

## Chapter 5

### Indigenous Recruitment in the APS

5.1 Indigenous employment in the APS is a priority area for the APS Commission. The APS Commission advised the Committee that an indigenous employment working group has been formed, with its findings expected to be published later in 2003. The group is looking at initiatives undertaken by a number of agencies in the last few years with a view to evaluating them and producing a 'better practice guide' for indigenous recruitment, including of indigenous graduates. The APS Commission told the Committee:

We would like to work with them to try and evaluate which strategies seem to be working the best, both from an attraction point of view but also more particularly from a retention point of view, and provide some good practice guidelines to other agencies...I guess it is a combination of, from our point of view, some good practice guides and certainly helping where we can with graduate recruitment on the indigenous side.<sup>1</sup>

5.2 In further information provided to the Committee, the APS Commission said other areas being investigated by the working group included:

- informing agencies of the need for an indigenous recruitment and retention strategy in their succession planning (including the issue of access to 'mainstream' APS jobs);
- new indigenous cultural diversity awareness training programs (to be offered to agencies by the Commission);
- new career paths for indigenous employees without graduate qualifications;
- partnerships between agencies with specific indigenous program responsibilities, and other agencies (and within agencies between areas with such program responsibilities and other program areas), to foster career development to 'mainstream' areas of the APS;
- development strategies to meet the leadership and professional development needs of indigenous APS employees at a number of levels (to be offered to agencies by the Commission);
- collaborative ventures with other organisations offering leadership skills development, for example the Australian indigenous Leadership Centre;<sup>2</sup>
- facilitation of a network of indigenous staff.; and

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1 Ms L Tacy, APSC, *Committee Hansard*, 14 August 2002, p.10

2 Answers to questions on notice, September 2002, Q.15, p.23

- examination, with a number of bodies, of additional programs focussing on learning and development and leadership that would be particularly targeted to indigenous employees.

5.3 In response to questioning, the APS Commission advised that it did not intend to set formal targets for indigenous recruitment. It considered that it was more important to determine trends and compare and evaluate agencies' experiences, with a view to determining what initiatives worked best and 'where they could be replicated', rather than setting formal targets.<sup>3</sup> Regarding 'benchmarking', it intended to investigate whether better measures of the success of initiatives could be developed, and how agencies could be assessed against these.<sup>4</sup>

5.4 *APS Workplace Diversity* reports contain indigenous employment by agency. Questions had been raised about the quality of indigenous employment data due to problems concerning self-identification by indigenous staff. The APS Commissioner advised that some agencies (for example, the Australian Customs Service) had taken action to increase employees' understanding of the benefits of self-identification. It was expected that this would result in improvements to the quality of the data.<sup>5</sup>

5.5 Agencies differ in the extent to which their business focus provides particular opportunities for employment of indigenous people. For example, AQIS, an agency in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australia (AFFA) provides employment to a number of indigenous people in the Northern Territory and Queensland. Its efforts in forging good relationships with indigenous communities in northern Australia have recently been recognized. AFFA told the Committee that:

AFFA's staffing profile reflects the organisation's commitment to workplace diversity, and to promoting a workplace culture that respects and responds to the cultural diversity of the Australian community. For example, AQIS was recently rewarded with a certificate of commendation in the Australian Public Service Awards for Innovative Practice in Implementing Workplace Diversity. This award was received for the collaborative approach to quarantine that has been forged between AQIS and many indigenous communities across northern Australia - particularly in the NT, Torres Strait and Cape York - where AQIS employs many indigenous staff and is involved in collaborative ventures with a range of indigenous stakeholder groups.<sup>6</sup>

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3 *ibid*, p.11

4 Mr A Podger, APSC, *Committee Hansard*, 11 November 2002, p.242

5 *Workplace Diversity* reports are the second of three companion volumes in the State of the Service series produced annually for calendar years, in accordance with the *Public Service Act 1999*. The others are the *State of the Service* reports and the *Australian Public Service Statistical Bulletins*.

6 AFFA, Submission no 19, p.3

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## Trends in employment

5.6 The APS Commission reported that the proportion of indigenous Australians in the APS had risen from 2.1 per cent in June 1993 to a peak of 2.7 per cent in June 1998, and was 2.4 per cent as of June 2003. The main agencies that provide services to indigenous people, such as ATSIC, DEETYA and DEWRSB, accounted for most of the increase.<sup>7</sup>

5.7 The APS Commission also reported that indigenous employment had improved at the middle and more senior levels in the APS. However, increases at these levels were offset by reduced numbers of indigenous employees at lower levels (APS 1 and 2), the levels with the greatest proportion of indigenous people.<sup>8</sup>

5.8 In the Committee's view, the drop in indigenous employees at these lower levels is significant. Given that the number of staff at these levels across the APS has contracted, the decline in indigenous employees suggests that a higher proportion of indigenous employees are separating relative to non-indigenous staff. As discussed in a later section, higher levels of separation by indigenous employees were previously masked by higher levels of engagements. This appears no longer to be the case.

5.9 The highest proportion of indigenous employees in the APS was in the APS 1-2 categories (3.6 per cent in 2001), and the lowest in the EL1 category (0.7 per cent in 2001). Representation in the SES was 1.5 per cent.

5.10 In agencies with more than 3000 ongoing staff, only Centrelink is near the average (2.2 per cent of total employees were indigenous). In those agencies with 1000 and 3000 employees ATSIC, as would be expected, had a very high proportion of indigenous staff (48 per cent). The Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) and the Department of Employment, Work Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB) are above the APS average.

5.11 ATSIC has a target of 60 per cent indigenous people in its workforce. Strategies in place to achieve this include:

- Standardised selection criteria including requirements demonstrated knowledge and understanding of indigenous societies and culture, and demonstrated ability to communicate sensitively and effectively on matters relating to the delivery of services to indigenous people.
- Advertising of vacancies in indigenous media as well as the usual media outlets.

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7 APSC, *Workplace Diversity Report 2001-02*, October 2002, pp.39-40 – see also: Mr Podger, APSC, *Committee Hansard*, 11 November 2002, p.235

8 APSC, *Workplace Diversity Report 2001-02*, October 2002, pp.39-40 – see also: Mr Podger, APSC, *Committee Hansard*, 11 November 2002, p.235

- Entry-level programs such as the Graduate Program, National indigenous Cadetship Project (NICP), Operative Development Program and Vocational Experience Program.
- Mentoring (particularly for new recruits), and a range of career development programs and training strategies for all staff.<sup>9</sup>

## **Strategies to increase recruitment of indigenous Australians**

5.12 Agencies are able to develop their own strategies and initiatives to encourage the employment of indigenous Australians. However, a number of sections of the Public Service Act and the Public Service Commissioner's Directions are relevant to indigenous recruitment.

- Section 18 of the Act requires agency heads to establish a workplace diversity program;
- Clause 2.13 of the Directions requires agency heads to put in place measures to eliminate employment-related disadvantages on the basis of a number of factors, including being an Aboriginal or a Torres Strait Islander under the meaning of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*;
- Clause 3.2 of the Directions, requires agency heads to:
  - help prevent all forms of discrimination, consistent with Commonwealth law;
  - recognise the positive advantages of, and help make the best of the diversity available in the workplace and the Australian Community;
- Clauses 3.3 to 3.6 of the Directions set out requirements for measuring, evaluating, reporting and reviewing agencies' workplace diversity programs;
- Chapter 4 of the Directions allows agency heads to identify particular opportunities as open to indigenous Australians; and
- Chapter 4 of the Directions relating to merit in employment also states that agency heads have special provisions available to enable them to identify specific opportunities available only to indigenous applicants to encourage the engagement and promotion of indigenous Australians—this is considered to be a 'special measure' under Commonwealth Anti-discrimination law.<sup>10</sup>

5.13 Clauses 3.3 to 3.6 of the Directions note that agencies need to ensure that there are integrated career development opportunities for all indigenous staff, including those in positions with specialised duties and those recruited using specific employment opportunities.

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9 ATSIIC, (Supplementary to Submission no 30), Submission no. 45, pp.3-4

10 *Recruitment of indigenous Australians in the Australian Public Service*, PSMPC, [www.apsc.gov.au/publications01/indigenousrecruitment.htm](http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications01/indigenousrecruitment.htm), p.3

5.14 On 11 May 1999, the Government announced its new indigenous Employment Policy (IEP) aimed at addressing employment disadvantage faced by indigenous Australians. A main element in the policy is the payment by the DEWRSB of a subsidy to employers who provide worthwhile job opportunities to disadvantaged indigenous jobseekers. This includes APS agencies.

5.15 The central program used by APS agencies to improve indigenous Australian representation rates is the NICP which sponsors indigenous undergraduates studying at tertiary institutions.

5.16 The then PSMPC's *Workplace Diversity Report 2000-01* did not report on trends in the number of APS NICP cadets. It is therefore unclear as to whether the numbers of APS NICP cadets was increasing, static or declining. The CPSU considered that the examination of information from APS agencies on the trends in the number of National indigenous Cadets within agencies should be a priority.<sup>11</sup>

5.17 Mr Henry considered that the levels and manner of engagement of indigenous people to the APS needed examination. He considered that there should be 'more emphasis on entry level traineeship-style recruitment, especially for those who identify as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander antecedents' and more effort into career development and management. He stated:

While we do have some vocational education and training positions, graduate administration assistants and the odd cadet position, I believe we could do much better with entry-level recruitment and subsequent career development and management.<sup>12</sup>

5.18 Mr William Towler, Executive Development Officer, National People and Development Unit in ATSIC, said that the NICP was an effective program, but that there were difficulties in getting the message across to indigenous people that they should apply for the cadetships. He considered that there were a range of problems requiring a variety of solutions to ensure that indigenous employment in both mainstream and indigenous-specific areas was increased.<sup>13</sup>

5.19 He emphasized that better understanding was needed amongst indigenous people of opportunities open to them for employment in the APS generally, as well as through special programs.<sup>14</sup> The Committee notes that improvements appear to be needed in dissemination of information, awareness-raising amongst indigenous people and communication strategies.

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11 CPSU, Submission no. 42, p.17

12 Mr Robin Henry, Submission no. 1, p.4

13 Mr W Towler, ATSIC, *Committee Hansard*, 15 August 2002, p.113

14 Mr W Towler, ATSIC, *Committee Hansard*, 15 August 2002, p.114

5.20 The APS Commission supported this view. It stated that a range of strategies should be used to increase indigenous recruitment to the APS include indigenous cultural awareness raising, workforce planning, trainee programs, schemes for non-ongoing APS employees to gain skills and experience, and targeted advertising.<sup>15</sup>

5.21 Centrelink provided information about that agency's recently developed 'indigenous employees action plan' that contained strategies regarding the recruitment, development and retention of indigenous people. It indicated that Centrelink's requirement for personal advisors provided an opportunity to recruit indigenous staff who could work with indigenous clients.

...there was quite a heartening result from our recent recruitment of personal advisers. Some of our most in need customers will be indigenous so we were trying to match the staff to the customer profile. In that respect, we have almost reached a point where 10 per cent of the 453 are indigenous recruits.<sup>16</sup>

5.22 ATSIC told the Committee that it also encouraged indigenous recruitment through its graduate program, the Operative Development Program and the Vocational Experience traineeship. Like a number of other agencies, it also advertised vacant positions in indigenous media, such as the Koori Mail.<sup>17</sup>

5.23 Commenting on an increase in active recruitment strategies for indigenous people across a number of agencies, Ms Lynne Tacy, Deputy Public Service Commissioner, told the Committee that, in addition to cadetships and graduate recruitment drives, DEWRSB had just announced a new contract management program for indigenous people.<sup>18</sup>

5.24 Centrelink, DoHA, Treasury, ACS, EA and DFAT provided information about their participation in the NICP.

5.25 DFAT told the Committee that it had participated in the NICP since 1994. After graduation, cadets were guaranteed an APS3 position in the department and were then encouraged to apply for positions as graduate trainees. Since 1993, DFAT had recruited 18 indigenous graduate trainees.<sup>19</sup>

5.26 Centrelink advised that, over the next two years, it aimed to progress efforts already underway to increase the number of traineeships it offered to indigenous people. The intention was to increase the number of scholarships and cadetships offered to indigenous recruits from ten each this year, to twenty each next year and

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15 *ibid*, p.5

16 Ms C McGregor, Centrelink, *Committee Hansard*, 14 August 2002, p.18

17 ATSIC (Supplementary to Submission no 30), Submission no. 45, p.3

18 Ms L Tacy, APSC, *Committee Hansard*, 14 August 2002, p.10

19 Ms J Ryan, DFAT, *Committee Hansard*, 14 August 2002, p.75

thirty each the following year.<sup>20</sup> The scholarship and cadetship programs would be overseen by the Centrelink Virtual College (CVC) with a view to assessing their effectiveness and, in particular, improving retention of indigenous trainees and cadets.<sup>21</sup>

5.27 DEH advised that ten trainees were recruited in 2001-02 under its indigenous Career Development and Recruitment Strategy, with two based in Canberra and the others across the National Parks in Kakadu, Uluru Kata-Tjuta, and Booderee (Jervis Bay). The emphasis was on attracting indigenous staff who had the potential to expand their skills and progress to senior management levels. It noted that The Parks Australia Division needed to recruit people who could work in remote locations and appreciate the cross-cultural factors applying to parks with Traditional Owners and Joint Management Boards and that it also had obligations to provide employment and development opportunities to indigenous people.<sup>22</sup>

5.28 Treasury advised that it had two indigenous cadets employed under indigenous Cadetship Program operated by DEWR, 'although the number of interested applicants with the appropriate skills [wa]s usually small'.<sup>23</sup>

5.29 A number of agencies providing services to indigenous people, such as ATSIIC, DEWRSB and DETYA, used identified positions where appropriate. The selection process for these positions needed to ensure that applicants have a demonstrated knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies and cultures and an understanding of the issues affecting those peoples. Applicants also needed to demonstrate an ability to communicate sensitively and effectively using appropriation negotiation and consultation skills.

5.30 ATSIIC submitted that 'all positions within the APS that deal with indigenous communities or individual should be classed as 'identified positions'. It noted that, in addition to its own target of 60 per cent indigenous employees, some other agencies also had targets.<sup>24</sup>

5.31 For some agencies, the proportion of indigenous employees reflected the nature of their work and the high level of involvement with indigenous communities. Although indigenous representation has declined slightly since 1997-98, Centrelink employed higher number of indigenous employees than the APS as a whole (3.6 versus 2.4 per cent). Further, in the two northern Australian areas with high

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20 Mrs M Hamilton, Centrelink, *Committee Hansard*, 14 August 2002, p.18

21 Centrelink (Supplementary to Submission no 26), Submission no. 48, p.2

22 DEH, Submission no. 20, pp.1, 5

23 The Treasury, Submission no. 21, p.2

24 ATSIIC, Submission no. 30, p.1

indigenous populations, the proportion of indigenous employees exceeded Centrelink's five per cent benchmark for indigenous representation.<sup>25</sup>

5.32 While it is generally recognised that indigenous employees should, if possible, be employed in areas which involved service delivery to indigenous people, there is no cross-public sector protocol as to how to identify particular positions having the requisite degree of work interface or engagement with the indigenous community. Furthermore, there is no cross-APS protocol as to what criteria should apply to those positions.

5.33 ATSIIC argued that it is important that the drive to increase indigenous representation in the APS should not extend to improving their representation in indigenous specific jobs only, but also to increasing their representation in 'mainstream' positions.<sup>26</sup>

## **Retention trends**

5.34 The Committee notes that the Aboriginal Employment Development Plan places significant obligations on agencies to remove institutional barriers to indigenous recruitment and career development.

5.35 For indigenous people, even more so than for young people in general, the recruitment of large numbers of indigenous employees is not the only solution to increasing indigenous representation in the APS. As in the general case, retention is just as important as recruitment for indigenous people. Indigenous employees need to remain in the APS to improve both their skills and their chances of moving into more senior positions. This suggests that more support is needed for indigenous employees after they are recruited than is currently the case.

5.36 The 1997-98 ANAO report *Equity in employment in the APS* found that 21 per cent of APS agencies had achieved the APS-wide target of two per cent indigenous representation in 1994 and since that time agency composition had been relatively constant. This belied the higher turnover and higher levels of appointment of indigenous staff compared with non-indigenous APS employees.

5.37 The ANAO report also noted that decreasing levels of appointments in the APS overall indicate that 'future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander levels in the APS might decrease'. Further, that 'despite higher promotion rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, they were more likely to resign from the service than others'.<sup>27</sup>

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25 Centrelink, Submission no. 26, p.13

26 Ms S McMartin, ATSIIC, *Committee Hansard*, 15 August 2002, pp.108, 111

27 *Equity in Employment in the APS*, ANAO, Audit Report no.16, 1997-98, p.45



5.38 ATSIIC expressed its concern at the high separation rates for indigenous employees (down from 4.1 per cent in 1999-2000 to 3.1 per cent compared with 2.2 per cent for non-indigenous staff in 2000-01).<sup>28</sup>

5.39 Other agencies agreed that higher levels of indigenous engagements had offset the over-representation of indigenous people in separations. The APS Commission supported the ANAO's conclusion that fewer engagements (indigenous people represented only 1.6 per cent of engagements in 2000-01) could lead to lower representation of indigenous people in the APS. It also stated:

The number of indigenous employees who leave within five years—or, indeed, within one year—is way higher than for non-indigenous employees. The other issue, which we have always known, is that indigenous employment has been particularly focused around particular agencies.<sup>29</sup>

5.40 The CPSU echoed concerns at the possible continuing decline of representation of indigenous people in the APS if the trend to higher proportions of indigenous people in separations compared with engagements continues.<sup>30</sup>

5.41 Given this, the APS Commission indicated its intention to focus initiatives in three areas:

- recruitment and possible alternative pathways apart from lateral recruitment at APS3 and above levels;
- retention, including possible support arrangements and 'whether better learning and development activities might provide a better career path' and so assist retention; and
- differences between and within agencies and whether partnership arrangements might be an option for improving indigenous employment.<sup>31</sup>

5.42 Mentoring strategies are also considered critical for indigenous employees. ATSIIC indicated that its mentoring program aimed to provide new employees, particularly indigenous staff, with role models who could assist and advise on career development and the APS code of conduct.<sup>32</sup> The APS Commission has also developed a series of profiles of indigenous employees in the Public Service across different agencies with a view to setting up role models from amongst indigenous APS staff.<sup>33</sup>

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28 *ibid*, p.55

29 Mr A Podger, APSC, *Committee Hansard*, 11 November 2002, p.242

30 CPSU, Submission no. 42, p.17

31 Mr A Podger, APSC, *Committee Hansard*, 11 November 2002, pp.242-243

32 *ibid*, p.115

33 Mr A Podger, APSC, *Committee Hansard*, 14 August 2002, p.9

5.43 The need for support networks for indigenous employees was emphasized by the Public Service Commissioner who said:

A key issue there is the support that people receive not only in the workplace but also in family support and so on. There are particular difficulties, for example, in people recruited from country areas and regions to work in Canberra and so we do have some need for building networks and support.<sup>34</sup>

5.44 The APS Commission's report *Recruitment of Indigenous Australian in the Australian Public Service* identified other ways in which a workplace could be made more supportive for indigenous employees. These included indigenous staff networks and community networks; promotion of the work of indigenous staff and work unity within the agency, cross-agency indigenous networks, support networks, mentoring arrangements, and identifying and eliminating any culturally inappropriate management or work practices.<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

5.45 The Committee supports the APS Commission's initiative to establish an indigenous employment working group to assist development of strategies not only to increase recruitment but, more importantly, to improve retention of Indigenous people in the APS. It notes the range of matters being investigated by the group but considers that there appears to be a fundamental need to improve information dissemination, awareness raising and communication strategies to indigenous people about employment opportunities in the APS.

5.46 In particular, opportunities available through the National Indigenous Cadetship Program appear not to be well-understood, nor does it appear that Indigenous people are aware that they are eligible to apply for general mainstream vacancies advertised in the APS.

5.47 The Committee considers the APS Commission and the indigenous employment working group could play a valuable role in providing appropriate and targeted information about employment opportunities to indigenous people in all areas of Australia.

5.48 The Committee also considers it important that, as proposed by the APS Commission, better measures of the success of initiatives to recruit and retain indigenous people are developed, with a view to assessing agencies against these.

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34 *ibid*, p.10

35 *Recruitment of indigenous Australians in the Australian Public Service*, PSMPC, [www.apsc.gov.au/publications01/indigenousrecruitment.htm](http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications01/indigenousrecruitment.htm), p.6

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## **Recommendation 9**

**5.49 The Committee supports the APS Commission’s initiative to establish an indigenous employment working group to assist development of recruitment and retention strategies. The Committee recommends that the APS Commission give priority to implementing and monitoring these initiatives and in particular improve information dissemination, awareness raising and communication strategies to indigenous people on employment in the APS.**

5.50 The Committee also strongly supports action by agencies to support indigenous employees so that they remain in the workforce. These actions include providing alternative career pathways, leadership development for different levels of Indigenous employees, facilitating networks of Indigenous employees, fostering partnerships between agencies with Indigenous employees to assist transition to ‘mainstream’ positions, learning and development activities that might provide a better career path and so assist retention; and mentoring strategies.

## **Recommendation 10**

**5.51 The Committee recommends that the APS Commission have a dedicated budget to assist indigenous people to gain employment in the APS. The Committee also recommends that indigenous employees be provided with ongoing intensive support for career development and to improve retention rates.**

5.52 On a broader issue, the Committee is persuaded that APS selection processes are still too ‘interview focussed’ and notes, in particular, the disadvantage at which some candidates (including young people and indigenous people) are placed in such competition, as well as the possible impact on workplace diversity that may result from present processes.

5.53 The Committee is pleased to note that the APS Commission is preparing a kit that will outline a wide variety of possible recruitment and selection processes, with guidance on when different approaches might be used. It supports actions to ensure appointment of candidates based on a broader definition of merit that includes personal attributes and attitudes and a focus on achieving value for money to the organisation. The evidence suggests, however, that agencies need more assistance to be able to aspire to ‘best practice’ in recruitment and selection. The Committee believes that better practice in this area will benefit a range of prospective employees, including indigenous people, and through recognizing their potential will benefit the APS itself.

