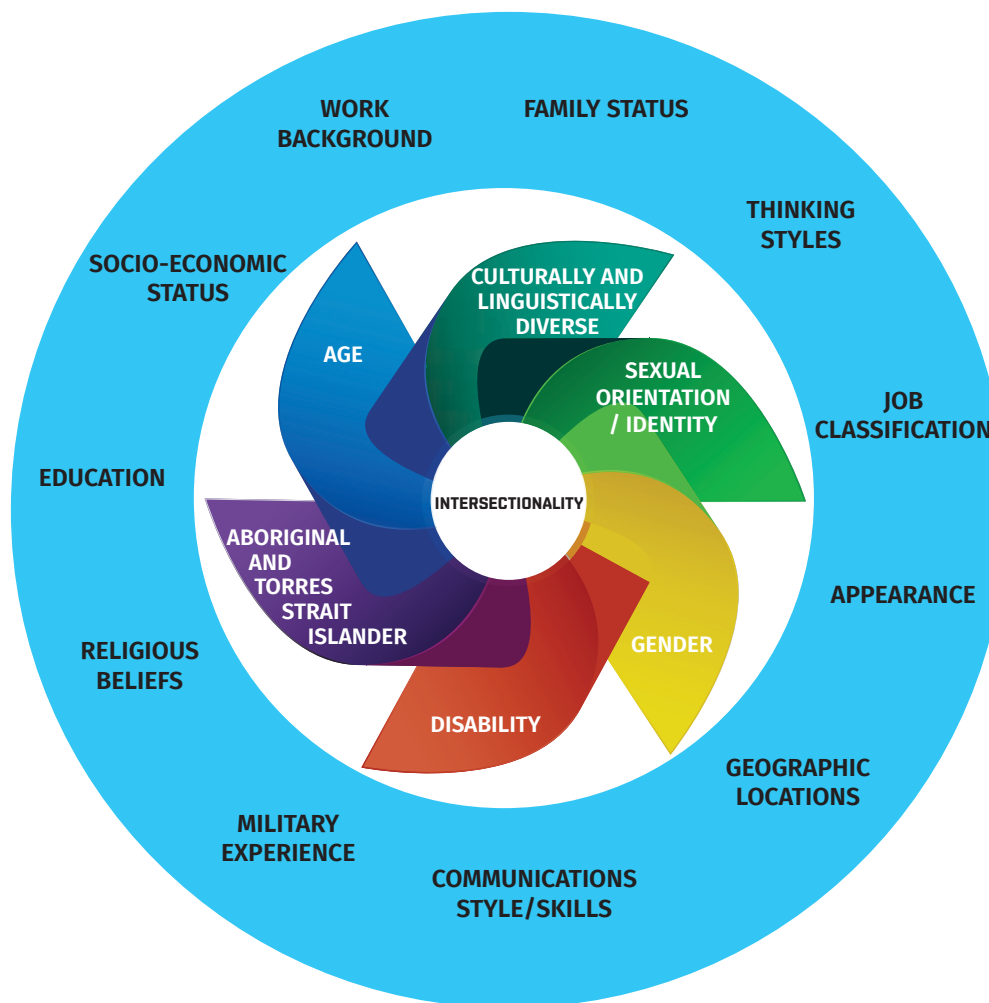
We are a diverse workplace with more than 160 unique trades and professions. We trust and respect the unique knowledge and experience each of us brings to the table, and actively encourage our staff to engage, participate and have a voice during their time at Council.

We champion inclusion every day, creating a welcoming environment for all our staff, and providing opportunity for more people to enjoy a fulfilling career with Council through innovative programs and partnerships.

We're proud to be driven by the values of equity and belonging and believe a diverse network of employees is best equipped to understand and meet the needs of the people who live, work and visit our city.

WHAT IS DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND BELONGING?

Lake Mac values diversity, equity and belonging and acknowledges it is a complex, changing concept. To understand and fully communicate this concept the Lake Mac Diversity Wheel has been created to represent the multilayered complexity.



WHAT IS DIVERSITY?

Diversity refers to all of the differences within people that make them unique and shape how they perceive the world. These differences may be visible or invisible, fixed or may change throughout a person's life.

While many forms of diversity exist, they can be largely grouped under two categories- identity diversity or cognitive diversity (Serendis Leadership 2022).

Identity diversity refers to the characteristics or demographics that make up a person's identity. Differences such as age, people with a disability, sexual orientation / identity, gender, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and culturally and linguistically diversity may define how a person perceives and experiences the world around them. These are represented in the 'pinwheel' of the above diagram.

Cognitive diversity, in contrast, refers to the differences in how we perceive and think about the world and include the external experiences that shape people such as work background, appearance, political ideology, military experience, religious beliefs, socio-economic status, education or geographic location. These are listed around the edge of the identity diversity.

Diversity acknowledges that people within a particular identity group may have different experiences, and therefore different needs, often referred to as **Intersectional diversity**. Intersectional diversity acknowledges that some people may belong to more than one diverse group and will therefore have more complicated experiences.

Our goal is to create a workforce participation rate that reflects the community we seek to serve.



WHAT IS EQUITY?

Equity refers to fair, just and impartial access to all opportunities, systems and processes that are free from harassment, bias, discrimination towards all people, regardless of their culture, age, gender, disability, marital status, etc.

Being equitable means acknowledging and addressing structural inequalities — historic and current — that advantage some and disadvantage others.

WHAT IS BELONGING?

To belong means to feel included as a valued part of the organisation. Also known as inclusion, it refers to creating an environment where all people, feel safe to bring their authentic selves to work. It means valuing our differences and developing a culture and a sense of community where everyone can participate and thrive. This means individuals are respected, supported and engaged; have a voice; and are provided with opportunities to contribute.

Inclusion in a workplace is achieved* when a diversity of people feel that they are:

RESPECTED for who they are and able to be themselves

CONNECTED to their colleagues and feel they belong

CONTRIBUTING their perspectives and talents to the workplace

PROGRESSING in their career at work (have equal access to opportunities and resources).



*Diversity Council of Australia

BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND BELONGING FOR LAKE MAC

Diversity, equity and belonging have been shown to have benefits to employees, the organisation and to the community we represent. In a literature review conducted by the NSW Public Service Commission the following organisational benefits were identified:

BENEFITS TO EMPLOYEES

The NSW Public Sector Committee states that all employees benefit from diversity and inclusion, not just those traditionally considered to be part of a diverse community, as everyone covers different aspects of themselves when they enter the workplace. These benefits can include:

 <p>Greater employee wellbeing and psychological safety.</p>	 <p>A feeling of being accepted and valued by others for who they are. This can reduce employee's anxiety and increase their energy and engagement by feeling free to bring their whole selves to work.</p>	 <p>Permission to be themselves, to trust their manager respects them enough to participate and have a difference of opinion all contribute to the feeling of psychological safety.</p>	 <p>Stronger professional networks and friendships.</p>
 <p>Through respecting differences and feeling accepted and valued employees can form a stronger professional network.</p>	 <p>Reduced conflict, bullying and discrimination.</p>	 <p>Conflict in the workplace can be minimised through a culture of awareness and understanding while acknowledging and respecting difference growing and developing as a person.</p>	

Experiencing diversity provides opportunities to develop personally and professionally by: expanding their world view and perspective; improving empathy; becoming more open minded; and increasing understanding of other's differences.

BENEFITS TO THE ORGANISATION



Increased productivity

Diverse workplaces and inclusive leadership have been found to be associated with higher levels of individual commitment and engagement, job satisfaction and career optimism. These measures have been used as indicators of organisational productivity with most of the research relying on employee perceptions.



Attract and retain employees

Diverse workplaces when coupled with inclusion have been found to have the capacity to attract the best talent from the widest possible pool, measured mainly through existing and future employee perceptions. This in turn leads to lower employee turnover. Conversely, the costs of not promoting diversity and belonging can be significant in terms of high turnover, absenteeism and even litigation.



Satisfied customers

Organisations that commit to diversity have a better chance of aligning their workforce with their customer base and improving the quality of their customer experience. The research suggests that organisations which reflect the communities they serve are better able to understand, connect and appeal to their customer base. This theme was the most commonly reported benefit of diversity and inclusion in our review of other public sectors in Australia and some overseas jurisdictions.



Better decision making and innovation

The literature indicates that diversity can foster innovation, improved decision making and creative problem solving by drawing on the broadest range of perspectives and experiences. Diverse thinkers can help to guard against group think and expert overconfidence, increase the scale of new insights and are better able to identify individuals who can best tackle the most pressing problems.



Improved financial performance

Diverse and inclusive workplaces experience better financial performance through increased innovation and productivity, better decision making, less risky decisions and improved financial practices through less mistakes and fraud.

BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY



Improved representation in the community

Diversity, equity and belonging can help to ensure that all voices are heard and that all members of the community are represented. This means that the decisions made and that any planning that occurs is in the best interests of the entire community, resulting in improved services.



Strengthened community relations

Having a diverse and inclusive workplace can mean that relationships with different groups in the community can be strengthened as it fosters better understanding and respect for different cultures, backgrounds and perspectives. When people from different backgrounds come together, they can learn from each other and collaborate in a more unified and harmonious way. Diversity, equity and belonging can also create a sense of belonging and acceptance which can help to strengthen relationships between members of the community.



Better customer satisfaction

A diverse workforce provides a welcoming and vibrant environment for our community. Council employees will be stronger at communicating, showing empathy and understanding the needs of our customers.





STRATEGIC LINK

This Diversity, Equity and Belonging Strategy, is Council's EEO Management Plan which is required under Section 345 of the *Local Government Act*, Preparation and implementation of EEO management plans. Development and delivery of the strategy is an action within our Workforce Management Strategy 2022-2026. It also links to our:

- Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2021-2025
- Aboriginal Community Plan 2019-2023
- Culturally Diverse Lake Mac Plan 2021-2024

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND BELONGING IN LAKE MAC

COUNCIL'S WORKFORCE PROFILE

216,428 people called Lake Macquarie home in 2022, making our city the second largest regional city in NSW by population. Our population is expected to grow by 28,000 people by 2036, creating an opportunity for Lake Mac to strive to have a workforce which reflects our community.



104,311

Males in Lake Macquarie LGA

109,529

Females in Lake Macquarie LGA

11,759

Aboriginal and/or
Torres Strait Islander



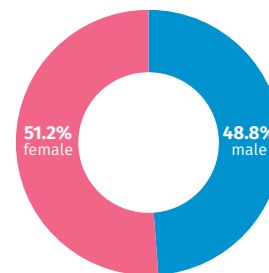
14,113

People with a profound or
severe disability

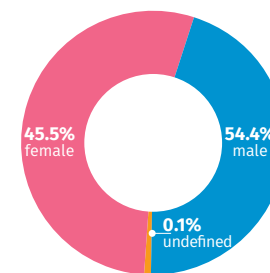


20,000

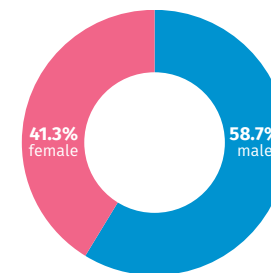
Culturally and linguistically
diverse backgrounds



Lake Macquarie
LGA



Lake Macquarie
City Council 2023



Lake Macquarie
City Council 2018

5.5%**

Lake Macquarie
LGA

3.3%*

Lake Macquarie
City Council 2023

1.2%

Lake Macquarie
City Council 2018

6.6%**

Lake Macquarie
LGA

1.1%*

Lake Macquarie
City Council 2023

0.7%

Lake Macquarie
City Council 2018

10%

Lake Macquarie
LGA

4%*

Lake Macquarie
City Council 2023

3.8%

Lake Macquarie
City Council 2018

* Figures are based on the current data provided by employees.

** Data sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Retrieved from 2021 Census latest release.

CURRENT STAGE OF MATURITY

This strategy utilises the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI) Diversity and Inclusion Maturity Model to assess our currently level of maturity.

LEVEL 1: THE WAY WE COMPLY

Stay within the law. Regulatory compliance. Risk management.

- Leader and employee responsibilities.
- Anti-discrimination laws.
- Workplace Gender Equality Agency requirements.
- Workplace health and safety legislation (anti-bullying, employee well-being).

LEVEL 2: THE WAY WE CHANGE MINDSETS AND BEHAVIOURS

Strategic approach beyond compliance. Business case in place. Leadership support.

- Diversity, inclusion and equality clearly defined and part of organisation strategy.
- Quick wins and raising awareness e.g. D&I events calendar.
- Targeted programs to attract and retain diverse talent and address unconscious bias.
- Delivering and great execution are critical elements.
- Each agenda uniquely sponsored.

LEVEL 3: THE WAY WE DO BUSINESS

Inclusion built into operating principles. Moved from leader or function owning to everyone owning. Holistic. Sustainable.

- In the DNA of the organisation.
- Fundamental to the way the organisation works.
- Diversity lens across every business practice - full integration into every process.
- Diversity and inclusion informing future work design and flexibility.
- Leading difference and inclusion.
- Understanding exclusion.
- Striving for a consistent 'lived experience' across all employees within your context.

Lake Mac currently sits at a Level 1 'the way we comply' organisation and is moving towards a Level 2 organisation as we focus on changing people's mindsets and behaviours. We are focused on ensuring that we comply with all laws and regulations within our policies and processes, have laid the groundwork for improving diversity, equity and belonging. As such a strategic approach towards identifying and implementing quick wins, raising awareness and changing the mindsets and behaviours of our people will remain the focus for the next three years.

This strategy aims to shift the stages of maturity across all four strategic from Level 1 'The Way we comply' to at least a Level 2. Subsequent strategies will endeavour to shift diversity, equity and belonging from 'the way we behave (level 2)' to 'the way we do business (level 3)'.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT



ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Employee feedback was received through online survey open to all employees.

The Inclusion Pulse Survey was open from 17 October 2022 to 4 November 2022 with a variety of communication methods used to encourage survey participation.

The survey was completed by 357 employees or 28 per cent of our workforce.



Key strengths identified

- Psychological safety.
- Support, curiosity, problem solving and development in teams.
- Women experience higher levels of inclusion than men, as do people in more senior roles.
- Inter-team collaboration is another theme that scores positively.



Key opportunities to enhance

- Deepen awareness and conviction of the value inclusion and diversity can bring to Council.
- Providing feedback to employees and the communication of decisions and performance assessment.
- Lack of survey participation - lack of understanding that everyone is diverse and the benefits of diversity, equity and inclusion to all employees.



OBJECTIVES / TARGETS

YEAR 1 - 2023-2024

The first year will be focused specifically on building awareness and understanding of diversity, equity and belonging across Council, highlighting the benefits to our employees and by extension, to our community. The objectives for the first year include:

STRATEGIC FOCUS	ACTIONS
	1.1 Establish an advisory group which is representative of the diversity of our workforce to progress the implementation of the strategy
	1.2 Support the advisory group to develop a yearly action plan populated with training, events, and other activities to build awareness and engagement with diversity and belonging concepts and acceptance
	1.3 Create a diversity, equity and belonging intranet page that contains resources designed to support employees in encouraging diverse and inclusive practice as well as employees who may be experiencing issues
	1.4 Provide input into the calendar of significant days, incorporating events, employee stories, internal communications and linking to the SBS Diversity and Inclusion modules available to all staff
	1.5 Undertake the requirements for and gain formal recognition as a bronze level Skilled Workplace for Mental Health First Aid Australia
	1.6 Recommend inclusion of an award that supports Diversity, Equity and Belonging in the Annual Employee Excellence Awards
	1.7 Create an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander acknowledgement email signature
	1.8 Include a statement that recognises employee's responsibility to create an inclusive workplace in all position statements

STRATEGIC FOCUS	ACTIONS
2. Diverse, vibrant teams	2.1 Prepare resources for managers which educate and inform them on accessibility and accommodations for people with a disability including physical, cognitive and mental disabilities
	2.2 Create training about diversity, equity and belonging that includes foundation concepts such as terminology, the value of diversity in teams and the role of unconscious bias and psychological safety
	2.3 Highlight diverse teams from across Council on the Intranet with a focus on how they benefit from the diversity and how they foster belonging
	2.4 Develop resources to support leaders and teams in their understanding of working with employees who are neurodivergent
3. Organisational systems and processes	3.1 Update recruitment training and policies to include a focus on the benefits of diversity and unconscious bias compulsory to all selection panel members
	3.2 Provide inclusive signage in Council staff amenities
	3.3 Implement universal design principles into all systems and processes to foster equity
	3.4 Develop leading indicators to measure maturity of diversity, equity and belonging across the organisation
	3.5 Design a robust process to collect and store current employee demographic diversity data
	3.6 Conduct an audit of all internal training for accessibility and inclusivity
4. Inclusive Leadership	4.1 Create a diversity, equity and belonging intranet page that contains facts sheets, toolkits and other resources designed to support managers in encouraging diversity and inclusive practice
	4.2 Include a statement that reflects the accountability for creating a workplace culture of belonging that is diverse and equitable in all leadership position statements
	4.3 Roll out the Inclusive Leadership online module to all people leaders in the organisation



YEAR 2 - 2024-2025

STRATEGIC FOCUS	ACTIONS
Organisational Systems and Processes	Design a robust process to collect and store employee demographic diversity data in support of privacy legislation change
	Commence review and updating our style guide, imagery, and branding to ensure we are using inclusive language and style
	Develop reasonable adjustment internal procedures to support new, existing and staff returning to work requiring reasonable modifications to safely perform their role
Inclusive Workplace Culture	Conduct a review of training for increasing cultural safety across the organisation for consideration in future corporate training plans
	Evolve and strengthen the structure and function of the subgroups of EDAN where employees can influence outcomes through lived experience commencing with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Disability groups
	Investigate how Council can provide, improve and promote inclusive, safe spaces in Council facilities for all employees which may include gender neutral bathrooms, with ablution facilities, parents room, quiet spaces, prayer rooms and inclusive signage`
	Establish a Females in Non-Traditional roles network to identify and address current needs, career development goals and attract more women into trade
	Continue to add additional resources to our Diversity Equity and Belonging intranet page
	Investigate how to include inclusive practice in how Council reviews and writes policies, procedures and guidelines
	Explore Welcome Here project by ACON to use for Lake Mac facilities
	Review current recruitment process to remove barriers for accessibility and equity for applicants including completion of Year 2 of the Disability Confident Recruiter program and review of wider opportunities for inclusion.
Diverse and Vibrant Teams	Create a series of playlists in LinkedIn Learning incorporating inclusive leadership, unconscious bias, inclusive language and other areas
	Deliver bi-monthly Diversi-Teas to promote different focus areas of diversity
	Maintain 20 per cent of our employees as Mental Health First Aiders
	Special Project – inaugural Local Government Symposium 2025 with focus on Inclusion and Diversity
	Consider methods to integrate visible support and promotion into diversity equity and belonging culture within Lake Mac including IDAHOBIT badge.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

WE WILL ACHIEVE SUCCESS IF WE:

Make progress to build an awareness and understanding of diversity and belonging across Council.

Increase participation of employees to share their stories with council and our community.

Continue to break down barriers for diverse groups to apply for roles at Council and have equivalent opportunities for career progression and professional development to support retention.

Increase the number of employees sharing their personal diversity data with Council, demonstrate trust, acceptance and engagement.

PROGRESS ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND BELONGING AT COUNCIL WILL BE MEASURED THROUGH:

Engagement by the number of employees involved in sharing relevant stories and content communicated across the organisation.

As the action plan is developed through the employee led advisory group, key deliverables and actions will be included and reported to our Senior Leadership Network on a quarterly basis and in the Annual Report.

Monitoring Voice Pulse Survey results relating to diversity, equity and belonging.

An increase in employee's willingness to provide personal diversity and belonging information, including demographic data, and openness in sharing personal stories.

Effectiveness of the 2023-2026 strategy will be evaluated as part of the development of the 2026 strategy.

Analyse progress on the four strategic priorities areas against the Korn Ferry model stage of maturity.



REFERENCES

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