

Responding to Diversity:

Progress in Implementing the

Charter of Public Service in

a Culturally Diverse Society



ACCESS AND EQUITY

ANNUAL REPORT 1998

Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs

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Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs

Office of the Secretary

The Hon Philip Ruddock MP
Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Reconciliation

Dear Minister

This is the 1998 Access and Equity Annual Report, *Responding to Diversity: Progress in implementing the Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*, prepared by the Department in accordance with Recommendation 30 of the *1992 Access and Equity Evaluation Report*, which was endorsed by Government.

I recommend that you table this annual report in Parliament and that it is made available to Senators and Members of the House of Representatives.

Yours sincerely

W. J. Farmer
December 1998

Preface

Following the nationwide publication and launch of the *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society* in July and August this year, the Government has continued to progress implementation of the *Charter's* principles as its strategy for ensuring its programs and services meet the diverse needs of all Australians.

Of particular note this year has been the development of department and agency Service Charters. The Service Charters initiative is a major element of the Government's public sector reforms. The overwhelming majority of departments and agencies which have prepared Service Charters have advised that they developed performance standards guided by and consistent with *Charter* principles. It is anticipated that reporting flowing from this process, particularly that from the new complaint handling mechanisms, will help enhance future reporting on the *Charter*.

Most Commonwealth departments and agencies have demonstrated improvement in service delivery for clients from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Significant achievements this year have been made in the areas of cross-cultural awareness training, flexible language assistance for clients, innovative service delivery for Indigenous clients, and improved incorporation of *Charter* principles into arrangements with third-party service deliverers.

State, Territory and Local Governments are also demonstrating their commitment to integrating the *Charter's* principles into their programs and service delivery. I am pleased to draw attention to a number of their initiatives, included for the first time in this year's report.

I remain committed to working with other Ministers to further implementation of the *Charter's* principles and, in doing so, to increasing the Government's capacity to provide culturally appropriate and inclusive service delivery for all Australians. My Department will also work to progress these goals and to provide advice or assistance to departments and agencies on *Charter* implementation as required.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philip Ruddock', with a large, stylized initial 'P'.

Philip Ruddock

Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Reconciliation
December 1998

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Executive Summary

The *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society* is the Commonwealth's strategy for ensuring that the diverse needs of all Australians are addressed in the provision of Government programs and services. It was formally launched nationwide by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in July and August 1998.

The *Charter* represents the Commonwealth Government's commitment to responsive service delivery. It also represents a nationally consistent approach to delivering government services to meet the needs of all Australians through its endorsement at the State, Territory and Local Government levels.

Progress in implementing the *Charter*

Departments and agencies have shown this year that they have adopted a range of innovative strategies to make their programs more responsive to the diversity of their clients. Departments and agencies have actively progressed the implementation of *Charter* principles by, for example, providing cross-cultural awareness training and resources to staff, making wider use of staff cultural and linguistic skills and increasing the use of client feedback mechanisms. They have also demonstrated greater flexibility and responsiveness in providing language assistance, and in approaches to improving accountability. Service delivery to Indigenous Australians in particular has seen a range of innovative responses.

As was the case in the 1997 report, the principles against which most departments and agencies are soundly achieving are 'access', 'equity', 'communication' and 'responsiveness'. Despite positive developments, such as the establishment of effective client feedback mechanisms and the introduction of accountability mechanisms in agreements with third-party service providers, more attention is still required in relation to 'effectiveness', 'efficiency' and 'accountability'.

Notwithstanding some very good examples of innovation, departments and agencies could improve their reporting of outcomes. The difficulty of reporting on the achievement of outcomes is acknowledged, and the introduction of the Accrual Budgeting framework from 1 July 1999 will provide mechanisms to assist departments and agencies in this. In addition, more detailed advice on the impact of competitive tendering and contracting (CTC) and the appropriate recruitment and training of staff by third-party service providers (for example, in the area of cross-cultural awareness) will be sought for future reports.

DIMA has addressed the relationship between the *Charter* and CTC in consultation with the Department of Finance and Administration (DoFA). It has worked similarly with the Public Service and Merit Protection Commission (PSMPC) on Workplace Diversity and with DoFA's Charters Implementation Unit on Service Charters.

This report includes for the first time initiatives to implement programs and services consistent with *Charter* principles by other government jurisdictions.

The *Charter* and wider policy issues

As with the *Charter*, a number of the Government's reform initiatives were embedded in 1997–1998 and have begun to impact on the performance of departments and agencies. Strong links exist between the *Charter* and these other initiatives.

Service Charters have now been adopted by most departments, agencies and government business enterprises (GBEs). They focus on client service and responsiveness and the overwhelming majority include service standards consistent with the principles of the *Charter*.

Workplace Diversity Programs have also been adopted and complement the *Charter* by addressing the diversity of staff skills and how harnessing these can best improve the performance of an organisation.

The report of the National Multicultural Advisory Council (NMAC), which is expected to be released in early 1999, may provide further guidance on the framework in which Government service provision should operate in a multicultural society.

Other service agendas impacting upon implementation of the *Charter* include work being progressed to develop a new set of indicators of cultural and linguistic diversity to replace Non-English Speaking Background (NESB), and the ongoing use of CTC by departments and agencies.

Both in response to this range of complementary agendas and the need to continue to promote and assist implementation of the *Charter*, DIMA will release resource materials and will embark upon a nationwide series of training workshops in 1999.

Part I

Progress in implementing the *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*

The *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society* was launched by the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, the Hon Philip Ruddock MP, in all States and Territories during July and August 1998.

The *Charter* has thus gained a national focus to complement its active implementation by Commonwealth departments and agencies throughout the year.

In Part 1 of this year's annual report, the achievements of departments and agencies in implementing the *Charter* are outlined. For the first time, implementation of the principles at the State, Territory and Local Government level is also included in this report. Contributions from the Governments of New South Wales (NSW), Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), as well as the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), are gratefully acknowledged.

While organisations provided many examples of the ways in which they have implemented the *Charter* principles, for reasons of brevity only some of these could be included in Part 1.

I.a Highlights

Commonwealth departments and agencies have generally performed well in regard to the *Charter* principles. Most significantly, a range of departments and agencies have explicitly reported that **Charter principles are now being incorporated into broader departmental and program planning processes**. Other notable initiatives implementing these principles follow.

- While most departments and agencies are **providing cross-cultural awareness training and resources** to client contact officers, the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) has reported that it has gone beyond this traditional approach by providing cross-cultural awareness training to its senior management. Two other agencies have also ensured that their third-party service providers received similar assistance.
- Many departments and agencies are now **making use of staff bicultural and bilingual skills**, particularly in direct client-contact areas. The Health Insurance Commission (HIC) is particularly noteworthy for recruiting and utilising staff with cultural and linguistic skills, including Indigenous staff, throughout its organisation. These skills, especially cultural skills, can greatly assist departments and agencies in the planning and design of culturally responsive programs, as well as at the point of service delivery.
- Complaint handling mechanisms, developed under the Government's Service Charters initiative (see 2.1 for details on this), are one of a number of important **mechanisms for the provision of effective client feedback** to inform improvements in service delivery, including in relation to the *Charter*. Departments and agencies have also continued to utilise various means of client input, including surveys, client fora and other innovative practices, such as Centrelink's Value Creation Workshops, with staff and clients.

- More so than in previous years, departments and agencies are reporting **a more flexible and responsive approach to the provision of language assistance** to their clients. While language services continue to be utilised through the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs' (DIMA) Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) and other sources, organisations are also increasingly recruiting staff with language skills into client service areas and developing skills registers or databases in order to harness the linguistic and cultural skills of their diverse staff.
- As in 1997, departments and agencies have continued to report on a diverse and **innovative range of strategies to address the needs of Indigenous clients**, and to better service those clients in the delivery of mainstream services. This has included having specific regard for cultural factors in providing services to Indigenous clients and utilising the expertise of Indigenous staff or community organisations to improve the delivery of programs.
- The competitive tendering and contracting (CTC) of government programs continued this year, presenting new challenges for public sector program managers (see 2.4 for further details on CTC). In accordance with the *Charter*, departments and agencies are **increasingly introducing accountability mechanisms**, such as service standards and performance indicators, **into agreements with third-party service providers** to ensure that service quality is consistent across all client groups.

The above highlights indicate that departments and agencies performed well this year in regard to the principles of 'access', 'equity', 'communication' and 'responsiveness'. Reporting on performance in relation to the remaining principles of 'efficiency', 'effectiveness' and 'accountability', whilst showing creative applications, was not as comprehensive.

I.b Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs' Initiatives

A range of strategic opportunities has been pursued by DIMA in line with its responsibility for ensuring consistency with the *Charter* in Commonwealth Government program planning, service delivery and outcome reporting processes.

DIMA has liaised with other government organisations, at both the Commonwealth and State and Territory levels, on a number of initiatives. It has:

- worked with DoFA in the development of guidance for public sector managers on competitive tendering and contracting of government services;
- provided advice to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in the review of department and agency annual report guidelines;
- worked with DoFA's Service Charters Implementation Unit in developing a reporting framework for department, agency and GBE Service Charters;
- liaised with PSMPC in the development of the Australian Public Service (APS) Workplace Diversity strategy;
- worked with the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Multicultural Affairs Unit of the Victorian Premier's Department in relation to a project which concerns collecting data on diversity (details in 2.5);
- liaised with the ABS to reach agreement that a question on ancestry is likely to be asked in the 2001 Census. Among other things, this will enable service providers to separately identify Australian South Sea Islanders and to appropriately target services to them; and

- continued to liaise with departments and agencies to provide nominees from the *Select Register*, which is a database comprised of highly skilled and experienced people in a wide range of fields whose interests and diverse backgrounds make them suitable for nomination to Commonwealth advisory committees (see 1.3 for further details).

In addition, DIMA's National Integrated Settlement Strategy (NISS) provides a policy framework for delivering and coordinating accessible and equitable settlement services by promoting communication between agencies at all levels of government and the community. Settlement Planning Committees in each State and Territory provide a forum for consultation between agencies on settlement issues affecting migrants. Key priorities in terms of assistance for migrants are: English language training, access to the labour market, the provision of settlement information, access to housing, translating and interpreting services, support for sponsors, the adoption of a more integrated approach to the settlement needs of refugee and humanitarian entrants, and meeting the settlement related needs of the ethnic aged.

Language services are another vital element in providing accessible government programs, which is inextricably linked to the successful implementation of the *Charter*. DIMA recognised that there may be inconsistencies in the provision of these services by Commonwealth departments and agencies, and has initiated a project to assist departments and agencies to better provide such services. As part of this project, in July 1998 the Centre for Research and Development in Translating and Interpreting at Deakin University provided a consultancy research report on language service needs and provision. DIMA will use this to inform further progress towards developing an approach to this issue, consistent with *Charter* principles. It is envisaged that this initiative will produce a non-prescriptive tool to assist managers to better use language services and thus make their programs more equitable and culturally responsive.

In the 1997 annual report, it was indicated that DIMA would run national training workshops on *Charter* implementation within 12 months. This initiative has now been rescheduled for early 1999. The workshops will target representatives from both government and non-government organisations and utilise a *Charter* resource kit which will include *A Good Practice Guide for Culturally Responsive Government Services*. It is also anticipated that these materials will be placed on DIMA's website (<http://www.immi.gov.au>) in due course.

I.c Progress in areas for attention

The 1997 report identified several areas for attention, namely: outcomes reporting (in regard to both the entire program and communication strategies); cross-cultural awareness training; and better utilising the bicultural and bilingual skills of staff. The progress made by departments and agencies in relation to these four areas is outlined below.

Outcomes reporting

The current focus on outputs and outcomes is neither new nor confined to access and equity issues. For some years, the emphasis on results, rather than inputs and process, has underpinned the program structure as the basis of portfolio financial management. This focus on results will be further strengthened with the implementation of the Accrual Budgeting framework from 1 July 1999.

While departments and agencies were encouraged in the 1997 report to provide better **reporting of outcomes for clients across entire programs**, they appear to be having difficulties in achieving this. Organisations in the main are continuing to report on the processes they have adopted to better service their culturally and linguistically diverse clients, rather than reporting on the practical outcomes achieved for those clients. Departments and agencies should move towards the reporting of outcomes as part of requirements for the Accrual budgeting framework commencing in 1999 which is based on outputs and outcomes.

In contrast, there has been a marked improvement in **reporting on the outcomes of communication strategies**. For example, the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) indicated that its education campaign targeting Indigenous employers has resulted in improved levels of taxation compliance. Similarly, the Australian Archives reported that its efforts to improve awareness of its services have resulted in greater use of the Archives by Indigenous researchers. While other departments and agencies advised of the success of various strategies and campaigns, further details were often not provided. Organisations are therefore encouraged to report on the reasons for, and the methods used to determine, the success of their strategies (for example, by comparing client survey results or recording a reduction in the number of mistakes made by clients in application processes).

More progress is expected to be made in the area of outcomes reporting with the introduction of the Accrual Budgeting framework in 1999, and it will remain a strong focus of future editions of this report.

Cross-cultural awareness training

Cross-cultural awareness training has been an important access and equity strategy since the policy's inception. As indicated in last year's report, many Government departments and agencies have training programs in place to provide staff with cross-cultural skills. Ensuring that third-party service providers adopt a similar approach with their staff was identified last year as an area for attention in 1998.

In 1998, two organisations provided information regarding the delivery of culturally-sensitive assistance and training to third-party service providers (see 1.1 for details). While this result is encouraging, in an environment where a substantial proportion of Commonwealth programs and services are now being delivered by third-party service providers, there is a need for all departments and agencies to ensure that those delivering

their programs are appropriately trained.

A further issue concerning the scope of cross-cultural awareness training has been identified in 1998. As in previous years, reporting indicates that departments and agencies have mainly provided this training to staff in customer service areas. DETYA, as noted, reported that it went beyond this traditional approach by providing cross-cultural awareness training to senior management. This approach is commended because it helps to ensure that cross-cultural considerations are incorporated into strategic planning processes as well as at the point of service delivery.

It has also become apparent that departments and agencies with an obvious client focus have taken the lead in providing cross-cultural awareness training to staff. It would seem that those organisations without a service delivery function tend to overlook this type of training. The provision of cross-cultural awareness training to senior management is encouraged, as is the provision of this type of training to staff of all departments and agencies.

Use of staff skills

Departments and agencies have made good progress in utilising staff bicultural and bilingual skills, which was identified as an area for attention in last year's report.

As in 1997, Centrelink continues to provide a lead in this initiative by promoting and rewarding the cultural and linguistic skills of staff, identifying this issue within planning strategies and actively recruiting staff with language skills. Many other agencies have also reported on their response to this issue. For example, the NSW Office of the Australian Customs Service (ACS) has developed a strategy to utilise staff language skills for client service, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) recruits specialist staff to assist with client contact. Several departments and agencies have established databases of staff language skills.

While this is a promising trend, reporting indicates that staff bilingual and bicultural skills are being utilised mainly by service-

delivery organisations and mainly in those areas which have direct client contact. All departments and agencies, including those with primarily a policy-making function, are encouraged to make use of staff bicultural and bilingual skills across different areas of the organisation to assist in designing and developing culturally responsive programs. This strategy is consistent with Workplace Diversity Programs, which aim to embrace and harness staff differences for the benefit of the organisation (see 2.2 for further details).

Similarly, with the increased contracting out of Government services to third-party service providers, departments and agencies may wish to highlight, contractually or otherwise, the benefits of utilising staff skills to organisations delivering programs on their behalf. As DoFA advised in its March 1998 publication, *Competitive Tendering and Contracting: Guidance for Managers*, agencies remain accountable even when a service is delivered under contract by the private sector (further information on competitive tendering and contracting is provided at 2.4).

Notwithstanding the progress noted over the past year and the introduction of Workplace Diversity Programs, staff bicultural and bilingual skills could be better utilised and therefore will remain an area for attention in future issues of this report.

1.d Initiatives by other levels of government

The *Charter* was developed in consultation with State, Territory and Local Governments. Information on the ways in which these levels of government are demonstrating their commitment to *Charter* principles through their strategies and programs is being included in this annual report for the first time, as follows.

Initiatives by State and Territory Governments

Many State and Territory Governments have developed their own official multicultural policies. For example, NSW has had its own *Charter of Principles for a Culturally Diverse Society* since 1993 and

has built on this through its 1996 Ethnic Affairs Action Plan, *Building on our Cultural Diversity*, and by incorporating its charter principles into legislation. The South Australian Government has a *Declaration of Principles for Multicultural South Australia* and introduced its multicultural affairs policy in 1997. Victoria's 1996 framework document, *The Pledge by the Government of Victoria to the People of Victoria*, acknowledges the State's cultural and linguistic diversity and commits its Government to delivering culturally appropriate services.

Highlights of initiatives that have been provided by NSW, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory for inclusion in this report follow.

- *A Languages Services Strategy and Guidelines* was published to assist public sector agencies to communicate information to their diverse clients in Queensland.
- Information kits targeting newly-arrived migrants were produced in Victoria and the ACT in association with DIMA.
- Interpreter cards to assist clients who do not speak English well are being utilised by most States and Territories.
- Resource materials have been developed in Victoria to help service deliverers meet the needs of culturally diverse clients in programs addressing drug use and abuse, which included the development of treatment, service and support models.
- Ethnic Service Development Officers are being used across programs, particularly health-related ones, in Victoria.
- A multicultural policy for schools is being implemented in Victoria.
- Resource materials are being provided to help NSW State agencies become more responsive service deliverers. In particular, a Standards Framework Self-Assessment Guide was developed to measure progress and determine future directions as part of a *Resource Handbook for Chief Executive Officers and Senior Managers*.

- An annual report on the status of ethnic affairs in NSW was produced for the first time (*1997 Ethnic Affairs Report*).
- Quarterly monitoring and reporting was provided to the ACT Government on service delivery to clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Access and equity across the public sector was evaluated to identify the extent to which diverse clients face barriers to accessing South Australian Government services.

Initiatives covering Local Government

During this past year, ALGA conducted workshops and consultations on access and equity in local government which targeted council staff, elected members and ethnic community representatives. ALGA is also finalising a report that will include *Charter* implementation strategies as a means of providing practical assistance to local government agencies in developing their own action plans.

The NSW Government has enacted legislation that requires NSW Government agencies and local government to deliver culturally appropriate and accessible services.

Victorian Government agencies showed their support for local government by sponsoring a forum for Local Government, *Local Diversity: Local Solutions in Regional Victoria*, in July 1998. The forum showcased examples of local solutions that are meeting the needs of diverse regional communities, and followed on from a similar forum with a metropolitan focus in 1997.

Conclusion

This snapshot of program and service delivery by other levels of government highlights the role of the *Charter* in making government service provision consistently appropriate to the needs of Australia's diverse community across each jurisdiction.

Charter principles

1.1 Access

‘Government services should be available to everyone who is entitled to them and should be free of any form of discrimination irrespective of a person’s country of birth, language, culture, race or religion’.

The principle of ‘access’ is concerned with ensuring that clients can easily use government services available to them and removing any barriers that might prevent people from readily using these services. The following examples indicate some of the ways in which access to services can be improved.

Current initiatives

Some agencies are using **research** to improve accessibility.

- HIC has used the findings of two major research projects to improve Indigenous Australians’ access to health services. Their access to Medicare has increased through the introduction of a range of special Medicare enrolment processes, including simplified enrolment and direct-billing processes, revised enrolment forms and an expanded range of locations offering electronic enrolment services. Extended Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme arrangements under amended national legislation also mean that medicines can now be supplied by approved Indigenous health services as well as pharmacies.
- Indigenous staff of Centrelink are undertaking customer research using survey methods preferred by Indigenous clients to identify in a culturally appropriate way the barriers to service access faced by Indigenous customers.

Others are improving client access by recognising that **services need to reflect the diversity of their client base.**

- DIMA clients who have been assessed as having particular needs due to their experiences of torture and trauma have access to a Special Preparatory Program prior to commencing the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). In addition, the Home Tutor Scheme provides informal tuition to clients eligible for AMEP who may not be able to attend regularly scheduled classes, such as women with family responsibilities and older migrants.
- The Commonwealth Financial Counselling Program of the Department of Industry, Science and Resources (ISR) funds non-profit community organisations to provide free access to crisis financial counselling services for disadvantaged groups at locations throughout Australia.

Innovative approaches are being adopted with a **special focus on Indigenous issues.**

- The Attorney-General's Department (AGD), in endeavouring to strengthen family relationships, will trial better ways of supporting Indigenous families. Pilot services will be run by community-based family service providers in partnership with Indigenous organisations under the *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* strategy.
- The ATO's National Aboriginal & Islander Resource Centre in Alice Springs handles telephone enquiries across Australia and conducts community visits. Staff from the Centre work to ensure that programs and services meet the needs of Indigenous clients.
- To assist Indigenous Australians, particularly in rural and remote areas, who have difficulties in accessing business funding, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) has introduced the Indigenous Business Incentive Program, which provides seed funding, training and other support.

- The WA Police Force has established a project within its Aboriginal Liaison Unit to assist Indigenous veterans and their families gain better access to Department of Veterans' Affairs' (DVA) entitlements and information.

Departments and agencies are also **assisting clients overcome 'double disadvantage'**, such as that faced by women, people living in rural and remote areas and those with a disability who are also from diverse backgrounds.

- AGD provides funding to organisations undertaking specialist services aimed at improving access to community legal services by disadvantaged groups, such as Indigenous women and disabled clients. New funding has also been set aside to improve rural and remote access to community legal services.
- The Department of Health and Aged Care's program, BreastScreen Australia, provides high quality, accessible and cost-effective mobile mammographic screening and assessment to women in rural and remote areas, including Indigenous women.
- The Office of the Employment Advocate (OEA) is piloting programs in which community organisations deliver assistance on employment agreements to workers in a disadvantaged bargaining position, such as people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, women, youth and people with a disability.

Departments and agencies have **developed access and equity plans** or **incorporated access and equity strategies into other plans** to provide better service to their diverse range of clients.

- The Australian Broadcasting Authority's (ABA) access and equity plan sets out practical strategies to ensure that its client services are responsive to the needs of people who may face barriers.
- DIMA has developed its third Access and Equity Plan, which provides a strategic framework for embedding the *Charter's* service principles into management practices.

- The Commonwealth Ombudsman’s Office has incorporated an access and equity strategy into its corporate and business plans in its strategic planning for cultural diversity.
- The National Campaign Against Violence and Crime (NCAVAC) Unit, which is located in AGD, has developed a strategic plan, *Crime Prevention in Culturally Diverse Communities*. It takes into account issues specifically facing members of ethnic communities, such as the experience of migration, inter-generational conflict, racism, poverty and inequality.

The **bicultural skills of staff** have been utilised for improving department-client relations.

- The NSW Office of the ACS conducted a survey to assess the need for officers to use languages other than English in daily working operations. In response to the findings, 17 additional officers sat for and received National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) accreditation.
- Clients of the Aerospace and Defence Industries Group of ISR usually are from different cultural backgrounds. The Group employs a range of experts who are fluent in foreign languages and have a first-hand knowledge of diverse customs, traditions and business practices, in order to establish solid, culturally sensitive working relationships with clients.

Some departments have ensured that staff of **third-party service providers** are culturally aware of, and sensitive to, clients’ needs where services have been contracted out.

- AGD held a national series of diversity strategy workshops in late 1997 for directors and selected managers of organisations contracted through the Family Relationships Services Program, to ensure that all contracted organisations strategically addressed the needs of a diverse population.

- Under the Migrant Employment Servicing Strategy, a network of officers from the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB) has been established to liaise with contracted employment service providers to ensure they are sensitive to, and able to address, barriers faced by people from diverse backgrounds.

Strategies for improving ‘access’

Departments and agencies have generally reflected a well-developed understanding of the *Charter* principle ‘access’ in 1998.

Competitive tendering and contracting of Commonwealth Government services to third parties (discussed at greater length in 2.4 of this report) is an increasing feature of Government service delivery. The shift away from delivery by government to community or private sector organisations presents an urgent need to ensure cultural awareness training for staff in these organisations.

While some departments have taken steps to ensure that the staff of third-party service providers are aware of, and sensitive to, cross-cultural issues, as suggested in last year’s report, departments and agencies could do more.

- Where service delivery is to be outsourced, organisations could consider reflecting the need for cultural diversity training in their development of contracts and service agreements with third-party service providers.
- Similarly, departments and agencies could advocate, contractually or otherwise, that their third-party service providers recruit people from diverse backgrounds and make use of existing bicultural and bilingual staff skills as a way of improving service accessibility.

1.2 Equity

'Government services should be developed and delivered on the basis of fair treatment of clients who are eligible to receive them.'

The principle of 'equity' is based on the premise that all people entitled to receive government services should be treated fairly. To ensure that all clients are treated fairly, service deliverers need to recognise and respond appropriately to differences among their clients.

Current initiatives

Departments and agencies are providing more equitable services in a variety of ways. For example, many organisations are actively **recruiting people from diverse backgrounds, sometimes to 'identified positions'**.

- Centrelink's Indigenous Services Unit has developed a strategy to address the recruitment, retention and representation of Indigenous staff throughout the organisation and has established an Indigenous Temporary Staff Employment register to facilitate recruitment. Centrelink also has an active program of recruiting bilingual staff aimed at increasing workplace diversity, in line with the local customer profile, raising the bilingual capacity of its offices and increasing cultural awareness.
- ATSIC has introduced an Accelerated Experience Acquisition Program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment and retention. Its long-term objective is to increase Indigenous employees in middle and senior management to 60 per cent so that they can better service their client group.
- All positions within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Unit of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) are 'identified positions', providing an important avenue for the recruitment and advancement of Indigenous peoples.

Some departments and agencies are **providing staff with training on the use of interpreters.**

- The Commonwealth Ombudsman's office trains staff in the use of interpreter and translation services to achieve equity in complaint handling.
- Centrelink has developed a training video on communicating with interpreters and also provides its officers with cultural diversity and language services training. Job aids and task cards have been placed on their Intranet site to support staff in their service contacts with diverse customers.
- ATO's New Small Business Unit has initiated training sessions with DIMA to improve ATO staff use of interpreting services.
- All Australian Federal Police (AFP) administrative regions distribute *Working with Interpreters* leaflets, which provide advice on using interpreters and contact numbers across Australia.
- The Australia Council trains its staff to help them use TIS and other interpreting and translating services.

Agencies and departments have continued to recognise that people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds have particular needs by developing **targeted initiatives.**

- Further to its 1997 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recruitment and Career Development Policy, ACS has established a Support Group for Indigenous Staff. The group maintains social and cultural links within the workplace and provides advice on matters involving Indigenous peoples.
- Trades Recognition Australia, in negotiation with DEWRSB State offices, has simplified the process for recognising migrants' trade skills.

- The Australian National Training Authority has funded the development of an Equity Communications Strategy to encourage participation and development for those, such as Indigenous Australians, who have been historically disadvantaged in terms of their access to, and outcomes from, vocational education and training. It will also assist stakeholders to incorporate equity considerations into everyday planning and other practices.
- ATSIIC has liaised extensively with the management of the Community Development Employment Program of the Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) to enable Indigenous participants equal access to income support. It has also collaborated with ISR's Australian Geological Survey Organisation on two of its projects relating to water supply quality in Aboriginal lands, which remains a critical health and equity issue.

Strategies for improving 'equity'

A key strategy for improving 'equity' is to ensure that staff are able to recognise and respond to the different needs of clients. As the above examples suggest, many departments and agencies are achieving this by recognising, in recruitment exercises, that people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds may have particular skills which will help the organisation better serve its clients at both management and service delivery levels.

While this is a good result, all departments and agencies are encouraged to include selection criteria concerning cultural diversity issues when recruiting across position levels, to advance the incorporation of equity considerations into program and policy planning processes, not only at implementation times. This could also assist liaison with clients who are not service recipients. Similarly, when contracting out services to third parties, organisations could advocate that all related recruitment processes include selection criteria incorporating cultural diversity issues.

Another strategy for achieving equity is to recognise the needs of clients in remote areas, including those from diverse backgrounds, through developing outreach and community liaison arrangements.

1.3 Communication

‘Government service providers should use strategies to inform eligible clients of services and their entitlements and how they can obtain them. Providers should also consult with their clients regularly about the adequacy, design and standard of government service.’

The ‘communication’ principle is about using appropriate information strategies to inform clients from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds about services and the standard of service they can expect. It is also about ascertaining clients’ views on the adequacy, design and standard of services. In essence, service providers should ensure that clients have a good understanding of the services available and obtain their views on how to improve their services.

Current initiatives

Departments and agencies are **using a variety of communication strategies to inform clients** about their services.

- DEWRSB promotes the Job Network to people from ethnic backgrounds through ethnic newspapers, the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) Radio and other community radio stations, television commercials, and multilingual posters and brochures. It also targets Indigenous peoples through radio advertisements.
- OEA informs clients about its Australian Workplace Agreements pilot programs through a series of multicultural radio broadcasts.
- HREOC’s Race Discrimination Commissioner is developing a public information strategy on the right to equality. This strategy seeks to foster greater debate and understanding in the general community that this right is a right to substantive equality, which may require that people be treated differently to accommodate their unique cultures or to address specific disadvantage.

While a number of agencies continue to **utilise interpreter services** to ensure their clients gain relevant information about programs, others are **using community representatives**.

- Centrelink's Community Agent program funds Indigenous community organisations to employ local people to assist community members with Centrelink matters to ensure that Indigenous customers are not disadvantaged in claiming and maintaining their entitlements. Centrelink also operates a national telephone service centre in twenty community languages, available for the cost of a local call during business hours. If needed, appointments are arranged at a Centrelink office with an interpreter.
- ATO uses a local community identity to conduct information sessions for Vietnamese people through SBS Radio in Sydney.
- DFAT State and Territory Passports Offices meet the costs of interpreter services for clients.
- OEA's National Telephone Advisory Service, available from anywhere in Australia for the cost of a local call, includes a telephone interpreting service which is promoted through OEA publications in community languages.

Translated materials are another way to inform clients with English language difficulties about their programs and services.

- HIC, in providing a reminder service for the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register, provides a translated insert with its immunisation reminder letter that includes advice to clients of TIS's telephone number if more information is required.
- The Department of Environment and Heritage (DEH) provides multilingual information brochures on legal requirements covering wildlife protection, particularly in regard to the use of endangered species in traditional medicines. Interpreter services have also been provided at public symposia on this topic.

Specialist resource packages have been developed for use by clients or community workers.

- Under its National Community Education Program, HREOC has produced information packages that include written, video and audio training resources advising Indigenous peoples of their rights and the protection available under anti-discrimination and other legislation. One such resource is a video entitled *Which Way?*, which is aimed specifically at Torres Strait Islander women and describes the operation of HREOC's Sex Discrimination Unit and its complaint handling process.

To assist the design and modification of programs, departments and agencies are **consulting with stakeholders**, including community representatives and other service providers, through various fora.

- Centrelink maintains State and Territory based consultative fora, known as Migrant Advisory Committees, throughout Australia. These Committees involve ethnic and community representatives, as well as a range of public sector managers.
- AGD's NCAVAC workshop on crime prevention in culturally diverse communities included participants from different government levels, community organisations and academia.
- ATO's Child Support Registrars Advisory Panel includes representatives from key Indigenous and ethnic community organisations.
- DVA's NSW Veterans' Affairs Network staff met Centrelink Aboriginal Liaison Officers from rural and metropolitan areas and members of the Commonwealth Indigenous Network to identify existing Commonwealth resources available to promote awareness of benefits and health services for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander veteran community.

- DIMA State and Territory offices have focussed on improving community input to settlement planning processes, including via the settlement planning committees established under NISS. For example:
 - the Queensland Office undertook consultations on access and equity and NISS;
 - the WA Office ‘reality-tested’ government service provision through community focus groups;
 - the Tasmanian Office held Settlement Planning Committee and Client Reference Group meetings in regional centres; and
 - the Victorian Office meets regularly with the local Ethnic Youth Issues Network.

Departments and agencies are also endeavouring to **include specialists from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds on Government advisory bodies**. In the past year, 32 agencies have sought nominees from DIMA’s *Select* Register for consideration by selection committees when positions fall vacant (for details on *Select* see 1.b).

Strategies for improving ‘communication’

It is apparent that departments and agencies are very much aware of the need to communicate with their clients in formats they can understand. Many have a large range of strategies in place.

Departments and agencies may also wish to consider publicising more widely the existence of an information resource, particularly if it is available in a variety of formats and languages, to assist in reaching its target audience.

In addition, departments and agencies are encouraged to regularly evaluate the success of communication strategies by, for example, undertaking client surveys through a variety of media (including the Internet) and recording client enquiries and complaints (as required under the Service Charters initiative) to obtain client feedback. This would help organisations to be more responsive to client needs and develop different communication strategies when circumstances change. It would also enable organisations to better report on the outcomes of communication strategies against planning objectives.

1.4 Responsiveness

‘Government services should be sensitive to the needs and requirements of clients from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, and responsive as far as practicable to the particular circumstances of individuals.’

The ‘responsiveness’ principle is primarily about ensuring that all services to the public are flexible so that they can be easily adapted to meet the different needs of clients.

Current initiatives

Many agencies are fostering a climate responsive to the needs of diverse client groups by providing **cross-cultural awareness training** as an integral and important element of staff training.

- DETYA has an Indigenous Recruitment and Career Development Plan, entitled *Yarrangi*. One of the Plan’s key strategies is to implement Indigenous cultural awareness training for senior and middle managers, which specifically confronts people’s prejudices.
- HIC has a multi-faceted training strategy with key cross-cultural components, including cultural awareness indicators in competency-based staff training, a module on cultural awareness and the use of effective communication skills to overcome language and cultural barriers in customer service, and support for maintaining or upgrading language skills under its study assistance policy.
- DVA, under its *Health Policy for the Veteran Community in Rural and Remote Areas*, has provided Aboriginal cultural awareness training to State office staff. It also trained Aboriginal Welfare Officers in Northern Queensland and Western Australia to provide information on DVA services to their communities.

- DFAT adopts both cross-cultural training and bilingual skills strategies at its Passports Offices to assist clients from diverse backgrounds.
- The Department of Defence's Australian Defence Force Cultural Awareness Strategy Team has presented training sessions to personnel who have regular contact with Indigenous Australians.

Some are also establishing such mechanisms as **staff skills registers** to ensure that bilingual and bicultural staff (as well as those with other skills, knowledge or experience) are used to respond to client needs.

- ISR, Austrade and the ACS have all established cultural and linguistic registers of departmental officers who have volunteered to contribute their skills. The Austrade database is available to the Austrade Hotline and other Austrade offices throughout Australia and will soon be placed on the Austrade Intranet for easy access by all Austrade staff. The ACS also maintains lists of NAATI accredited officers in most regions and central office. It continues to encourage and financially support the study of languages by staff through its Studybank scheme.

Client feedback is being obtained to facilitate continuous service improvement.

- Centrelink has obtained customer consultation through feedback cards, focus groups, market research, surveys, community consultations and complaints, suggestions and compliments. It is also trialing the highly innovative Value Creation Workshops, in which non-English speaking customers are surveyed in a focus group forum with staff. Centrelink has also designed some of these workshops specifically for Indigenous Australians. The workshops are conducted in the target audience's language and involve the use of interpreters for English-speaking staff and bilingual materials for both staff and customers.

- The Department of Health and Aged Care has implemented 'Co-ordinated Care Trials' in three predominantly Aboriginal communities to test and obtain client feedback on innovative models of delivery and funding of health and family services for Indigenous peoples with complex and long-term care and support needs.
- DIMA has responded to critical client feedback on its recorded information service by standardising and updating the information available. A plain English expert assisted to ensure clearer understanding by users. Contact information on TIS is now provided within thirty seconds of entry to the system to ensure that non-English speakers have appropriate language access.

Some departments and agencies are undertaking **research to identify gaps in, or barriers to**, service provision, with a view to ensuring that these *Charter* issues are addressed in the development of new programs.

- OEA is collecting information from employers about the non-English speaking background status of the employee parties to Australian Workplace Agreements. This will allow OEA to analyse information on Australian Workplace Agreements using this measure as a research parameter.
- ATO's Child Support Agency (CSA) is undertaking a research project to clarify the differences in the way the social security and child support systems currently recognise 'marriage' and 'adoption', and the implications of this for income support eligibility. By identifying the family formation characteristics of Indigenous Australians, the CSA can identify ways to improve service to them.
- ATO is using Census, ethnicity and demographic data in its Tax Help and Superannuation Business Line planning processes.
- DIMA uses the comprehensive statistics provided by its Settlement Database as a tool for planning, providing and evaluating equitable provision of migrant settlement services.

- ABA, in conducting and commissioning research into attitudes on programming issues, makes provision to access the views of communities which are sometimes under represented in national surveys of randomly selected samples because of language and cultural barriers.

To ensure that public service delivery meets the needs of all Australians, departments and agencies recognise that it may sometimes still be necessary to develop services and programs for **specific client groups with particular needs**.

- Following the Federal Government's formal identification of Australians of South Sea Islander descent as a disadvantaged minority group, DEWR's Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) Classification Working Group has recognised them as a disadvantaged group potentially requiring special assistance, particularly those who are not living in the major population centres. The JSCI is a computer-based measure which identifies job seekers most in need of Intensive Assistance.
- Centrelink aims to ensure culturally responsive assistance for refugees who access DIMA-funded On-Arrival Accommodation.
- One of DETYA's higher education sector initiatives to improve education outcomes for Indigenous Australians includes the provision of an electronic network to link Indigenous postgraduate students and academics across Australia.
- ISR's Creditcare project, delivered under contract by the Credit Union Services Corporation, aims to assist in the provision of financial services in rural and remote communities where financial institutions have closed. Field officers work with local and Indigenous communities to devise and implement strategies to attract financial institutions (usually credit unions) to these communities.

- The ATSIC-Army Community Assistance Program's pilot has seen a small number of very remote and disadvantaged Indigenous communities gain improved access to community infrastructure, such as water and sewerage, road and airstrip improvements and housing.

Strategies for improving 'responsiveness'

Departments and agencies have continued to deliver services in flexible ways.

Addressing gaps in service delivery, which are often identified through client feedback, is an important way of improving responsiveness. Given the importance of feedback, and within resource constraints, departments and agencies may need to be strategic in the way they gather information in order to meet a range of research objectives. For example, when gathering information on one topic it may be pertinent to gather information on another topic in order to maximise the use of resources. Similarly, departments and agencies may need to be creative in the range of methods used to gauge client satisfaction. One way of gauging client satisfaction is to assess whether the promotion of services is increasing the use of services by relevant sections of the community.

Progressively addressing the needs of particular segments of clientele is another possible approach. One way in which to achieve this is through improved data collection on client ethnicity (discussed further at 2.5).

Departments and agencies are also encouraged to be aware of those particular groups who have been formally recognised by the Government as disadvantaged and may be appropriate for specific targeting.

In respect of the above, it is noted that Australian South Sea Islanders have been identified as being disadvantaged in terms of *Charter* principles. The likely inclusion by ABS of an ancestry question in the 2001 Census (as mentioned in 1.b) to aid the identification of Australian South Sea Islanders will help relevant departments and agencies to better target services to them. The significant progress in relation to this group made in the area of employment services in 1998 (see DEWRSB's example provided earlier in this section) is also welcomed. However, these are two isolated examples for this group, and departments and agencies providing other types of programs and services are encouraged to better address their needs in the future.

1.5 Effectiveness

‘Government service providers should be ‘results oriented’, focussed on meeting the needs of clients from all backgrounds.’

The principle of ‘effectiveness’ relates to the degree to which services meet the needs of clients from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Performance monitoring and reporting enables agencies to assess whether their programs and services have actually resulted in the desired benefits for their clients and whether the clients themselves are satisfied with the outcomes.

Current initiatives

Agencies are using a variety of **performance mechanisms**, not only to define the level of service expected, but also to assess the effectiveness of services.

- Under the Department of Health and Aged Care’s national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health program, all State and Territory Governments report against draft national performance indicators for health services to this client group. The indicators are being refined and, for the first time, information is available on national expenditure, which will provide a firmer basis for shaping decision-making and monitoring government performance.
- DIMA has developed Immigration Detention Standards governing the quality of care and of life expected in immigration detention facilities, which include access and equity issues. Contract monitoring mechanisms, including incentives and sanctions, are in place to ensure that service delivery meets these standards.
- HIC customer service staff are assessed against specific access and equity performance measures under its competency-based assessment system.

- FaCS, in conjunction with ATSIC, is negotiating Indigenous Housing Bilateral Agreements with all States and Territories, which aim to improve the housing outcomes for Indigenous peoples through better coordination, greater accountability, improved efficiency and a reduction of service duplication between governments.

Both **internal and external review mechanisms** are important in determining whether services meet clients' needs.

- ATSIC commenced its rolling five-year effectiveness reviews of Aboriginal Legal Services this year. The reviews will examine a range of program issues, including management systems, service delivery, resourcing, staffing issues and statistical data, and how these relate to outputs and outcomes. In addition, quality standards are being developed for regional services.
- Centrelink is conducting a review of its language services to examine technical and operational issues associated with current interpreter and translator contracts, with a view to increasing contract effectiveness. Procurement procedures and the pricing structure will also be examined.
- HREOC's evaluation of its educational comic, *Takin a Stand*, found that the comic was an effective tool for anti-racism education for youth, particularly when used as part of discussions about racist attitudes and behaviour.
- ATO is undertaking an interim internal review of the Child Support Charter to examine ways in which to better meet the needs of people from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people with disabilities. (Service Charter issues are discussed more generally in 2.1 of this Report.)
- HIC is conducting an evaluation of its Equity and Diversity Program with the objective of ensuring the Commission's staff and culture can better meet the needs of customers.

- DETYA's Task Force on School to Work Transition for Indigenous Australians has reviewed and reported on the Department's Indigenous programs in order to develop more effective program initiatives. DETYA has also reviewed the Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme (ABSTUDY) in light of the Government's introduction of the Youth Allowance. The review included submissions and consultative meetings and recommended refocussing some ABSTUDY allowances on educational outcomes rather than inputs.

Agencies are **testing and evaluating new processes** prior to the full development of initiatives to ensure they are effectively tailored to clients' needs.

- HIC, in conjunction with Department of Health and Aged Care and the Queensland Department of Health, has introduced a range of special Medicare enrolment processes. Results and feedback from a pilot study have been positive and HIC is now working closely with HAC's Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Services on refining and extending these arrangements.
- ATSIC's Complaints and Review Management service was piloted in NSW for 12 months prior to its national roll out.

Analysing **client statistics** allows departments and agencies to assess whether they are meeting clients' needs, target resources more appropriately and improve service quality.

- Centrelink has developed software that allows it to access a range of generic client information so as to better target resources and strategies.
- DIMA monitors application waiting times, application processing times and other measures of service quality. This monitoring revealed, for example, in DIMA's Victorian Citizenship Section an improvement of more than 30 per cent in average counter waiting times over six months as a result of measuring service delivery and providing regular feedback to staff and management.

Client feedback is an important factor for improving services.

- ATO's new Outreach Network liaises with ethnic communities through an informal one-to-one approach, which provides for more direct feedback to assess how well the ATO is meeting the needs of ethnic clients. It also allows a quick response to community needs for information and services.
- SBS Radio obtains community feedback for planning processes by regularly inviting community representatives from its Sydney and Melbourne markets to meet management and program makers, as well as receiving delegations from community organisations and visiting community events.

Strategies for improving 'effectiveness'

An encouraging trend emerging is that some departments and agencies are reporting outcomes in more detail, including changes to organisational practices that have resulted from monitoring and review processes.

Many other departments and agencies could provide greater detail when reporting the findings and recommendations of reviews, in addition to stating the objectives or methodology of a review. This would allow a more accurate assessment of outcomes and enable other agencies to gain a clearer picture of best practice achievements.

Departments and agencies are also encouraged to use performance indicators to measure actual outcomes to better assess their effectiveness. Collection and comparison of uptake statistics against program objectives and projections is one way in which this can be achieved. Another way is to collect data on client satisfaction through such means as surveys, focus groups and complaint handling mechanisms, which are being adopted by most departments and agencies under the Government's Service Charters initiative (see 2.1). To make these mechanisms more effective for clients from diverse backgrounds, departments and agencies will need to ascertain which customers are not making complaints and why.

1.6 Efficiency

‘Government service providers should optimise the use of available public resources through a user-responsive approach to service delivery which meets the needs of clients.’

The ‘efficiency’ principle means using available public resources in ‘results-oriented’ ways that best meet the needs of all clients.

Current initiatives

It is important to consider and integrate cultural diversity issues into all stages of the development, implementation and evaluation of a service or program. At times this requires **a range of strategic planning measures, often in partnership with other agencies**, as shown by the following examples.

- Centrelink has developed an online Population Diversity Information database from 1996 Census statistics. Data includes information on language spoken at home, country of birth and population by age and gender. The database enables analysis, long-term planning, and appropriate bilingual staffing to reflect customer profiles, including for outreach and liaison services.
- AGD has implemented new legal aid agreements and is also establishing performance measures, in line with the move to benchmarking and best practice, as part of its strategic planning.
- ATSIC undertook planning and liaison with other agencies to expedite implementation of changes to the Community Development Employment Program, aimed at ensuring that Indigenous participants have equal access to income support.

Another means for improving the efficiency of service delivery is to **maximise the use of existing and new resources**. This can include **technological innovation** and **combining resources** with other departments and agencies.

- DIMA has consolidated the administrative functions of TIS at three State offices so as to make better use of TIS's national contractor resources. The process included technological improvements to TIS telephone systems and an upgrade of the TIS Information System. Service standards were preserved by ensuring the continued availability of its national 24-hour telephone interpreting services, on-site face-to-face interpreting services and document translation lodgment services.
- New contractual arrangements for DIMA's AMEP services commenced this year. These arrangements expanded the range of learning opportunities available to migrants, created a program responsive to clients' changing needs and provided more flexibility in timing and method of delivery arrangements. There is now a broader range of institutions involved in service delivery providing better learner pathways for clients to continue studying English on completion of the AMEP. Services to country areas have also expanded significantly.
- Centrelink has installed specialised software which enables electronic distribution of information in community languages without the corruption to layout and other problems often associated with on-line readability and printing of non-Latin scripts. The use of this electronic format allows the texts to be released, withdrawn or amended in a more timely and cost-effective way and provides staff and customers with more flexible access. In addition, Centrelink has trialed the use of payphones with touchscreens through Telstra, which allowed customers to access written information in six languages and obtain immediate access to its multilingual call centres.

Promoting best practice provides departments and agencies with incentive and direction for improving their own services.

- DEWRSB's Practice Improvement page on its website aims to identify issues of key concern and examples of good practice for dissemination through Job Network. It includes information about ongoing improvement of service delivery, practical tips, links to other relevant sites, and dedicated e-mail boxes for direct communication with DEWRSB officers on practice improvement matters.

- ATO aims to improve services in cooperation with other agencies. This includes working with DIMA regarding Tax File Numbers for new migrants, using DETYA messages as part of ATO presentations in schools, and in conjunction with ATSIC, developing a business tax newsletter for Indigenous organisations to improve business practices.

In addition to utilising **service standards and performance indicators as set out in Service Charters**, some agencies are **developing additional performance measures** to make their services and programs more efficient.

- The Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office aims to finalise all complaints in a timely manner, whilst maintaining the quality of its service. The Office has established and monitors timeliness standards covering all aspects of the complaint process.
- Centrelink's Customer Service Centres, Areas and Segments report to FaCS against National Standards set out in the Services Agreement between Centrelink and FaCS.

Strategies for improving 'efficiency'

Creative ways of identifying barriers to reaching objectives, and the means for overcoming them, may be achieved, for example, by sharing information and improving cooperation and coordination of action between departments and agencies. Doing this as early as possible within the planning process can further capitalise on the benefits of such synergies.

Another method for improving 'efficiency' may be through developing benchmarks and best practice procedures to measure the implementation of programs and services, and sharing the results across programs or organisations. A further strategy yet to be fully harnessed is the adoption of innovative information technology. Centrelink's introduction of specialised software to enable electronic distribution of information in community languages is an excellent example of how innovative technology can be used to provide a better service to customers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

1.7 Accountability

'Government service providers should have a reporting mechanism in place which ensures they are accountable for implementing *Charter* objectives for clients (for example, by reporting on this in annual reports or other types of report).'

The 'accountability' principle is about public reporting by service providers on the outcome of access and equity initiatives across the range of *Charter* principles. From July 1999, addressing this principle will form part of the requirements under the Accrual Budgeting framework.

Current initiatives

Most departments and agencies are ensuring their accountability for the implementation of *Charter* principles by reporting on access and equity measures in this report and their own annual reports. Departmental Service Charters will further assist accountability measures by obliging organisations to introduce complaint handling mechanisms, which should, amongst other things, enable organisations to report more comprehensively on how well they are meeting *Charter* objectives (Service Charters are addressed in greater detail in 2.1 of this report).

Some departments and agencies have additional accountability measures requiring **specific reporting processes for particular client groups**.

- AFP reports to the National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau on a range of issues relating to police and ethnic communities.
- ATO's National Social Justice Committee oversees implementation of access and equity principles and provides advice to ATO Commissioners for their regular Corporate Governance reviews with National Program Managers for each business and service line.

- DETYA has a number of reporting strategies in place.
 - Universities are required to develop strategies to improve access, participation, success and retention rates for disadvantaged groups, and report on performance against the targets specified in their strategic plans.
 - Under Annual National Priorities, States and Territories are required to report on national planning and accountability arrangements in vocational education and training. The priorities include provision of improved opportunities and outcomes for under-represented groups.
 - Education providers are required to list their achievements against a set of performance indicators under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program, which aims to address the gap between educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians and the wider community. The indicators have been developed so that they are aligned with national priorities for improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

Departments are also setting **stringent contracting criteria** that organisations must demonstrably meet before they are eligible for consideration as potential third-party service providers.

- Under DETYA's national vocational education and training arrangements, State and Territory authorities will only register a training organisation if it can demonstrate that it implements staff access and equity policies and procedures.

Accountability measures are also built into contracts sourced to non-government organisations providing service delivery on behalf of the Government.

- Under the terms of their revised service agreements with DIMA, Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs) are required to report throughout the year on their performance against major activities under their work programs that constitute 'milestones'. Their annual reporting requirements include client survey results regarding satisfaction of the services MRCs have provided.
- DEWR's Job Network requires providers to establish their own internal complaints system, and to refer job seekers and employers to customer service officers if they wish to provide feedback about the service.

Strategies for improving 'accountability'

'Accountability' focusses on outputs and outcomes, as well as inputs and processes, and therefore is a way of determining how well organisations are achieving outcomes in relation to both service delivery and policy development. Currently, organisations appear to have continued to predominantly report on processes rather than outcomes. In addition, while most departments and agencies have reported against all *Charter* principles, some organisations that are not major service providers did not address the principle of 'accountability' in this year's reporting.

It is expected that reporting against this principle will improve with the introduction of the outputs and outcomes based accrual accounting framework from 1 July 1999. In this context, contributors might look to provide both qualitative and quantitative performance data and analysis concerning their outcomes and, where practicable, to graphically illustrate them. They could also provide longitudinal data to allow performance over longer time periods to be assessed. Additionally, results can be portrayed by measuring outcomes against strategies and objectives in work plans and access and equity accountabilities included in contracts with third-party service providers.

As noted previously, improved 'accountability' performance is expected to flow from the introduction of complaint handling mechanisms under Service Charter arrangements. Most departments and agencies have already implemented these, with some establishing additional accountability measures within their Service Charter processes, such as the AFP's mechanism being oversighted by the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office. Since most Service Charters and complaint handling mechanisms will have been operating for a full year by the time of next year's report, relevant departments and agencies are encouraged to report on outcomes identified by and achieved through these measures.

Part 2

The *Charter* and wider policy issues

The introduction of the *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society* coincided with a range of other public sector reforms aimed at making Government service provision more responsive. For example, the *Charter* shares common goals with both Workplace Diversity Programs and the Service Charters initiative, which should provide considerable scope for utilising the natural links between these reform processes.

NMAC's anticipated report may impact on the *Charter's* implementation by noting the relevance of the *Charter* principles for the wider Australian community. Similarly, the ongoing adoption of competitive tendering and contracting by departments and agencies, and the effect of this on culturally responsive service provision, will continue to impact on *Charter* implementation. Another important issue for the *Charter* is the current development of a more effective statistical measure of diversity.

2.1 Service Charters

From July 1997 all departments, agencies and GBEs dealing with the public have been required to develop Service Charters. A Service Charter is a straightforward public document that outlines the quality of service clients can expect to receive and the avenues available for providing feedback. Service Charters also cover the provision of indirect services, such as through grants and contracts, as well as an agency's regulatory functions.

The Service Charters initiative is important for the implementation of the *Charter*, as the Service Charters share the goals of improving client service and providing a client-responsive accountability mechanism.

The Government's framework document for developing Service Charters, *Putting Service First: Principles for Developing Service Charters* (the *Principles*), specifically states that service standards should comply with the *Charter*. In this way, the *Charter* both underpins and complements the service quality and standards inherent in Service Charters. To assist departments and agencies in meeting this requirement, DIMA has provided advice on the *Charter* to the Commonwealth Service Charters Network.

From this year, departments, agencies and GBEs are required to report annually on their performance against the standards outlined in their Service Charters. The Minister for Finance and Administration will also provide an annual whole-of-Government report to Parliament on progress in addressing the objectives of the *Principles* document noted above and in meeting implementation timetables.

In advance of the whole-of-Government report, the Service Charters Implementation Unit in DoFA has advised that implementation is progressing well across the APS and that the general quality of Service Charters developed to date has been very high, with almost all including some service standards. In addition, 94 per cent of the Service Charters already in place have been developed with performance standards consistent with the principles of the *Charter*. In the coming months, the Service Charters Implementation Unit will oversee finalisation of the remaining Service Charters and then conduct a review of Service Charters.

Two agencies, Centrelink and CSA, have already conducted reviews of their Service Charters and an evaluation by the Commonwealth Ombudsman of Service Charter implementation in these organisations has provided other departments and agencies with the opportunity to identify good practice and potential problems.

The Ombudsman's early findings from this evaluation indicate that the introduction of Service Charters has resulted in a decline in the number of complaints it has received in relation to timeliness and service standards. Furthermore, Service Charters are increasingly a focus of agency accountability, supplanting corporate plans in this regard.

However, the Ombudsman has also noted that agencies will need to be mindful of problems that are emerging in relation to complaint-handling mechanisms. Some complaint-handling mechanisms appear to be too complex, with too many levels of referral before the dispute resolution stage, whilst others lack effective tracking systems or are operated by staff who have not received adequate training.

As part of Centrelink's own review, its customer discussion groups across Australia provided particularly useful input and included both clients from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and representatives of 65 relevant community groups (including the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia, MRCs and Aboriginal advocacy groups).

DIMA will also continue to monitor the implementation of Service Charters, in the context of implementation of the principles of the *Charter*, to determine the impact of Service Charters on improving service for clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Departments and agencies may be asked to address this issue in future editions of this report.

2.2 Workplace Diversity Programs

Workplace Diversity is another key aspect of the Government's APS reform agenda and its emphasis upon encouraging diversity in the workplace complements the principles of the *Charter*. It aims to ensure that all Australians have equal access to APS employment and that their diverse range of skills, experiences, values, views and working styles are harnessed in the workplace. It also supports the Service Charters initiative by engendering a workforce that is more representative of, and therefore better able to respond to the needs of, a diverse clientele.

The Public Service Commissioner's guidelines, *Managing Workplace Diversity*, were launched in February 1998 and directed all Commonwealth departments and agencies to have in place agency-specific Workplace Diversity Programs by 31 August 1998. These guidelines have replaced Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) guidelines (but continue to encompass EEO) and are

supported by the broad array of anti-discrimination legislation already in place. In May 1998, the Commissioner followed the guidelines with the release of the *A Practitioner Handbook for Workplace Diversity Programs* to further assist the development, implementation and monitoring of Workplace Diversity Programs.

Workplace Diversity encompasses the former EEO Strategy in that it upholds the principles of fairness and merit, encourages a workplace free of discrimination and harassment and aims to rectify disadvantage that may result from factors irrelevant to a person's work performance. However, it goes beyond EEO by embracing the organisational benefits diversity can furnish in seeking to provide employees with the opportunity to reach their full potential. Workplace Diversity Programs include monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanisms, and PSMPC will report annually to Parliament on comparative agency performance in relation to Workplace Diversity Programs in *The State of the Service Report*.

2.3 National Multicultural Advisory Council

As indicated in the 1997 report, the Government appointed a new NMAC with revised membership and terms of reference.

The Council's first task is to develop a report that recommends a policy and implementation framework for the next decade aimed at ensuring that cultural diversity is a unifying force for Australia. The Council has consulted widely with the community in the development of the report.

In this context, NMAC has been briefed on the *Charter* and acknowledges this in its December 1997 Issues Paper, *Multicultural Australia: The Way Forward*, and explicitly refers to the aim of the *Charter* being 'to respond to the needs of all clients in an open, non-discriminatory way'.

By the end of 1998 the Council will have met nine times to prepare its report, which is expected to be submitted to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in early 1999. The report is expected to note progress being made in relation to the *Charter* and the relevance of the *Charter* principles for the wider Australian community.

2.4 Competitive Tendering and Contracting

Increased competitive tendering and contracting (CTC) of Commonwealth Government services to third parties has been a feature of recent reform of program and service delivery.

This major refocus of service provision is necessitating a cultural change across Government departments and agencies. CTC is expected to provide optimal value for money, improved accountability and transparency in the delivery of public sector activities. However, this shift from service delivery by government to community or private sector organisations also presents challenges for departments and agencies as it changes the dynamic of the relationship between the department or agency and their clients by involving new parties in that relationship.

As a whole-of-Government policy, the *Charter's* principles continue to apply to Government programs and services, regardless of the means of delivery. When the nature of program and service delivery changes and when the relationship dynamic between agency and clients is modified by CTC, the *Charter* becomes more important as it provides a framework in which to ensure that service delivery remains accessible and equitable.

CTC and Access and Equity

Several organisations have addressed CTC issues this past year. Two of these, the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee (whose report, *Contracting out of Government Services*, was released in May 1998), and the Administrative Review Council (whose report was released in November 1998), touched on access and equity measures in general terms only.

More significant for the *Charter* was the report by the House of Representative's Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs, *What Price Competition? Report on the Competitive Tendering of Welfare Service Delivery* (June 1998).

The Committee's position on the need for Government agencies to remain accountable for welfare services delivered by third parties reflects one of DoFA's key CTC principles ('Agencies remain accountable for activities subjected to CTC', as detailed in its March 1998 publication, *Competitive Tendering and Contracting: Guidance for Managers*). In the context of accessible and equitable service delivery, therefore, departments and agencies need to consider the best way of contracting out services in a culturally diverse society, consistent with both DoFA guidelines and the *Charter*, to ensure that the integrity of program delivery is maintained.

Department and Agency experiences with CTC

Whilst implementing CTC underscores the need to have sound administrative measures in place, it also opens the door to a range of new approaches to service provision which can improve quality and encourage innovation. Certainly, departments and agencies have cited access and equity improvements as a result of CTC. For example, the Department of Health and Aged Care has advised that the tendering process for projects under its National Youth Suicide Program has raised awareness of the program among a wide range of service providers. It has also encouraged innovative service delivery, helped develop networks between tendering consortia and drawn service providers into the process who may not otherwise have submitted tenders.

There is also evidence that departments and agencies continue to meet *Charter* requirements in their contracting out of service provision. For instance, AGD held Australia-wide diversity strategy workshops for third-party service providers under the Family Relationships Services Program to ensure that contracted organisations have a strategic approach to responding to client diversity. DIMA's contracted AMEP services include a range of contractual measures to ensure that the program maximises its reach to eligible clients.

The major area of concern identified by contributing departments and agencies in relation to their *Charter* obligations has been about the suitability of an open tender process for all programs and services. Not every organisation is expert at preparing tenders and some groups, such as smaller non-government organisations and

rural, remote, Indigenous and non-English speaking groups, were felt to be particularly disadvantaged by this process. As a consequence, selective tendering processes have been used as an alternative to open competitive tendering processes in some cases. There is also a need on some occasions to seek exemption from tender, for example, when an organisation has previous significant experience with the work or they hold expertise which is not available elsewhere in Australia.

Initiatives to address *Charter* issues under CTC

As the agency responsible for *Charter* implementation at the Commonwealth level, DIMA is endeavouring to ensure that the *Charter* principles are considered as a matter of course when relevant service contracts are developed.

DIMA contributed to both the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee inquiry and the Administrative Review Council investigations mentioned above. It was also involved in the development of DoFA's 1998 pair of booklets, *Competitive Tendering and Contracting: Guidance for Managers* and *The Performance Improvement Cycle: Guidance for Managers*, which ask managers to consider access and equity issues, as embodied in the *Charter* principles, in the contracting out of services.

In addition, DIMA has prepared, in consultation with DoFA, an information sheet on the *Charter* for use by agencies in the preparation of CTC tender documents, *Competitive Tendering and Contracting – the Government's policy on access and equity*. This is now available as an individual document and will form part of DIMA's forthcoming *Charter* resource kit, scheduled for release in late 1998.

DIMA has also worked with other levels of government to assist with cultural diversity considerations in CTC. For instance, DIMA's Queensland Office collaborated with the Queensland State Government, through the Queensland Migrant Settlement Planning Committee, in developing a guide for government, titled *Client Service in a Culturally Diverse Society: incorporating access and equity management principles in government-funded programs and services – A practitioners' guide*.

It is anticipated that more detailed reporting on this aspect of service provision will be sought from departments and agencies for future Access and Equity Annual Reports.

2.5 Suitable Indicators of Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

An important message of the *Charter* is that effective and responsive program development and service delivery requires clear identification of clients' diversity and needs.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs, in its January 1996 *A Fair Go For All – Report on Migrant Access and Equity*, raised concerns that the designator NESB was too broad a term to be a useful tool for designing services that match people's particular needs and circumstances.

In response, the Council of Ministers for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs (COMIMA) agreed in May 1996 that an alternative approach was required and that the term and acronym NESB be dropped, where possible, from all official communications.

In March 1997, COMIMA resolved that DIMA, the ABS and the Multicultural Affairs Unit of the Victorian Premier's Department form a working group to develop a pilot test of a new approach to collecting data on diversity and disadvantage, and later agreed to a pilot project under joint Commonwealth, State and Territory funding.

The project pilot commenced in late February 1998 and involved the ABS trialing a data collection instrument to measure cultural and linguistic diversity in service settings across all levels of government. The key challenge was to establish whether a single designator could be identified to replace NESB, or if a different approach was required. The project involved the ABS extensively analysing 1996 Census figures, ensuring in the process that pilot outcomes were evaluated for effectiveness and usefulness in administrative settings, and that they were methodologically sound and promoted the adoption of ABS statistical standards.

The work is in progress.

2.6 Future Policy Directions

The nationwide launch of the *Charter* in 1998 has raised considerable interest and provided momentum with which the Commonwealth, through DIMA, can advance the message of the *Charter* to all areas of Commonwealth service provision and beyond.

This will be achieved through promotion of the *Charter* at appropriate fora, such as the November 1998 Institute of Public Administration Australia's National Conference, *Service Delivery to the Community*, and by wide distribution of the document itself.

A series of national training workshops on the *Charter*, as foreshadowed in last year's report, will be conducted in 1999 and will target public sector managers across all levels of government.

To complement this training, DIMA is producing a kit to assist Commonwealth departments and agencies to implement the *Charter*. The kit includes *A Good Practice Guide for Culturally Responsive Government Services* to help organisations develop service models, as well as information sheets addressing policy development, client service, evaluation and audit, competitive tendering and contracting (CTC) and appointments to advisory bodies.

Initiatives with the private and community sectors

With CTC having initiated the movement of government service provision into the private and community sectors, it is now appropriate to explore opportunities to expand implementation of the *Charter* into these spheres. There is scope, for example, to build on *Charter* resource materials that have been developed in regard to CTC which include these sectors as a target audience. To inform such work, the impact of CTC on government service provision will require further assessment. Better reporting will also assist this process.

Initiatives with other levels of Government

Some of the initiatives identified above fall across government levels. In 1999, the Commonwealth, through DIMA, will endeavour to build upon these initiatives and jointly progress the development of culturally responsive services with State and Territory Governments and ALGA.

2.7 Conclusion

As with other policy reform agendas initiated in 1997, the *Charter* now forms part of the landscape of public service provision. In an environment where client service has become increasingly important, the *Charter* serves to ensure that Government departments and agencies understand that their clients are a diverse group with different needs.

In terms of reporting against the *Charter* principles, this past year has been both one of consolidation and one where new initiatives were implemented. Once again, departments and agencies performed well against the first four principles and in regard to programs and services. With the introduction of the Accrual Budgeting framework next year, departments and agencies will provide more comprehensive reporting of outcomes. This should allow for a more accurate assessment of progress made against the implementation of the *Charter's* last three principles.

The year saw an increased emphasis upon reporting of achievements for culturally and linguistically diverse clients by other levels of government, included in this report for the first time.

In the coming year, the promotion of the *Charter* and the development of appropriate resources will continue. It can also be expected that the implications of competitive tendering and contracting on service provision to culturally diverse clients will remain a focus of this report.

Part 3

Appendices

3.1 Evolution of the Access and Equity Strategy

- Early 1970s* Settlement programs established to meet initial settlement needs for accommodation, English language training and other services. However, these came under increasing pressure from Australian society's growing diversity and needs. 'Multiculturalism' coined as a policy term, denoting equal rights and opportunities for all.
- 1978* The Galbally Report, a review of post-arrival migrant programs, acknowledged that all members of society must have equal access to programs and services. It also recommended that community needs should be met by mainstream programs and services, but that 'ethno-specific' service delivery may still be necessary at that time to ensure accessible and equitable service delivery to some groups.
- 1978* The Ethnic Liaison Officer scheme, a forerunner of the Access and Equity Strategy, introduced. Under it, every department identified a senior officer whose task it was to disseminate information about migrants' needs.
- 1982* Programs and services resulting from the Galbally Report evaluated. The evaluation reiterated the principles set out by Galbally and also emphasised that departments had a responsibility to ensure that their programs are accessible to people from all cultural backgrounds, independent of any budget supplementation.

- 1985 The Access and Equity Strategy inaugurated, superseding the Ethnic Liaison Officer scheme. The Strategy identified people from non-English speaking backgrounds as its principal clients, and required departments to remove barriers to service provision and meet their needs through general programs and services, modified if necessary. All portfolios required to produce three-year access and equity plans.
- 1987 The Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA) established in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet with responsibility for coordinating the Access and Equity Strategy.
- 1989 *National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia* extended access and equity to include all groups who may face barriers of race, religion, language or culture, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- 1992 The Access and Equity Evaluation Report defined access and equity as being 'the rights and entitlements that all should expect to enjoy' and recommended annual reporting by departments and agencies against its recommendations.
- 1993 Access and equity performance annual reporting commenced.
- 1994 Australian South Sea Islanders included as a specific access and equity target group.
- 1995 COMIMA agreed that efforts in access and equity are required by the three levels of government.
- 1996 The functions of OMA transferred to DIMA.
- 1996 Access and Equity Strategy re-focussed as the *Charter of Public Service in a Culturally Diverse Society*. The *Charter* was endorsed by all levels of government as a nationally consistent approach to ensuring government services were culturally responsive.

- 1997 A new public sector focus on providing quality services to clients, departments, agencies and GBEs led to the development of agency-based Service Charters to ensure that Government services meet the needs of all clients.
- 1998 The *Charter* was formally launched nationwide. Progress continued across jurisdictions to integrate *Charter* principles in all government service planning and delivery.

3.2 List of Commonwealth Agency Contributors

The following departments and agencies provided access and equity statements for this report.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Attorney-General's

Australian Bureau of Statistics

Australia Council

Australian Customs Service

Australian Electoral Commission

Australian Federal Police

Australian National Audit Office

Australian Taxation Office

Australian Trade Commission

Centrelink

Commonwealth Ombudsman

Communications, Information Technology and the Arts

Defence

Education, Training and Youth Affairs

Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business

Environment and Heritage

Family and Community Services

Finance and Administration

Foreign Affairs and Trade

Health and Aged Care

Health Insurance Commission

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

Immigration and Multicultural Affairs

Industry, Science and Resources

Office of the Employment Advocate

Prime Minister and Cabinet

Public Service and Merit Protection Commission

Sport and Tourism

Transport and Regional Services

Treasury

Veterans' Affairs

3.3 Acronyms and Abbreviations

ABA	Australian Broadcasting Authority
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ABSTUDY	Aboriginal Study Assistance Scheme
ACS	Australian Customs Service
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AGD	Attorney-General's Department
ALGA	Australian Local Government Association
AMEP	Adult Migrant English Program
APS	Australian Public Service
ATO	Australian Taxation Office
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
COMIMA	Council of Ministers for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
CSA	Child Support Agency
CTC	Competitive tendering and contracting
DEH	Department of Environment and Heritage
DETYA	Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs

DEWRSB	Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
FaCS	Department of Family and Community Services
DIMA	Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
ISR	Department of Industry, Science and Resources
DoFA	Department of Finance and Administration
DVA	Department of Veterans' Affairs
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
GBE	Government business enterprise
HIC	Health Insurance Commission
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
JSCI	Job Seeker Classification Instrument
MRC	Migrant Resource Centre
NAATI	National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters
NCAVAC	National Campaign Against Violence and Crime
NESB	Non-English Speaking Background
NISS	National Integrated Settlement Strategy
NMAC	National Multicultural Advisory Council

NSW	New South Wales
OEA	Office of the Employment Advocate
OMA	Office of Multicultural Affairs
PSMPC	Public Service Merit Protection Commission
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
TIS	Translating and Interpreting Service

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Victorian State Government

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