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Progress Report on EDP: some gains; more needed

The first Progress Report on the *Equity and Diversity Plan (EDP) for the Public Sector Workforce 2001-2005* is now available.

The Office of EEO has collated the 2002 performance objectives received from almost all the larger public sector agencies—those with over fifty employees—covering 98.5% of the public sector workforce. The collated objectives have been summarised in the Progress Report to the Premier.

Key points of the Progress Report reveal gains for some diversity groups towards reaching the objectives set for 2003 and 2005. Other groups may not be so clearly on target, indicating a need for continued effort by all public sector agencies to achieve the Government's commitment.

Summary points for each diversity group are:

Indigenous Australians: Community representation of Indigenous Australians is 3% and the public sector workforce objective of 2.9% for 2005 looks like being achieved. However, there has been a decline in the number of Indigenous Australians employed above Level 6 and that trend needs to be reversed. The objectives set by agencies indicate many are making considerable effort in this area.

People with Disabilities: There continues to be good distribution of people with disabilities across all levels of the public sector. The Equity Index is close to the ideal of 100. However, planned agency increases are below what is required to achieve the 2005 objective of 3.6% (community representation is 4%) and proactive strategies are required from agencies.

People from Culturally Diverse Backgrounds: Distribution continues to be good across all levels. Actual representation for 2002 indicates that progress is on target for achieving 2003 objectives. However, agencies have been cautious in setting objectives for this diversity group and should be more confident about setting achievable goals.

Women in Management: The 2005 objective for Management Tier 1 (CEOs) has already been achieved, but women remain under-represented at Tier 2 (corporate executive). Representation across all levels is slightly below the EDP objectives and additional effort will be required if they are to be achieved.

Youth (less than 25 years): The public sector objectives for 2003 and 2005 will be met or exceeded if agencies achieve the gains planned for the percentage of young people.

The Government is committed to developing an equitable and diverse public sector workforce that matches the community at all levels and enables employees to combine work and family responsibilities.

The *Equity and Diversity Plan* identifies incremental progress to achieve these priorities. The Office of EEO is continuing to develop support strategies for specific diversity groups to assist agencies increase representation.

Director's Comment

I am encouraged by seeing so much effort being made to meet the objectives set by the Government's *Equity and Diversity Plan for the Public Sector Workforce 2001-2005*. It is clear that many others share the commitment to developing an equitable workforce that matches the diversity of our communities.

The results shown by the 1st Progress Report are reasonably positive, especially for women at CEO level, people from culturally diverse backgrounds and young people (aged less than 25 years).

However, I am concerned that the planned agency increases for the representation of people with disabilities are below that required to meet sector objectives. I would strongly encourage you to re-visit the EDP objectives set by your agency for people with disabilities and consider proactive strategies to increase the objectives.

My office is working to develop a support strategy for the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities. This strategy will complement the support strategies already released for Indigenous Australians and women in senior management.

Noela Taylor
Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment

Guide for employing people with disabilities

People with disabilities are currently under represented in the public sector. The Government's *Equity and Diversity Plan Progress Report – April 2003* shows that the planned agency increases are below what is required to achieve the sector objectives. The Premier indicates that this is cause for concern and proactive strategies are needed.

So how is your agency tracking?

Are you struggling to attract and encourage people with disabilities to respond to your job advertisements? Managing diversity and encouraging people with disabilities to join your agency requires a flexible and inclusive strategic human resource management plan. While there are many strategies, this article will look at three areas that may assist you to reach your target audience.

Review your job descriptions

Firstly, look at the positions you are trying to fill. Are they too rigid and inflexible? Are they isolated from other positions? Would a person with disabilities make the assumption that—because there are some aspects of the position that they would be unable to perform—they would not be competitive?

When preparing JDFs, don't look at positions in isolation. Think about combining tasks differently across positions. Try to move away from assumptions that a particular method of work or activity is critical to the position. Be flexible in your approach.

Approach service providers

Secondly, consider using special measures to enable your agency to work with specialist recruitment agencies so that positions are designed to match the abilities of individuals with a disability.

Guide for employing people with disabilities (cont.)

Approaching a number of providers and following a competitive process will ensure that the requirements of the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984* and the *Public Sector Standards in Human Resource Management* are met in terms of maintaining an open, accountable and equitable recruitment process.

Identifying positions for people with disabilities can increase employment opportunities and help to recognise that direct experience of a disability, and a proven commitment to assisting people with disabilities, can provide your agency with a depth of experience and understanding that would be difficult to obtain in other ways.

Advertising with direction

Thirdly, look at your targeted advertising. Do people with disabilities feel they have the opportunity to apply for positions in your agency? Are you making it clear in your advertisements and utilising the skills of specialist recruitment agencies to target people with disabilities?

When preparing your advertisement, include a statement that “people with disabilities are encouraged to apply” and/or include a statement along the lines of “appropriate modifications may be made to the workplace or the duties of the position to meet the needs of a person with a disability who is competitive in the core duties of the position.”

Applicants should also be encouraged to identify any appropriate modifications that may be required to enable them to demonstrate their abilities. These measures indicate that your agency is committed to providing opportunities for people with disabilities and it recognises that employment practices may need to be adapted and reasonable workplace adjustments may need to be made to accommodate people with disabilities.

After preparing the advertisement, the next step is to ensure that it is marketed to the target audience. Advertise vacant positions in publications where people with disabilities are likely to see or hear about them. Step outside the traditional recruitment techniques and form a partnership with specialist providers and relevant government agencies to encourage a more diverse range of candidates and ensure a greater pool of people with disabilities is available in the applicant pool.

There are over 53 disability employment agencies that provide free services to employers to help them link to job-seekers with disabilities. There are 30 agencies in the metropolitan area and 20 regional agencies. Most of these agencies will match clients to appropriate positions and provide assistance and support to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities.

Contact details and information about the full range of services provided by the disability agencies can be found by contacting the Disability Recruitment Coordinator, EmployAbility (telephone: 08 9400 5146; website: <http://employability.ecu.edu.au>).

EmployAbility is a not-for-profit service provided by Edith Cowan University Service Professions (Joondalup campus) and funded by the Department of Family and Community Services.

Case studies: people with disabilities

Win/Win examples

Corporate Information Project Officer—Workcover

Linda Penfold is employed as a Corporate Information Project Officer with WorkCover in Shenton Park. She enjoys her job and the independence that goes with it. The workplace is easy to get to from her home and is a friendly environment. Her job involves entering all the books from the library into the computer. She also helps out in the Records section to find and return files.

Linda was born severe to profoundly deaf but no modifications to the workplace were required and the only extra piece of equipment required is a volume control phone.

Linda commenced in the public sector in 2001 as a data entry operator at the former Department of Family and Children's Services. She wanted a job working with computers after completing a business skills course at TAFE.

Linda would like to see more deaf people employed in the public sector as many jobs can be performed independently without necessarily requiring hearing. She would like barriers between hearing and non-hearing people broken down and thinks more people should learn the Auslan sign language, as many are still nervous about speaking to deaf people.

Data Entry Operator—Legal Aid

It was a combination of one woman's positive spirit and an employer's ability to look outside the square that recently made life changes for Jackie Greene.

Jackie has Athetoid type cerebral palsy, the severity of which considerably impedes her movements and speech. Daily tasks most individuals take for granted – such as preparing a meal, eating, drinking from a glass, even speech and walking – require a supreme effort.

However this has not prevented Jackie from living an independent life with her young son in her own home. The only area of life that seemed to evade Jackie was again something commonly taken for granted: being able to do a fair day's work for a fair day's pay.

To achieve this goal Jackie completed units in Business Administration at TAFE, then registered with Bizlink. Bizlink is an employment agency funded by the Department of Family and Community Services. It assists people with disabilities to secure and retain quality employment.

Jackie sat and passed the public service exam using a scribe from Bizlink to assist with recording her answers. A short work experience at Legal Aid WA demonstrated that she has a positive attitude and 100% accuracy. Jackie was offered a contract to work part-time on a productivity-based wage.

Using a modified mouse and keyboard, Jackie works as a data entry operator in a busy team environment.

“The job is easy, I can do it at my ability because they [Legal Aid] have adapted it to suit my needs”, says Jackie. “I love the fact that I can get out of the house and I feel part of the workforce. I love my job, it has made a huge difference to my life and my co-workers are great”.

Legal Aid's willingness to look at adapting a contract to suit Jackie and 'redesign' the job has allowed Jackie to achieve a life long goal. In return Legal Aid have a more diverse work force, strong team morale and another dedicated, valued employee.

Case studies: people with disabilities (cont.)

Disability discrimination

The following summaries of conciliation outcomes have been quoted from the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission website:
www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/decisions/conciliation/employment_conciliation.html.

Woman refused employment for telemarketing position

A woman who has one eye complained that because of this she had been refused a telemarketing position. The complaint was settled with an agreement to pay \$1000 compensation.

Selection for library job

A man who uses a wheelchair complained that he had been refused a job as a library assistant because the employer thought he could not reach the top shelves without giving him an opportunity to demonstrate that he could do the job. The complaint was settled with an apology, payment of \$2500 compensation and an agreement to improve staff disability awareness training.

Police applicant rejected due to past illness

A woman complained that her application to join a police service had been rejected because she had cancer of the cervix in the past. The complaint was settled with payment of \$14000 compensation and an agreement to review medical criteria for the service.

Adjustment to distribution and collection job

A woman with a lower back problem complained that she had been refused a job involving house-to-house distribution and pick-up because she could not carry heavy boxes. She claimed the employer had failed to consider reasonable adjustment by allowing her to do the job carrying smaller amounts of material at a time. The complaint was settled when the employer agreed to review its selection procedure.

Accommodation of deafness

A woman who is deaf complained of a lack of reasonable accommodation in the workplace including provision of TTY phones, alternatives to audible public address announcements, and lack of interpreters for important meetings. She also alleged harassment by a supervisor for signing with other deaf employees. The complaint was settled with an agreement to provide awareness training for staff and supervisors, to provide for text communication and to pay \$5000 compensation.

Dismissal while in hospital

A chef complained that when he experienced a severe anxiety attack and required seven days sick leave during which he was admitted to a psychiatric hospital, he was dismissed. The complaint was settled with payment of \$55,000 compensation and provision of a reference.

Implications for Employers

These cases illustrate the need for employers to be mindful when dealing with any disability or impairment in the workplace. Under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, it is unlawful for employers to discriminate against a person on the ground of the other person's disability in the arrangements made for the purpose of determining who should be offered employment or in the terms or conditions on which employment is offered. It is also unlawful to deny the employee access; or limit opportunities for promotion, transfer or training, or to any other benefits associated with employment; or to dismiss the employee due to a disability.