

**Question on Notice
No. 260
Asked on Tuesday, 7 March 2006**

MS MALE asked the Minister for Police and Corrective Services (MS SPENCE)-

QUESTION:

What has the Department of Corrective Services done to address the diverse cultural needs of offenders?

ANSWER:

The Department developed its first action plan to support and celebrate multiculturalism last year. Development of the 2006–2007 multicultural action plan has commenced and continues the work of the first plan in a similar manner.

While the first official plan was developed last year, the Department had already begun working towards supporting and celebrating cultural diversity and the 2005–2006 multicultural action plan sought to build on that work. It sought to develop a unified departmental position on cultural diversity, consolidate the initiatives already occurring, further encourage the occurrence of these initiatives, and begin to look to the future by developing actions for a three-year period. The plan has three key outcomes:

- firstly to foster an inclusive, cohesive and open society that values diversity;
- secondly to ensure that staff from diverse cultures have an equal opportunity to benefit from, and contribute to, the Department; and
- thirdly to ensure that the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of offenders is acknowledged and accommodated where practical.

The plan supports the diverse cultural needs of offenders by promoting development of an environment, amongst offenders and staff, that supports and celebrates diversity and directly supports religious and linguistic needs through particular activities.

Current activities being undertaken by the Department as part of the multicultural action plan 2005 – 2006 to address the needs of culturally diverse offenders include:

- Corrective services facilities support prisoners of various faiths by:
 - allowing spiritual representatives of various religions to visit facilities;
 - approving religious aids such as prayer mats to be kept in prisoners' cells;
 - meeting religious dietary requirements where requested and appropriate;
 - supporting culturally important events; and
 - supplying cultural resources to prisoners from non-English speaking countries in their mother language, including newspapers, books and DVDs.
- Community corrections area offices and corrective services facilities liaise and collaborate with external service providers to meet the needs of offenders from diverse backgrounds. The needs of offenders vary and may include a need for translation services, establishing social contacts with people of their own culture, assisting with experiences of torture and trauma and meeting religious needs.

- The Department of Corrective Services recognises the richness that a diverse workforce contributes to it as an organisation. The Department aims to value and utilise the different experiences, backgrounds and capabilities of its staff to better achieve our business goals and to create an inclusive environment that enables all employees to contribute to their full potential. This is articulated in the Department's "Diversity in Corrections Management Plan 2005-08".
- In an effort to assist gender re-balance at Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre the Department applied for and was granted an exemption to a range of provisions of the Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 that allowed the department to overtly recruit and select women for roles at that centre. That strategy has successfully increased the number of women at the centre which is currently targeted at a 70:30 ratio.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees currently represent 4.2% of all employees at the Department. The whole of government target is 2.4%.
- The Department has identified that recruitment and selection processes do present barriers for diversity groups. Accordingly, the Department has changed its recruitment and selection processes to be more enabling for all diversity groups. Changes to the recruitment and selection process include the removal of discreet selection criteria for positions and adopting a greater focus upon employment and experiential backgrounds to best match persons with positions.
- In the next round of state-wide recruitment, currently taking place, the Department will be recruiting and selecting using this method. By 30 June 2007 the Department proposes to have specifically increased the appointment rates of ATSI employees from 3% of appointments per year to 6% per year.
- The Department has embarked upon a strategy to make itself a more attractive employer within the labour market and specifically amongst diversity groups. In a recent employer branding campaign for "start up positions" in North West Queensland, the Department has targeted persons with the ability to quickly establish strong relationships with community leaders.
- General recruitment campaigns, via whole of state advertising, are now also focussing upon persons from diverse employment and experiential backgrounds to work at the Department. Responses to both attraction campaigns has resulted in an increased interest and response from target groups.
- Specifically, employment of staff from a Vietnamese background was identified as important in corrective services facilities as the number of prisoners of a Vietnamese background has become significant compared to other cultural backgrounds. Subsequently, initiatives were undertaken by the Human Resources Branch to encourage applications from the Vietnamese community.
- The Department also offers a number of traineeships for people from diverse backgrounds through the Migrant Work Experience Program. Under the Migrant Work Experience Program, the Department funds a four week TAFE office skills course for the participant and then provides a six week work experience placement. A participant from a program last year was appointed as a temporary employee following the placement.