

Workplace Diversity

Achieving a Just & Secure Society

The Attorney-General's Department's Workplace Diversity Program for the period 1998 to 2000 was reviewed during the 2000–01 reporting period. As part of the review the Department's performance was assessed against the performance indicators in that Program. The results of two staff surveys—referred to in the previous annual report—formed the basis of the assessment. The results of the analysis are presented below.

Objective 1 Performance Indicator: That by the year 2000, 80 per cent of staff at all levels believe that equity and diversity principles and practices are being applied in the Attorney-General's Department.

- In terms of providing workplaces free from harassment and discrimination, 86–88 per cent of staff gave the Department a medium to high performance rating. It was determined that the 12–14 per cent of staff indicating low performance by the Department in this area would remain a strong focus of attention as harassment and discrimination is more commonly experienced by minority groups.
- In terms of some of the other factors that contribute to employee perceptions regarding the application and practice of equity and diversity principles, 70–80 per cent of staff gave the Department a medium to high performance rating, with 20–30 per cent perceiving low performance. These other factors include, for example, staff and managers being committed to equity and diversity initiatives, staff being consulted about workplace practices, diversity of staff being valued, and staff enabled to effectively balance work and family responsibilities.

The above percentages represent aggregated responses for all classification levels of staff. Results by classification level reveal wider variations in percentages at some classification levels than those quoted. On that basis, given that the indicator sets a target of '80 per cent of staff at all levels', it was determined that the Department had fallen slightly short of meeting this performance indicator.

Strategies to address the shortfall are included in the Department's Workplace Diversity Program for 2001 to 2003 and are detailed in subsequent paragraphs.

Objective 2 Performance Indicator: That by the year 2000, 60 per cent of staff at all levels believe that their skills, experience and qualifications are being maximised to meet work area, branch, division, office, station and corporate goals.

- In terms of recognising and fully utilising the skills of employees, approximately 75 per cent of employees gave the Department a high to medium rating.

It was determined that the Department had met this performance indicator.

Objective 3 Performance Indicator: That by the year 2000, the barriers to diversity in the Department, as identified through an anonymous staff survey, have been substantially reduced.

- Approximately 75 per cent of employees indicated a high to medium rating in terms of being enabled to balance work and family responsibilities. However, in relation to such factors as 'dealing effectively with employees who under-perform', 'open and effective communication within the division' and 'making decisions about people based on merit', there was a number of concerned employees who gave the Department a low performance rating (around 30–50 per cent, depending on the factor).

It was determined that, on the basis of the responses from employees in these areas, the Department could not claim to have 'substantially reduced' the barriers to diversity and therefore did not meet this performance indicator.

Strategies to address identified deficiencies

Performance management: A review of the Department's Program for Performance Improvement (PPI) was undertaken in 2000–01 and improvements made. These improvements included the integration of the Department's generic capabilities into the PPI. The generic capabilities are based on the Public Service and Merit Protection Commission's *Senior Executive Leadership Capability Framework* and define ways of working that foster the application of diversity principles. Training for all employees and managers was undertaken in 2001 to acquaint employees and managers with the changes to the PPI and improve their understanding of how the program is to operate.

Communication and consultation: This issue was discussed at a recent planning conference involving the Department's SES employees. SES employees reported to a General Manager, outlining the steps they will take to improve communication and consultation within their divisions and branches.

Decisions based on merit: To improve application of the merit principle and enhance consistency of approach in recruitment and selection processes, a set of recruitment guidelines (taking account of changes resulting from the *Public Service Act 1999*) has been developed for dissemination to all staff.

Work and life balance: A survey of employees on work and life balance issues was recently undertaken by the Employee Relations Section in partnership with the Department's Work and Family Network. Results of this survey will be used to formulate strategies to assist employees in balancing their work and personal lives more effectively. In addition, a review of workloads is under way within the Department to identify 'problem' areas. This review was agreed with the Department's Workplace Relations Committee—formed to oversee the *Attorney-General's Department Agreement 2000*—following feedback received from employees during the agreement negotiations concerning high workloads and long hours.