

YOUTH AFFAIRS NETWORK OF QUEENSLAND INC.

RESPONSE TO

THE QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT'S

DIVERSITY AT WORK 2001-2006

DRAFT DISCUSSION PAPER

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About the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland

The Youth Affairs Network of Queensland Inc. (YANQ) is the peak community youth affairs organisation in Queensland. Representing over 400 individuals and organisations from Queensland's youth sector, we promote the interests and well being of young people across the state. YANQ advocates for and with young people, especially marginalised and disadvantaged young people, to government and the community. Further, YANQ encourages and participates in the development of policies, programs, projects and research that are responsive to the needs of young people and we promote and support cultural development.

Introduction

Briefly, YANQ, as the Community youth peak, would wish to thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Draft Discussion Paper "Diversity AT Work - 2001 2006". It is commendable that the government is considering the issues and barriers that may affect culturally and linguistically diverse people and their ability to enter into the public service workforce, and I hope that a Government strategy such as this may encourage and show-the-way for non government employers to consider strategies to address similar issues.

I would also commend the whole-of-government focus to maximize the contribution of CALD employees to the Queensland public sector's diverse workforce. I can foresee bonuses and

linkages with other strategies - such as MAQ's Community Relations Public sector training workshop proposal and the work of the community relations plan - which will enhance the commitment to multiculturalism and hopefully make it somewhat easier for a culture shift to implement the Diversity at Work framework.

Response

In these brief comments, I would wish to focus on two specific issues which are important in the context of NESB / CALD young people, but which I believe highlight the need not only for the Diversity at Work framework in the present, but the need to address further whole of government initiatives and approaches to ensure equitable access for young people as they mature and wish to enter the public sector workforce in the future.

The first issue is one of Racism as a barrier to employment, and while I am well aware of significant strategies and positive responses to address racism, it is important to note that NESB / CALD young people have higher rates of unemployment as a population group. Indeed, some groups such as Vietnamese young people are severely under represented in the labour market. Seeto (1991:69) explains this by suggesting that "...birth in a non-English speaking country, limited English language proficiency, recency of arrival and inappropriate educational qualifications for the Australian marketplace" are factors that can act as barriers to employment among NESB / CALD young people and therefore create higher levels of unemployment. Indeed, even for those NESB young people who have successfully secured employment, racism can still effect their ability to fully perform and to even retain employment (YANQ 1993:6).

The second issue, is in regard to language, and the realities that while many NESB / CALD young people have many skills, these are sometimes difficult to present well on paper, through language, and/or communication. Therefore concerns by prospective employers through the selection processes often mean that talented, well qualified people do not get the job.

In many ways, the education system also disadvantages NESB / CALD young people preparing for the transition into the labour market. The National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) in its 1992 report "*A Stitch in Time ~ Strengthening the First Years of School*" recognises basic literacy, numeracy, problem solving ability and commitment to the workplace as work skills needing to be strengthened among school aged students. However an anomaly exists among NESB / CALD students because the education system does not offer as effective an English as a Second Language (ESL) Program as possible because of a lack of resources in this area. This has created a situation where many NESB / CALD young people who lack proficient English language skills are not given the opportunity to fulfill their scholastic potential. This clearly disadvantages them in the area of educational qualifications and preparation for a highly competitive labour market (*Bamborough, YANQ, 1998 ESL Program Issues Paper*). The issues highlighted from the NBEET report married with the current situation for many NESB / CALD young people accessing ESL Program support in Queensland paints a bleak picture.

Again, a whole of government approach which enhances ESL programs for young people will have flow-on effects which ultimately assist in enabling people to enter employment.

BIBLIOGRAPHY/RESOURCES

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