University of Cape Town

Staff Inclusivity Survey 2025

Executive Summary

Introduction

The *InclusionIndex* 2025 represents the second institutional staff inclusion survey conducted at the University of Cape Town, following the inaugural *InclusionIndex* in 2019. The 2025 survey serves as a formal retest of the 2019 baseline, enabling the university to measure longitudinal change, identify areas of sustained progress, and surface persistent challenges requiring systemic attention.

The 2019 survey formed a foundational dataset for UCT's broader inclusivity and transformation strategy. The 2025 cycle provides an opportunity to assess the cumulative impact of initiatives undertaken since then and to evaluate whether inclusion is being experienced more consistently across faculties and PASS divisions.

This Executive Summary presents the methodology, overall quantitative findings, lowest and highest scoring inclusion factors, areas of greatest improvement, the emerging narrative themes from qualitative engagement, and a summary of the recommended way forward.

Methodology

The *InclusionIndex* 2025 used a mixed-methods design combining a comprehensive quantitative staff survey with targeted qualitative engagement.

The *InclusionIndex* instrument measures multiple dimensions of inclusion, including Leadership, Values, Recruitment, Advancement and Development, Dialogue, Belonging, Bullying and Harassment, Discrimination, Safety, Emotional Safety, Reward and Recognition, and Emotional Wellbeing.

The quantitative survey was followed by focus groups, one-to-one interviews, and written submissions. Twenty in-depth interviews were conducted across academic and PASS staff categories, alongside facilitated group discussions in selected units. These engagements provided context to the statistical results and helped identify systemic patterns shaping staff experience.

In 2025, 46% of staff participated in the survey across faculties and PASS divisions, exceeding the 41% of 2019 and providing a robust basis for comparison with the 2019 baseline.

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The findings are interpreted through a complexity lens, recognising that institutional culture emerges from the interaction of structures, leadership behaviours, power dynamics, and everyday relationships rather than from policy alone.

Overall Results: 2019 - 2025 Comparison

The 2025 results show a moderate uplift in overall staff experiences of inclusion compared to 2019. Most inclusion dimensions demonstrate incremental positive movement. These include overall Inclusion, Leadership-related indicators, Dialogue, Safety, Emotional Wellbeing, and Emotional Safety.

The most notable improvements between 2019 and 2025 are observed in the areas of Values and Institutional Belonging. Staff report stronger alignment with institutional values and a greater sense of connection to the university than in 2019. These represent important strengths upon which further transformation efforts can build.

However, not all dimensions improved. The Discrimination scale did not follow the same upward trajectory as other scales, indicating that experiences of discrimination remain persistent and require targeted attention.

Two areas continue to stand out as the most significant institutional concerns: Bullying and Harassment, and Advancement and Development. These remain among the lowest scoring inclusion factors in 2025, reinforcing that psychological and interpersonal harm, as well as perceived fairness in career progression, remain key barriers to full inclusion.

Mean Scores by Inclusion Factor

The table below summarises the institutional mean scores for each inclusion factor in 2019 and 2025.

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Inclusion Factor	2019 Mean	2025 Mean	Direction of Change
Overall Inclusion	6.64	6.89	Improved
Executives	6.21	6.45	Improved
Direct Manager	6.73	6.94	Improved
Values	7.34	7.79	Significant improvement
Recruitment	5.63	5.82	Slight improvement
Advancement & Development	5.41	5.55	Remains low
Fitting In	7.29	7.44	Improved
Bullying & Harassment	4.88	4.96	Remains lowest
Dialogue	6.32	6.58	Improved
Institutional Belonging	7.56	8.09	Significant improvement
Emotional Wellbeing	6.48	6.66	Improved
Safety	6.58	6.79	Improved
Emotional Safety (new in 2025)	n/a	5.47	Emerging concern
Discrimination	5.72	5.70	Flat trend
Reward & Recognition (new in 2025)	n/a	5.63	Moderate

The lowest three inclusion factors in 2025 are Bullying and Harassment, Advancement and Development, and Emotional Safety. These dimensions reflect concerns about treatment, progression fairness, and fear of speaking openly.

The highest scoring factors in 2025 are Institutional Belonging and Values. Staff report strong commitment to UCT, dedication to their work, and enjoyment of working at the university. These high belonging scores coexist with frustration about fairness and psychological safety, reflecting a paradox within the institutional culture.

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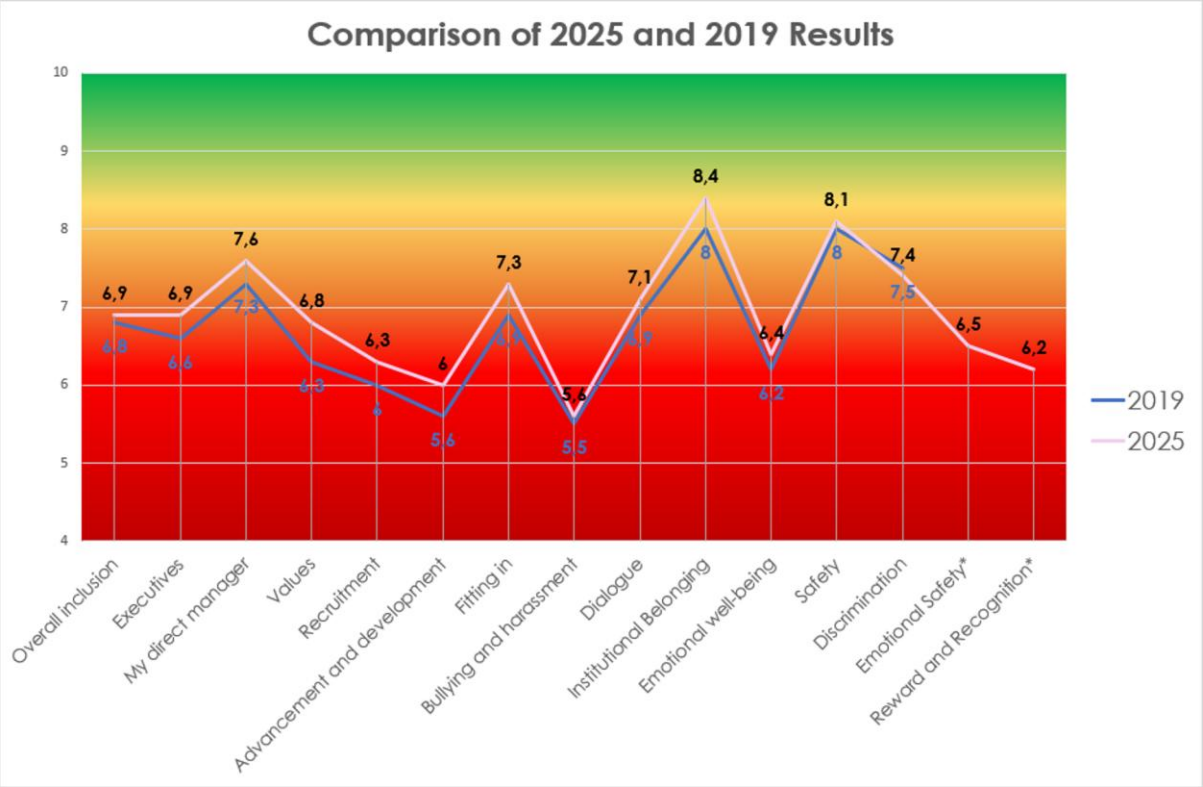
Key 2019–2025 Comparison Graph



The comparison graph illustrates the moderate uplift across most dimensions from 2019 to 2025, alongside the relative stagnation of discrimination and the persistently low scores in bullying and advancement-related factors.

Emerging Narrative Themes

The qualitative phase of the *InclusionIndex* surfaced a set of interrelated themes that help explain the statistical patterns and illuminate the lived experience behind the data.

1. **Policy–Practice Gap.** While transformation and inclusion policies are widely recognised as robust, staff report inconsistency in everyday enactment, particularly at line-management level. The gap between policy intent and lived practice remains a central barrier.
2. **Leadership Capability and Accountability.** Inclusion progresses where leaders demonstrate fairness, transparency and care, and where they are willing to hold difficult conversations. Where management is experienced as gatekeeping, inconsistent or overly procedural, trust erodes.

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3. **Psychological Safety.** Fear of retaliation, hesitation to express views openly, and uncertainty about reporting processes continue to constrain dialogue and participation, particularly in hierarchically structured environments.
4. **Uneven Access to Advancement.** Perceptions of opaque or constrained progression pathways, especially among PASS staff and designated groups, reinforce concerns about fairness and opportunity.
5. **Pride and Paradox.** Strong institutional commitment and pride coexist with frustration about relational strain and inequity, creating a dual narrative of belonging alongside dissatisfaction.
6. **Fragmented Good Practice.** Inclusive practices and positive leadership examples exist across the university, but they remain unevenly distributed and insufficiently embedded at system level.

A Way Forward

UCT has established the formal architecture for transformation and inclusion, including executive oversight structures and strategic integration into Vision 2030. The 2025 Inclusion Index demonstrates that the next phase of transformation requires a shift from policy articulation to consistent behavioural enactment.

Priority attention should focus on strengthening leadership capability and accountability, reforming advancement and promotion systems to remove structural bottlenecks, and addressing bullying and harassment through clearer thresholds, survivor-centred processes, and visible accountability.

Inclusion must also be embedded into workload management, resourcing decisions, and human resource design, ensuring that fairness is experienced in everyday operational realities.

The progress since 2019, particularly in values alignment and institutional belonging, demonstrates that meaningful change is possible. The strategic imperative now is to convert incremental improvements into systemic consistency, so that inclusion is not experienced unevenly or episodically, but as a shared and lived institutional norm across the University of Cape Town.

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