



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, AGEING,
COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL SERVICES**

(Reference: [ACT public service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment](#))

Members:

DR C BOURKE (Chair)
MR A WALL (Deputy Chair)
MS Y BERRY
MS N LAWDER

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

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WEDNESDAY, 11 DECEMBER 2013

Secretary to the committee:
Mr T Rowe (Ph: 620 50129)

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.30 am.

BYLES, MR GARY, Acting Head of Service and Director-General, Chief Ministerate

KEFFORD, MR ANDREW, Deputy Director-General, Workforce Capability and Governance Division and Commissioner for Public Administration, Chief Minister and Treasury Directorate

CENTENERA, MS LIESL, Director, Workforce Capability and Governance Division, Chief Minister and Treasury Directorate

FORESTER, MS ROBYN, Director, Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Community Services Directorate

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Services for its inquiry into ACT public service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank you for attending today. This morning the committee will hear evidence from the ACT public service, followed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body at 11 am and, at 12 pm, Dr Kate Barnett, Deputy Director, Australian Workplace Innovation and Social Research Centre.

Witnesses are afforded a range of protections and obligations by parliamentary privilege, and I draw your attention to the privilege statement before you on the table—the pink card. Can you confirm for the record that you all understand the privilege implications of the statement.

Mr Byles: Yes.

Mr Kefford: I do.

Ms Forester: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I remind witnesses that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and webstreamed and broadcast live. Before we proceed to statements from the committee, Mr Byles, would you care to make an opening statement?

Mr Byles: Yes, thank you, Dr Bourke. We thank the committee for the opportunity to appear here this morning and discuss the issues around the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategy. I might just introduce my colleagues who join me at the table to address your questions. On my right is Ms Robyn Forester. Robyn is the relatively newly appointed—although it was in July—Director of the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. On my left is Mr Andrew Kefford, Deputy Director-General, Workforce Capability and Governance. And on his left is Ms Liesl Centenera, the director of public sector management. We welcome questions from the committee this morning.

THE CHAIR: I will kick off. Mr Byles, you probably accept that most of us are prejudiced about other people in a variety of different ways. You would accept that?

Mr Byles: Just reframe that question again, Dr Bourke?

THE CHAIR: Most of us are prejudiced about some people in a variety of different ways?

Mr Byles: I am not sure I follow your line of questioning, but—

THE CHAIR: That is all right.

Mr Byles: I do not accept the initial assertion.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Well, I will put it like that.

Mr Byles: Yes.

THE CHAIR: But the difference between prejudice and racism, or actions of racism, centres around words and action. Prejudice is the underlying feeling or thinking, but racism is the words or action. You would accept that?

Mr Byles: I am following your line of thought, Dr Bourke, and I am happy to sort of entertain the question.

THE CHAIR: Good; thank you.

Mr Byles: If you ask one.

THE CHAIR: The recent campaign “Racism. It stops with me”, which is run by the Australian Human Rights Commission, mentions some interesting statistics: one in five Australians have been subjected to race hate talk and one in 20 have been physically attacked because of their race. The ACT public service is drawn from the general population of Canberra, so you would have to accept that there are people within the ACT public service who may be prejudiced and would also have feelings of racism.

Mr Byles: I have not seen those statistics to which you refer. But if that is the case—and I accept what you are saying—they are certainly disturbing. I will agree that the ACT public service is representative of the population. That goes without argument. But I can say that the ACT public service has been very strong in the respect, equity and diversity framework, and what we are trying to enforce in the ACT public service is all about common decency and respect for colleagues, not only within the workforce, but in the broader community.

THE CHAIR: Could you tell us a little bit more about that respect, equity and diversity framework and how you are tackling racism within the ACT public service?

Mr Byles: I can. I might refer to my colleague Mr Kefford to explain. He has been the architect and the implementer of it, under my guidance of late. And he might refer to his colleague as well.

Mr Kefford: The respect, equity and diversity framework was launched by my predecessor as commissioner and the former Chief Minister in 2010. It has three

elements to it, which are borne out in the acronym. One is around respect, in which much of the conversation has been focused around the behaviour of staff in the service towards their colleagues. There are then the elements, one of which we are talking to the committee about this morning, in relation to the diversity of the workforce and ensuring that our workforce represents the community from which we are drawn. There are particular targets as part of that in relation to employment of people with a disability as well as employment of people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.

The framework sits alongside and supports the implementation and the expectations of behaviour which are set out ultimately in section 9 of the Public Sector Management Act and, more importantly and perhaps more relevantly, in the ACT public service code of conduct, which, as commissioner, I formally published in October of 2012 following a process of consultation.

The intent of that framework is to both create an explicit set of expectations around the behaviour that we will exhibit not only towards our colleagues but to the recipients of the services which we as a service provide and to provide a mechanism through which colleagues who have experienced inappropriate behaviour or believe they have experienced inappropriate behaviour can raise those concerns through informal, or indeed formal, channels to have those addressed. While it is not specifically framed in terms of the issues that you are raising, Dr Bourke, certainly conduct of the sort that you describe in those statistics that you quoted would come well within the expectations of that framework.

The whole of that system is underpinned by the ACT being one of the two jurisdictions in the country which have a human rights framework. That sits underneath and guides the framing and the carrying out of all of the legislative obligations to which we as officials are subject.

THE CHAIR: As public service commissioner, how many complaints would you receive of racism within the public service?

Mr Kefford: In my time in this office, Dr Bourke, I have had one.

THE CHAIR: One.

Mr Kefford: That was raised amidst a number of other issues. The majority of the matters that end up with me—and this is borne out in the reporting that is in the state of the service report—have tended to be more in the workplace bullying area than racism. But—I have been in this position coming up for 2½ years—I have had one matter that has specifically raised racism as one of the concerns being addressed.

THE CHAIR: Does that surprise you?

Mr Kefford: It disappoints me, certainly. Surprise? As Mr Byles has said, we are a service that is made up of 22,000 people drawn from a society that is obviously much greater. I would like to think, and certainly it is our intention and aspiration, that we have a service where the values and behaviours to which we all ascribe, and indeed ultimately to which we are all legislatively bound, and I would like to think we are a

service where we never have transgressions, but at the same time we are an organisation of 22,000 individuals, and just as there are transgressions of other standards of behaviour set out in areas of the statute book—one is too many but, at the same time, I am not naive enough to sit here and say we will never have an issue. That is why we have in place frameworks that, first of all, as I say, are explicit in terms of our expectations and then also provide for mechanisms for those who transgress those standards of behaviour to be disciplined and dealt with.

THE CHAIR: How does that level of complaint compare with other jurisdictions? Do you have any awareness of that?

Mr Kefford: I would have to take that on notice, Dr Bourke.

THE CHAIR: Yes; good.

MS BERRY: Supplementary question, please, chair. I am particularly interested in the RED framework. I was working with some ACT government employees when the RED framework was introduced and the implementation process began. It seemed to me, and from workers that I was involved with, that it was very much a top-down implementation process: this was the framework that was being introduced and everybody needed to adopt it as a policy. Of course, everybody knows, and I think this is what Dr Bourke was touching on, that it is all well and good to have a policy, but it is about how it actually works on the ground and how the people, particularly the people on the ground that are delivering the services, actually adopt the policy and how they are part of implementing it themselves. Having a policy is one thing, but actually getting it to work and having people understanding it and embracing it is another thing.

Mr Kefford: Yes.

MS BERRY: Can you give us some indication about how that has worked?

Mr Kefford: Sure.

MS BERRY: Particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but about how people in the workforce are adopting that RED framework.

Mr Byles: I might just lead off on that and then hand over to Mr Kefford. I would make no apologies for an initiative such as RED to be top down. Leaders have to model their behaviour, they have to demonstrate their commitment and they have to take charge and implement such a framework. I think that it has been very successful. Certainly from my perspective, I know that in my previous appointment I took a very personal commitment to implementing the framework, to the point of having a senior sponsor monitoring the implementation and ensuring that the entire directorate was very aware of the requirements of the RED framework. So I think it is good that leaders set the example and become the exemplar for such a framework. But I also agree that all the policies in the world can be useless unless they convert on the ground to actions. While it remains a challenge, I am sure—I know—we have achieved great things in that area. I might ask Mr Kefford to explain how we have converted that into actions on the ground.

Mr Kefford: Thank you, Ms Berry. I would echo Mr Byles's observation that when change is being sought, it is necessary and appropriate that the leadership of whichever organisation is clear in what it expects and models that in its own conduct.

The RED framework as it now stands did not come from nowhere. The predecessor document was the equity and diversity framework, and it continued. While there was particular focus placed on this one when it was launched, it was not coming from nowhere, so it was not a new thing that was being imposed from the top down. Indeed, the obligations that are in there are, in one sense, unremarkable. If you look at any public service across the country, we all have frameworks which go to expectations of behaviour, and certainly, in terms of the sorts of issues that we are canvassing here, there is a very significant degree of consistency.

It was a deliberate feature of the way in which the RED framework was rolled out that it was launched by the former Chief Minister and my predecessor as commissioner. At that time that structure reflected the way in which the public service was organised. We are in the process of reviewing it; there was a scheduled review of RED due now, which we are currently undertaking. My expectation is that when we launch the next iteration of this document, it will reflect properly the role of the head of the service now, in terms of setting the expectations for the public service as it exists.

In relation to the process of developing the RED framework, though, it was not imposed from the outside; there was a degree of consultation that went into the preparation of that document, and that process was certainly mirrored in the discussions that underpin the current ACT PS code of conduct. That was developed very deliberately through a process of consultation with staff. So following the structural changes to the public service in the middle of 2011 and the creation of the office of Head of Service, the deliberate decision taken was to have a conversation with staff about the values and behaviours that would define that organisation.

We ran a very lengthy process of consultation. Indeed, it was a process of consultation that took longer than we expected, because at the point we were going to close it off, we were still having people knocking on our door saying, "Hey, I want to be part of this." That process around the values and behaviours very consciously built on the currency that RED has. I think it is fair to say that there has been great emphasis placed on the "R" bit of RED in terms of the respect and behaviours, and that flowed very deliberately into the discussion around the new values and behaviours.

As I say, that was done very much in a process of consultation with staff. Then it was launched again; Andrew Cappie-Wood and I launched that as Head of Service and commissioner. And that now has the force of the standards, which the codes have never had before.

We have then taken it to the discussion around values and behaviours that now underpin the structure and content of the public service performance framework. Again, it is trying to get beyond, "Here's a list of what we expect" to "This is actually how we do things around here." The new performance framework, which the former Head of Service launched in the middle of July, following another process of collaboration and consultation across directorates, not only very deliberately frames

what we as officials are expected to do—that is unsurprising—but very consciously places a focus on how. Again, that is bringing into the formal assessment of performance the way in which we behave based off the values and signature behaviours.

In terms of the implementation of RED, it is covered off in the state of the service report, and I am happy to go through that if you would like to. My observation would be, though, that, through the way in which it has been rolled out, it has developed a currency. It is a language that is common across the service. Some directorates have done more or have had more success and more tangible delivery against the framework, but in terms of its currency and expectations, we were very conscious, as I say, of doing the process around the new values and behaviours not undermining RED, because it does have a life. One of the good things about that framework is that while it is a good framework and it has been commented on positively by other jurisdictions, it has a currency that goes beyond a nice folder on our shelves. That, again, goes to how we implement: rather than just saying, “This is what we want,” it has to flow to behaviour. If it does not flow to behaviour, then we are not achieving what we are setting out to do.

MS BERRY: As a supplementary to that, you just said that you are doing a review of the framework right now. Will the review include how the RED framework has been received or adopted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, how it reflects—

Mr Kefford: It will cover the whole coverage of the RED framework, including into this space. One of the key elements of that will be the whole-of-government survey which I intend to run, I think, in March of next year. When we run that, we will be using the Victorian people matter survey to go down this path. That will be able to be sorted to particularly identify the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the service. But the review of the RED process more broadly does cover the whole of the way in which it has been implemented, including in relation to the two strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and people with a disability.

THE CHAIR: Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Mr Byles, in the employment strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it provided, as of 2010, a snapshot of employment figures and I was hoping you might be able to give an update to the committee on where things currently are within the public service. If you are not familiar with it, it gave a breakdown, obviously, of the total number of Indigenous employees in the public service. And I was hoping you might be able to clarify: indicator No 5 in the chart you have supplied says that the current head count is 257 people as of 30 June, yet the state of the service report for the same period has a different figure. Which one should we be going on?

Mr Byles: I will allow Mr Kefford time to get those figures. But my figures that I have got provided here—again, this could be corrected—are that since the employment strategy was launched in 2011 we have increased staff by 82 to a figure of 258. That was from 176. They are the figures. Again, they will be verified shortly. I can give the particular break-up of the classifications, if you want, in due course. About 40 per cent of these were administrative officers. And, of course, we have a

trainee program with 22 participants. Again, I will just ask Mr Kefford: it is the difference between 257 and 258.

Mr Kefford: The tables that were appended to the submission were produced before we had finalised the process of settling the state of the service. So the state of the service as published is correct.

MR WALL: So the figure is 238 head count?

Mr Kefford: That is the figure that is in here, yes.

MR WALL: So it differs from the submission. That is all right. Could I have a bit of a breakdown on the profile? Is there a breakdown of gender—male, female and other?

Mr Byles: Just bear with us.

Mr Kefford: Yes, I have got it. I just have to find it. Sorry, just bear with me.

Mr Byles: Just bear with us. In terms of the gender break-up, while Mr Kefford is searching, we certainly have the difference in terms of the age groups. They are really accessible. But we are having some difficulty finding—maybe we have not got it. We might just take that on notice please.

MR WALL: That is okay. There were a number of statistics that were in that report.

Mr Byles: If we can find that before the end of this inquiry, we will advise you.

MR WALL: That is all right. There were a number of statistics there. So perhaps if I give them to you and then through the course of the hearing, they can be reported back.

Mr Byles: Sure, absolutely.

MR WALL: I will start again. How many are shown as administrative officers, and then senior positions?

Mr Kefford: I can give you that now. There are 108 administrative officers, 18 health professionals, 16 nursing, 24 senior officers, 26 teachers and 66 across the other classifications.

MR WALL: And what is their employment basis—full time, part time, temporary contract?

Mr Byles: I have actually got that. I have got that here: 157 are permanent, 27 permanent part time, 37 temporary full time, nine temporary part time, eight casuals.

MR WALL: Average length of service?

Mr Byles: We have got that here. Just bear with us.

MR WALL: Sorry, it is just the starting point.

Mr Byles: No, that is all right. No, I understand.

Mr Kefford: Less than five years of service, 69.34 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, the ACT PS average being 46.6; five to nine years service, 18.9 per cent and 25 per cent; 10 to 19 years, 8.8 per cent and 17.3; 20 years plus, 2.9 per cent and 11.1.

MR WALL: And average length of service?

Mr Kefford: That is what I just gave you.

MR WALL: That was that one?

Mr Kefford: Yes.

MR WALL: Sorry, my apologies.

Mr Kefford: Would you like it by generation as well? I cannot give you male and female, but I can give you generation.

Mr Byles: We will give you male and female. It is just that we do have the generational break-up.

MR WALL: It is nice to get an update on where things currently stand. One of the points that was mentioned in your submission under “Recruitment” was the process of identified positions. I was just wondering how the positions are identified.

Mr Kefford: This was one of the significant initial steps, because it involved changes to the Public Sector Management Act to allow for this to happen. I should say at the start of my answer, if you will bear with me for just a moment, one of the issues that we have found, particularly in conversation with my colleague Ms Forester, is that we have gone down a path of calling them identified positions. Given the market in which we are seeking to recruit here—in fact, the commonwealth language is “designated positions”—what we are actually talking about is the particular identification of positions specifically for people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. So the act was changed to permit that process to happen, as were the standards. There have currently been 18 positions designated across the service.

The way in which that happens as a matter of process is that, before a position is advertised it needs to be specifically determined to be a designated position. So it is not something that can be done afterwards. While, in one sense, this process is a modification to the broad merit principle, it is there for good and proper reasons. But in keeping with that, we have to be clear at the start that a particular position is a designated position. It is then advertised and selected against in the usual way.

The act, as I say, was amended to create the capacity for a directorate to do that. It is a decision that is delegated at a low level inside the directorates to allow decisions to be made to recruit in this way.

MR WALL: At what level are most of those positions, Mr Kefford?

Mr Kefford: The designated ones, I would have to take on notice.

MR WALL: That is fine. And in recruiting to fill those positions, how does the process differ from standard recruitment process?

Mr Kefford: In terms of how it is done and the way in which the decision is made, it does not. The designation merely puts boundaries around the eligibility field in the way that, similar to a position that is advertised with prerequisite academic qualifications, it narrows the field to that class of individuals. It gets advertised as a designated position but from then on, the weighing of the relative merits of applicants proceeds in the normal way.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: You have, I think you said, 238 staff at present. In the employment strategy it says your target for 2015 is, I think, two per cent. That is different to the target in the national partnership agreement, which is 2.6 per cent. Can you talk me through the difference? Why is the ACT target different to the national target?

Mr Kefford: This is going a little on my recollection when I was in the intergovernmental space at the time. The national targets were set at the COAG table in the usual way. I think part of how we got to a number that is different is recognising the relative size of the population as a proportion of the overall territory population. So there was a process, as I recall, of a different level being set and then that was articulated here in the strategy.

MS LAWDER: So are you saying the ACT has a lower proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than some other states? Is that what you are saying?

Mr Kefford: I think—

MS LAWDER: Rather than numbers, I am talking about proportion.

Mr Kefford: The consideration was the relative size of the employment market and the employment pool in which we were participating, yes.

MR WALL: The follow-up question I was going to ask just came back to me: in talking about the designated or identified positions, what areas or roles are they generally? Are they administrative, are they specialised?

Ms Forester: The roles are very varied. Our trainee roles, for instance, are designated positions, and they are across all directorates. Some roles are specific to the type of work that is happening within an area. And this is where we need to be clear about how we define what our positions are, whether they are identified or designated, but we can take that question on notice to actually provide you with the types of jobs that those positions are doing.

MR WALL: That would be appreciated.

THE CHAIR: Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: I had a question regarding the cross-cultural training that you refer to in your submission at page 24. You talk about wanting to form closer links with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. How are you going to go about doing that? What is your plan?

Mr Byles: In terms of cross-cultural training, can I say that this very day, this afternoon, the strategic board as a group will be undergoing some cross-cultural training for a period of three hours, again to model the behaviour expected. And I know there has been some training done throughout the directorates, but I might ask Mr Kefford if he can expand on that.

Mr Kefford: It is not just in this area of the submission that it flows through. One of the features of the way in which the process has been developed to date is that we have reached a point now where, as a service, we need to be engaging better with the community. It is not to say we have not been but we recognise that halfway through the process we have done a number of the things that we could do ourselves to remove some of the obstacles to reaching the target, the designated positions being one example of that. So this sort of initiative appears regularly on the public service training calendars. Training is an interesting way to describe it, but that is the place in which it appears.

I think also one of the strengths of the way in which the Community Services Directorate has now structured and organised the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs is that it will allow us as a service to engage more coherently with the community, using the links that Ms Forester and her colleagues have, at a much more immediate way than we do perhaps from Chief Minister and Treasury.

Mr Byles: Again, could I just add, it is about connecting and ensuring that we are committed to achieving good outcomes, tangible outcomes. Notwithstanding what I mentioned about the cultural training, can I say we have developed, certainly in my time over the past few years, some very strong and close links with the elected body. I know that that has developed and matured in the period of the last few years to the point that I know directors-general meet regularly with their portfolio representatives. For the very first time, I am sure, the elected body attended the strategic board meeting two weeks ago and we had the opportunity to discuss issues that were of concern to them, many of which are reflected in the submission.

So it is about the continuous engagement and making sure that we understand as a bureaucracy, as public servants and as people, how we can connect better. Robyn, I do not know whether you want to add anything.

Ms Forester: I would like to talk directly to your question about engaging with community and cross-cultural awareness training. The majority of directorates in their reconciliation action plans do have commitments towards cross-cultural training or cultural awareness training. From the directorate that we sit in, which is Community Services Directorate, we do run regular training for working with Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander people, which is a key focus of the training that we are doing.

A major piece of work that the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs is working on at the moment is a whole-of-government agreement which will be commencing that conversation for a good partnership with community, elected body and government about what we as government can do to support community and community aspirations, and vice versa. That is a great place to start that conversation with community and to get members of the community involved who may not have been engaged with ACT government previously as part of that conversation and partnership.

MS BERRY: I was asking about it because Dr Bourke talked a bit about prejudice and racism in the questions that he was asking, about how people might disrespect certain values from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community merely because they do not understand the sensitivities in the culture. How are you going to get that out to everybody? How are you going to get everybody aware about the sensitivities in the culture? How do you make the difference between people's ignorance and actual prejudice or racism?

Ms Forester: It goes beyond training. I think what we need to do and what is happening in some places, and particularly through our office, is what we do beyond the conversation of cultural awareness training or cultural appreciation training. It is the additional time and work that you need to put in with your colleagues to allow them the opportunity to understand.

I personally have a bit of a mantra that no question is a stupid question and no question is off limits with me. If somebody wants to ask something about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, people, community or whatever, I allow them to ask that, as racist as some of those comments may be, because I think the only way people are going to learn is through that conversation. I think that is what we need to really be looking at—how we have the conversation? It is not just the training; it is the conversation, it is building the appreciation.

Mr Byles: Thanks, Robyn. I would like to add something to that, Ms Berry. In terms of tangibles, I will give you an example of five things that I think are important in terms of reflecting behaviour and tangible outcomes. I know this happens certainly across my previous directorate and, I dare say, across many directorates. At induction training, sometimes for new people and sometimes for not so new people, there is normally a session on cultural awareness. People come in the door to join an organisation. That forms part of the induction training.

There is often a regular update—I know it can be sometimes monthly—about the RED framework that is put out often by the governance area. It refers to behaviour and it emphasises the importance of the RED framework. Of course, Mr Kefford has spoken about focusing on the “D” part of the RED framework. We have had a lot on the “R” part, which is essential. Perhaps now we need to look more at a broader aspect of that.

I know that during various supervisor toolbox meetings the issue about cultural awareness is discussed. Probably the most important thing is monitoring the

behaviour of the senior leaders and, indeed, everyone in the workforce. It is about do as I do rather than do what I say. I think leadership has an important role here in modelling behaviour and expectations.

MS BERRY: Thank you.

MS LAWDER: I want to ask a couple of questions from a recruitment perspective. I think I heard recently that in the ACT public service we have a reasonable recruitment rate but that the retention rate may be lower than in some other states. Is that correct?

Mr Kefford: Generally or with this group?

MS LAWDER: For the Indigenous group.

Mr Kefford: I hesitate to draw comparisons across all the jurisdictions because I do not have that to hand. We could probably see if we could get that on notice for you. But I think one of the features of what has happened in the last couple of years is that we do reasonably well in recruiting. You are right. To some extent, that reflects the focus on the traineeship program and other elements.

Yes, the retention or the churn rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees is slightly higher than for the service as a whole. We are not alone in that. Certainly I know from the commonwealth that that has been their experience. But there is a range of issues that go to retention, many of which are canvassed in the submissions that are before the committee. I think that in general terms your observation is correct. We have done reasonably well at recruitment. We need to be continuing to focus on retaining those employees once we have them in.

MS LAWDER: I read also in another submission about some of the ways that work best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in recruitment. One of them is word-of-mouth recommendation.

Mr Kefford: Yes.

MS LAWDER: Do you find that in the ACT public service?

Mr Kefford: I think there is much in those submissions that certainly reflects our experience. For example, when it comes to promoting us as an employer of choice for people in this region within that particular community, we do go down paths that are perhaps not the normal ones—“Let’s put it on a website and hope people see it.” We make particular efforts. For example, as part of the graduate program, we make contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through the universities.

We have regular meetings, as Mr Byles has already alluded to, with Mr Little as part of the ongoing dialogue between the service and the elected body. Regularly we raise in that context issues going to employment and delivery. I think it is an area, as I was saying before, where certainly since Ms Forester has been appointed, we have been in a position to continue to think about how we can do better in publicising ourselves to the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Recognising that we compete in this employment market with a very large employer who is appearing before you a bit later who, in general terms, or at least in some professions anyway, pays better than we do, I think part of how we can improve our performance in this area will be continuing to emphasise the degree to which people who work with us can work with and for their immediate community in a way that they cannot if they work on the other side of the lake.

So it comes down to an ongoing dialogue with the local community about what we can offer, what they can offer to us in the way in which we can organise ourselves better or make it easier for members of the community to come and work with us and, hopefully, to stay with us and contribute to the community in a way that, as I say, is harder to do directly from the other side of the lake.

Ms Forester: I just wanted to add to that, as you say, word of mouth is a powerful tool for humans, full stop. But I think the opportunities that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have is that we are a very connected community. We do talk a lot to each other and we listen to what people have to say about an organisation. It took me over 20 years before I came and stepped into ACT government to make that step out of the commonwealth. But seeing the opportunities and hearing about the opportunities that are available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was enough to make me think that maybe this is an area where I should come and have a look.

Going on from what Mr Kefford has said, I think we have got some great opportunities here to sell our roles in the ACT government, particularly in the context that if you want to work with community, you can actually do that in the ACT government in a way that you cannot do in the commonwealth. Really, that is what a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want to do. They want to work with their mob, for their mob, to get really good positive outcomes.

If you ask a lot of Aboriginal people where they saw a job advertised or where they heard about a job advertised, it is usually from friends, family, from within the community. Very rarely do people see jobs advertised in the newspaper or on the internet. Word of mouth is a powerful thing for our community.

MS LAWDER: On the HR side of recruitment, has there been much consultation with the elected body or others—this is sort of a favourite bugbear of mine—about advertisements and addressing selection criteria? I have always believed that it is much more difficult for someone who is outside the public service and who has never been in the public service to understand exactly what you are looking for in those ads.

Mr Kefford: Yes, I think you would be aware that there is some work being done in the ACT PS recruitment guidelines in part to pick up the recommendations that the Auditor-General made when she looked at unrelated matters going to the application of short-term and higher duties and so on. It gave us an opportunity to come back and recast those guidelines.

In that context, we are looking at how we can better provide guidance and advice to colleagues who are pursuing a recruitment process as to how they might make the way in which they seek to attract people more attractive to Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander people. We will go to how to actually use the designated position process in a way that, because of the age of the document, is not there in a form that is useful. I do not think it is there at all, let alone in a form that is useful.

The question you raise about the way in which we select people for the public service is one which, both from personal experience as well as the process that we are going through in that recruitment process, we continue to reflect on. For a certain class of jobs, the capacity to write against five selection criteria is a good way to test whether someone is going to be able to fulfil the job. There are a good number of our jobs across the service, not just in relation to the particular group we are discussing this morning, where I would be much more interested to know their capacity to deliver the job, of which writing has very little part.

In the context of the review of the act which we are currently working on, one of the significant conversations we were having as recently as yesterday is what does merit actually look like? As a public service, of course, we need to make selection processes based on merit, which go to both opportunity to compete for positions as well as the way in which we make that relative assessment. But as we reframe those guidelines for general application as well as for particular groups for which we have got strategies in place, I think there is room in there to be clearer that there are other ways to assess the suitability of people for positions that are perfectly valid and do not rely on long statements against selection criteria.

MS LAWDER: Yes, because I think it applies to other groupings as well—

Mr Kefford: Indeed.

MS LAWDER: not just Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Mr Kefford: Certainly. In the policy white-collar space, the capacity to write against those things is something that people can and should be able to do. But for some of the service delivery roles or the hands-on practical, typical blue-collar type positions, whether or not they can write is not really going to be a good indicator of whether they are going to be good at the job. We do this. I am not saying we do not. But in terms of reframing the guidelines, it gives us an opportunity to have that conversation and direction in a more structured way.

MR WALL: A supplementary?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

MR WALL: I go back to the separations or the retention rate within the ACT public service. As the employment figures have grown over the last four years, the proportion of separations as a percentage have increased. Has there been any data capture or any investigation into why that might be the case?

Mr Kefford: I am sorry. I was distracted by a piece of paper. Could I ask you to repeat your question, Mr Wall?

MR WALL: It must have been a good piece of paper?

Mr Byles: I think it was getting some answers for your previous question.

Mr Kefford: It is an answer to a question and another question from me. We will come back to that.

MR WALL: That is all right, Mr Kefford. I refer to indicator No 3. The chart you have supplied there shows that over the last four years the number of Indigenous employees in the public service has increased, as has the separation rate. But over and above that, the separation rate has grown above what the general population of the service has.

Mr Kefford: Yes.

MR WALL: I was wondering why that is the case. Has there been any investigation or an attempt to capture some data around the cause?

Mr Kefford: The issue you raise around data capture is an interesting one. It kind of flows through the submission that Mr Cappie-Wood and I have made to the committee. We are in the process of developing a system which will give us a better handle on that. While I may be able to give you a sense of why we think this is happening, it is a bit like the answer we give to Ms Porter in estimates the other day about attraction and retention of older people into the service: we do not have good central data on this. We can collect it. We can collect it by survey, but on an ongoing basis, because we still have systems that have not changed since the structure changed, we do not have as good a handle on the data as we might have.

One of the steps that we have been taking as a service in the period since the creation of the single structure is to pursue greater consistency across all of the directorates in what data we capture, how we capture it and so on. One of the steps we are taking in that is the whole-of-government survey; so we will get some good data out of that for the first time across the whole of the service.

It is not to say that we have not got it, but we do not have it consistently. Some directorates have some really good time series data in this space, but as a service we do not have a complete set across the service. So we are looking at ways in which as we begin to manage the workforce as a single workforce rather than as the 11 departments that we were prior to 2011, we need to make sure that we have got the data and the systems capacity to deliver the sorts of information that we need to manage our workforce properly.

MR WALL: Okay. You mentioned in the submission that the whole-of-government staff survey was to be completed in the second half of this year. Has that been done?

Mr Kefford: That was the intention at the point we wrote that. But, for a range of reasons—many of which go to the capacity of our Victorian colleagues to administer the survey—we have decided to do that in March rather than December. As I say, the Victorian State Services Authority administer the survey themselves, but they use external providers to support them in doing that. Essentially, by taking it to March, they are already geared up to deliver it and that will allow us to deliver the process

more efficiently. Given that the report was not done in time for this year's state of the service, whether we did it in December or March does not change the fact that we will publish it in July anyway.

MR WALL: It will be reported in 2014.

Mr Kefford: Yes.

MR WALL: And what information has been gleaned from exit surveys as to the reasons individuals are leaving?

Mr Kefford: Again, it is patchy. I think this is one of the other areas in which I would like a clearer sense. I have a sense, but I would like some clear data behind it. In many cases they are going on promotion somewhere else. So, in one sense, the system works. So while they are not counted in our numbers any more, we are seeing people come to us, enter the workforce, do some training with us and then go and work for the commonwealth or the community sector. In one sense, while they are not showing up in our numbers, as I say, if the intention of this program is to get people from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community into the workplace and equip them with new skills that then mean they can go and do other things, that is great. It is great if they stay on and do other things with us, and there are enormous opportunities to do that with us. But, given where we are and the location of the commonwealth in the same market, we should expect that people will move on.

Indeed, one of the conversations we have started with our commonwealth colleagues and need to continue—and not just for this group—is getting better facilitation of those changes rather than simply having people make their own decisions to go and come back. There is an opportunity for us to say to our colleagues in the service, “Look, why don't you go and work for the commonwealth for a bit. Get some experience in a different sort of environment and then come back.” And, in the same way, for us to say to our commonwealth colleagues, “If you want your people in the health department to get some real front-line service delivery experience, well, come and do it with us. They don't even have to leave home.” Because of our history, that sort of transfer is readily able to be done.

A number of people, like Ms Forester and me, have made that decision of our own accord, but the sort of conversation we have started, as I say, not just with this group, is a way to actually facilitate that transfer as a much more regular part of how we do business. That can then be worked into people's ongoing performance development so they can say, “Well, look, I'd really like to go and spend some time in the commonwealth department for a while,” and we can facilitate that. Again, that goes to the opportunities this creates for us to say, “There is a career path here.” We can do better at mapping those career paths, and I think our submission says that, but, at the same time, there is an opportunity for us to do that.

MS LAWDER: What is the proportion of completion of exit surveys generally and more specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

Mr Kefford: I would have to take that on notice. One of the issues is that, at the moment, they are done at directorate level. It is not something of which we have

complete knowledge in the centre. It is not to say over time we do not think we need to get into that space, and, indeed, we are getting into that space, but, at the moment, I would have to take that on notice.

MR WALL: You mentioned that you did not have data to support it but that your theory is that a large number of the exits were to go on to promotion in other areas.

Mr Kefford: Yes.

MR WALL: Is it simply the attraction of higher salary, or is it a change in role and responsibility?

Mr Kefford: I suppose I would say “some” rather than a “large proportion”, because I actually do not know the answer to that. But, one of the elements someone will weigh up if they are looking for a job is, “What do I get paid?”

MR WALL: Naturally.

Mr Kefford: Indeed. For those jobs where we are actually competing with the commonwealth, the data that has been published this year shows that generally our salaries are lower than theirs. That is not to say that for every position you can have in the ACT public service there is a direct comparator in the commonwealth. For example, if you want to be a nurse on a ward, what the commonwealth pays the health department really does not matter. In that case, it is more relevant what New South Wales pay their nurses. But, for those jobs where there is a direct comparison to the commonwealth, then, yes. If you look at, say, the policy stream, it is a reasonable assumption that someone who has gained some good experience here will move to the commonwealth, remembering that the commonwealth have similar targets to us and are equally keen to deliver on their commitments. They are competing with us, and one comparative advantage they have often will be salary. Ms Forester has outlined some of the other advantages that we have as a service, and part of how we deal with the fact that our pay is not as high as our commonwealth colleagues is to point out the other benefits that we offer here as a service, starting from the fact that we are working directly and closely with our community but, then, also the breadth of opportunity we have without leaving home is far greater than what our commonwealth colleagues can offer.

Ms Forester: If I can just add to your question, Ms Lawder, one of the things we talked about earlier was the word of mouth, and, again, with the Aboriginal community being quite small, the salaries tend to focus a few people. If you have family members in the commonwealth doing a similar job for a higher salary and an opportunity comes up there, people will think about those options. Again, for us to keep people here, it is about what we can offer. I also think we have some great opportunities to get more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into our service.

Mr Kefford: Chair, before we move on, might I come back to Mr Wall’s data question?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Kefford: The overall numbers in the ACT public sector are 257. The total in the ACT public service is 238. The distinction between those is that the public service is essentially the directorates that work for the Head of Service. The public sector picks up Calvary public, CIT, A-G's, DPP and the Office of the Legislative Assembly. So, of the 257, 146 are women, which is 56.8 per cent, I am advised, of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. The public sector head count is 57 per cent women, and the average across the whole of the service is 65.5 per cent women.

THE CHAIR: What encouragement is there for Indigenous employees to undertake further study in their chosen field once they have moved beyond traineeships and are moving up the middle ranks of the service?

Mr Kefford: Dr Bourke, the opportunities for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are the same as for the rest of the service. A larger proportion of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff than the overall workforce have participated in the future leaders program that we run centrally. The way in which the training development needs are administered generally is through the performance framework that I was alluding to before, so it becomes a conversation that staff have with their supervisors about their future development desires and, therefore, needs. There is an opportunity as part of that framework to have that conversation on a regular basis. That takes into account, as I say, the performance on the job in terms of areas where perhaps an individual might have it suggested to them that they will benefit from a training course or, alternatively, they express a desire to undertake something. At the same time, the intention of all of that is that it becomes an ongoing conversation and recognises that sometimes the best training and development will be provided by on-the-job experience rather than formal coursework.

THE CHAIR: Is there any checking of directorates to find out if each Indigenous employee has the required individual learning and development career plan?

Mr Kefford: Not specifically for that class of employees. Although one of the significant areas of emphasis in the rollout of the new performance framework is the expectation from the Head of Service and the strategic board that it will be administered for every employee. As I say, that framework was launched in July by the Head of Service, and there will be reporting to us as part of that. There are also reporting expectations under the RED framework of directorates providing information about the learning and development needs and responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

THE CHAIR: And what about the potential for mentoring by Indigenous senior officers of junior staff within directorates? How is that coming along?

Mr Kefford: Again, that is part of our framework in the way, indeed, it is with other jurisdictions. Perhaps the best example of this at the moment in the service is a program that has been undertaken in the Health Directorate where they have gone down a path of formally training mentors to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. I think it has been shown to be an effective mechanism for providing support to employees, not just at our place but in other jurisdictions. Again, it is an area that forms part of the strategy and one which sits as an important part of all of our learning and development, not just for this group.

THE CHAIR: And what are the options to revitalise the ACT public service Indigenous staff network?

Ms Forester: We have commenced that process. The staff network has had two meetings since July to talk about the opportunities for reinvigorating the staff network. After the first meeting, we sent out a survey to all staff for their input into the sort of network they wanted, the sorts of things they would like to see happen with that, how often they would like to meet, when they would like to meet and so forth. We recently had the second meeting last week at the cultural centre. We are working really hard to try to reinvigorate the whole-of-government staff network. I know a number of directorates have individual networks, but we are looking at what we can do to bring the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff network into something that is workable and something staff want and rather than something that is imposed on them.

THE CHAIR: Just coming back to career advancement, there seems to be a sense that careers of Indigenous officers in the ACT public service plateau at middle ranks. Why would that be?

Mr Kefford: I am not sure there is an easy answer to that. In general, one of the issues we are seeking to engage right across the service is a better sense of workforce planning, career progression and succession planning. It is an area in which I think we will do better with the sort of data we are going to get out of the survey when we do it. I could relate a series of anecdotes from my own staff's experience as to why people have gone where they have gone.

In some respects, some individuals will consciously choose not to pursue further promotions. For others, there may be skills or capability deficiencies which we could be addressing. Again, the performance framework is part of the answer to this. It sits more with a focus on those of us responsible for staff in the service to actually consciously think about and talk about how we can assist our colleagues reach whatever their aspirations might be. Again, the performance framework places great emphasis on that responsibility to manage and look after our people in all respects, including actively assisting them to reach whatever it is they would choose to do in their own careers.

THE CHAIR: Perhaps Ms Forester, with her experience in the commonwealth and the AFP, could shed some light there as well about other experiences in other places.

Ms Forester: Yes, if I just use myself as an example.

THE CHAIR: Only if you want to.

Ms Forester: For a very long time, I sat within the same bandwidth—when I say “for a very long time”, I am talking around 10 years—through a range of different agencies. I was quite comfortable doing what I was doing, and that was what my skills and expertise were. Some of it was around lots of care for the work that I was doing, however not having the final responsibility for things that were happening. I think a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people get comfortable within that zone of the work that they are doing, what they want to do. We are not as ambitious as some

people like to think. Yes, there is a proportion of our community who are ambitious and want to go on to senior ranks but a lot of our community are comfortable doing the work that they do.

Particularly from my recent experience in the AFP, for instance, we basically had a saying that if we got a member past the seven-year mark, we had them for life. And I think that is probably true in a lot of agencies. If we can get somebody past the seven, eight-year mark, we have got them for life, and they are comfortable doing what they want to do. They do not have the ambition to want to progress. I think because of that they develop a really good skill base that is very much valued in the work that they are doing.

Even for me, taking that step from being just in the executive level ranks into the senior executive service was a big decision that I had to make. But my decision was put down to: I think I have got a lot to offer; I think I have got a lot of experience. And in reality, it was probably about time.

I also had a number of people pushing me to make that step. And if I did not have those people pushing me to make those steps, I would probably still be sitting across the lake doing what I was doing with the AFP and, again, being very happy for the next 10 years at the level that I was.

So I think one of the questions that we need to actually think about is: do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people really want to progress or are they happy with what they are doing? And I think that is the question that we need to ask, particularly because we are so connected to our community and we think about our other responsibilities. We get past raising our children and then all of a sudden we are having to consider elder care. So for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people those responsibilities to family and community are ongoing. The break never happens. I am about to do that. My youngest is 25, and I am about to take on caring for my mother. So there are those responsibilities that we all need to think about. And I think we do get comfortable.

That is probably not just for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but for people with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds as well where we do get comfortable and people think we need to push people through. Those that do want to progress, we do need to provide the support for. We do need to provide some opportunities. But I do not think that we should get locked up in this whole fact that an Aboriginal person may sit at that ASO5 or ASO6 level for 10 years and automatically from the outside people go, "There are all these other people going past them. Why is that?" If we ask the question, some of them will say, "Yes, I've applied for things. I got an opportunity. I applied once, twice, three times. I didn't get anything, so I'm not going to bother again." Or the flipside of that is, "I'm quite happy doing what I'm doing. I'm quite happy to support the work that I'm doing, to continue the work that I'm doing and train others that come through and past me."

THE CHAIR: Did you have a feeling that to be in the SES you needed to be exceptional, that you needed to be of such a high level of competency to be able to be competitive because you are an Indigenous public servant?

Ms Forester: No, not for me personally. And that, I think, is really just because of me and my upbringing. To me, things are not privileges; they are there. They are opportunities. And they are opportunities that we have to take. I think the big thing for me is not so much about the exceptional individual that steps up into those ranks but it is also about the additional time and effort that one needs to put in. You can be an EL1, an EL2, in an organisation. You can come to work at 8 o'clock, you can go home at 6 o'clock, you do not have to worry about what is going to happen after hours. When you make this move into the higher ranks, technically you are on call 24/7, I believe. Some people may not think that, but if something goes down, then you have got to be there to support that. Maybe that is just a misconception.

But I think, for me, stepping up into those ranks was really about, "Okay, do I want to do this? Do I want to put in this time? Do I want to give up my life?" The moment I got handed an iPad and an iPhone I knew, "I am on call. I am contactable." So I think those sorts of things are things that we need to think about. And in reality, if you look right across the commonwealth and its jurisdictions, the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that are in those senior ranks is very low. In the commonwealth public sector, for instance, we have one band 2 SES officer. We have a number at the band 1 level. But I think it is about making that step and wanting to do that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

MS BERRY: As a supplementary, you talked about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people making that decision for themselves because it suits their lifestyle or where they are. In talking with friends of mine who are working in the public sector and who have had children and then had demotions rather than continuing on at that higher level because the higher level meant that they did not have the flexibility that they needed to be a parent, are they some of the things that might be taken into consideration? You are talking personally, what is happening in your life right now. That might be a decision that you have to make because the flexibility is not there. And do you think that that should be something that is taken into account, that there should be flexibility at those higher levels?

Ms Forester: I think we need to make sure that people understand that people have different life responsibilities. I think everybody needs to take that into consideration. And that is not just something for women; it is something for men as well, because I think men these days are taking on the caring roles a lot more than they have in the past. I think people just need to be aware of what their limitations are and what their opportunities are, but we also have to be honest about what our capability or what our responsibilities are. So I think it is really important when people do step up into those higher levels, their managers, their supervisors, know that they do have other responsibilities. So I think it is, yes, just one of those things that we need to be aware of. And in reality, that is just common sense.

One of the things that I say to people is, "No matter what position you sit in, you need to learn about your staff. You need to know your staff. Yes, you are not coming to work to be everybody's friend but you need to know a little about what it is that motivates them and what their responsibilities are."

THE CHAIR: Coming back to the survey that you were talking about before, Mr Kefford, that is going to be able to generate some data around Indigenous employees at each rank within the public service and their career progression and provide some evidence around that?

Mr Kefford: It will. It will not answer all of the questions that come out of this conversation, but it will certainly be more data and more consistent data than what we have at the moment. And it will be administered as a census rather than as a survey.

THE CHAIR: So when will that be available?

Mr Kefford: I will report it in next year's state of the service. The data will be available, I understand from my Victorian colleagues, within a few weeks of the process being conducted. They have a reasonably efficient process for turning around the responses. But we will run it in March. I will publish it in next year's state of the service.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Wall.

MR WALL: Ms Forester, one of the points you touched on before was that Indigenous people are not necessarily as ambitious as some others in the wider community. What is your basis for that comment?

Ms Forester: That is just knowing my community.

MR WALL: Okay.

Ms Forester: It is knowing my community. I have been a part of my community for 50 years.

MR WALL: It touches on a point which is probably fairly key to not just this employment strategy but Indigenous employment more generally: if there is a philosophy like that, a lower level of ambition to progress further, then, on the flip side, there is possibly the same sort of attitude towards entering into the workforce in the beginning. Would you assume that that is a reasonable point?

Ms Forester: Yes, I would assume that is a reasonable assumption. When I was younger, I never wanted to be a public servant. I thought to myself: "What can I do working for government? What influence can I have? What are they doing for my community?" The only thing I knew about government as a young adult, as a teenager, was that we had a thing called social security that paid child endowment, and there were unemployment fees, and there were a lot of Aboriginal people that worked in those areas. I did not know much else about government. I think the motivation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to work is (a) to be able to feed their family, to be able to get accommodation, clothing, and so forth. The motivation for a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to get into the workforce is to be able to look after the mob.

THE CHAIR: What did you want to be when you grew up?

Ms Forester: What did I want to be? When I was a teenager, all I wanted to do was be a theatre practitioner. I have those skills and expertise, but I never had any intent to want to sit in an office and do that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Mr Wall.

MR WALL: I guess the next step from there is: what can we as a government or as a public service do? How can we take that attitude into consideration? What can be done? What should we be doing to further attract and recruit? From your experience, what are the shortfalls in what we are currently doing?

Ms Forester: I think it is about people out there actually knowing what we do, knowing what services we provide and where there could be opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Earlier we talked about the terminology of jobs. Yes, a high percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want to work in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs. Another percentage of them just would like a job. We need to be clear about what the opportunities are out there, what we can provide and what are the expectations of those particular roles.

I think that where we can focus the best is to start getting into the younger generation, particularly our year 10s, 11s and 12s, talking to them about what government does and getting them job ready so that when they do graduate from year 12 there are opportunities for them to make that decision, so they can say (a) “I want to work for government,” (b) “I want to go study,” (c) “I want to work in the retail sector or in a community services type area.” I think that is where we need to concentrate our efforts so that people have an understanding about what is available in government. Yes, there are areas where you can work specifically supporting your community and supporting your mob, but there are other areas. If you want to work in IT, you can work in IT; if you want to be in HR, you can work in HR; if you want to be involved in the schools as a teacher’s aide or even in some of the more manual areas in horticulture or whatever, those opportunities are out there. I think that is really what we need to do.

MR WALL: So a bit more mentoring for those latter schooling years into earlier adulthood?

Ms Forester: Yes; mentoring, school-based apprenticeships—those types of areas, where we can provide some of the work experience so that people can get an opportunity to know what it is to work in our organisation prior to them making a decision that this is where they want to end up.

MR WALL: Thanks.

THE CHAIR: Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: I have a question regarding NAIDOC Week. My children’s primary school celebrates NAIDOC Week throughout the week, and our early childhood centre did the same. It helped that there were people who work in those environments that have Aboriginal heritage. I noted that one of the strategies that you have for the retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees is that they have access

to leave for NAIDOC Week and other days of cultural significance. How does the public service or the public sector celebrate NAIDOC Week within the workplace? For example, for the ACT government primary schools, it is a pretty important week in their calendar. How does the ACT government across other departments celebrate?

Mr Byles: I know from personal experience that directorates—again, this is personal experience—are very supportive of NAIDOC Week, emphasising that they model that support in allowing leave and providing whatever support they can for the various people to attend NAIDOC Week. Andrew, you might want to elaborate on the types of other activities that go on?

Mr Kefford: Sure. Mr Byles is right; it is done at a directorate level. This year it was marked particularly with the formal opening of the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Community Services took the lead in the way that you would expect; that is more Ms Forester's space than mine.

But there are provisions made. In some cases it is a low key thing where individuals just want to go and do what they want to do, and that is fine. In some cases, it is reflected even in things like the regular social club gatherings having a NAIDOC theme. It is one that is done at a local and directorate level, because that is the level at which it makes the most sense in terms of organising events.

MS BERRY: I guess the reason why I was asking about it was that when Ms Forester talked about the conversations being the most important thing about culture and having people understand culture, with NAIDOC Week, if there are celebrations within departments—storytelling, music or having people from the community coming into various departments to tell their stories—that would go a long way in having those stories told, with that communication and those conversations about culture. Do you think there is enough being done or that more could be done in that respect?

Mr Byles: It is a fair point, Ms Berry; I have just noted that down. Anything we can do that makes people more aware, that encourages connection—certainly I would be very happy to look at that. I have jotted that down so that I can follow that up.

Ms Forester: NAIDOC is really important, and a number of directorates do have celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture within their reconciliation action plans. I think the important thing that we need to note is that NAIDOC is the focus but it should not be the only time when we celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture; it has to be an ongoing conversation. I know that through the Community Services Directorate, with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander grants program, in the past we have had schools, for instance, apply for funding to run NAIDOC events, and particular projects have come out of that. Again, some directorates probably do it better than others; that really comes down to a lot of the personnel and the opportunities available for people to do things.

One of the big opportunities for the ACT government in coming up into NAIDOC for 2014 is the fact that we now do have an Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, whose focus is about getting those conversations happening. I think that after next year we will be able to ensure that we have got a good program of

activities happening out there and provide support to all of the directorates in ACT government to ensure that that conversation commences and that conversation continues.

MS BERRY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: I have a question relating to page 30 of your submission, about the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander liaison officers. First, could you just help me with this: is there a missing word or words in the blue box? Is it “panel” or “recruitment panel” or something? Do you know? It is at the top of page 30. The heading is:

5. Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander liaison officers ...

It is page 30 of 31 in my submission. It says:

Of those who completed the survey, Five Agencies recruited a total of eight Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officers.

Do you see where I mean? It continues:

Further, four Agencies report they arranged for an Aboriginal Community member to be on the ...

Ms Forester: Sorry, panel.

Mr Kefford: Interview panel. It is from the state of the service report, page 59. We will fix it up.

MS LAWDER: From the information provided, it says that five were recruited but only four had an Aboriginal community member on the panel. In the performance strategy, it says:

Where Directorates are recruiting Aboriginal Liaison Officers, an Aboriginal community member must be on the interview panel.

That is in the beige-buff colour. Apparently, it should apply to all directorates' employment strategies. Can you explain who is responsible for monitoring this and reminding directorates or ensuring that directorates comply with this?

Mr Kefford: At the moment, the strategy is administered and delivered at a directorate level. To the extent that there is a reminder process, it is the annual reporting process, which we complete, at the moment, through a survey.

MS LAWDER: Has someone written to that directorate and said—

Mr Kefford: As part of the process of settling this, we kind of interrogate what we have been told and go back and say, “Excuse me.” In terms of which one it is, I actually do not know. I can take that on notice, if you like. As I say, what we publish

here is the collation of the survey data.

MS LAWDER: It seems like a reasonably pertinent point.

Mr Kefford: Indeed. Without knowing the details—and I do not know the details—there may have been a particular issue, in which case, while that is not strictly in compliance, it was unavoidable. But I am happy to take that on notice, because I do not know.

MS LAWDER: You would not want it to become a habit.

Mr Kefford: No; indeed. This goes to one of the issues we were touching on before, about the way in which we discharge the whole of that workforce management function across the service now that it is a single organisation. With the way in which the new industrial agreements run horizontally across the whole of the service, the scope for that sort of directorate difference is much diminished. That will also assist us in picking up on this kind of thing.

MS LAWDER: Thanks.

THE CHAIR: We will adjourn for a tea break. Thank you, Mr Byles and Mr Kefford—and Ms Centenera, who did not get a chance to speak, I am afraid.

Ms Centenera: That is all right.

THE CHAIR: And Ms Forester. Thank you for attending and for your evidence.

Sitting suspended from 10.53 to 11.03 am.

CHURCH, MR BRENDAN, Board Member, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body

BROWN, MS ROS, Board Member, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body

THE CHAIR: I reopen this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Services. Good morning and welcome to this public hearing. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for attending today. We are going to be hearing evidence from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body from now until 12 pm.

Witnesses are afforded a range of protections and obligations by parliamentary privilege, and I draw your attention to the privilege statement before you on the table, the pink card. Could you confirm for the record that you both understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Mr Church: I understand.

Ms Brown: I understand.

THE CHAIR: I remind witnesses that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and webstreamed and broadcast live. Before we proceed to questions from the committee, would you care to make an opening statement?

Mr Church: I think I will. Firstly, I would like to pass on an apology from the chairperson, Rod Little. He has got an interstate commitment, so he was not able to make it today. Aunty Ros and I will be providing some evidence on behalf of Rod and other elected body members.

I guess what I will do is start off by giving an overview of our submission from 16 August. This talks about five or six points which the elected body are particularly concerned about around the current status of the employment strategy. But it also offers some solutions around how we think we could progress some of these areas. So bear with me and I will just quickly go through them. It should only take a couple of minutes.

I guess first and foremost the elected body are concerned about the current status of the strategy and we really want to ask the question: is the strategy being implemented as a priority across the directorates? There are a lot of government frameworks out there these days that the community foresee as tick and flick documents, and the elected body are concerned that this strategy may be one of those.

There is a clear focus on entry level positions, or a lot of the reporting has been done on entry level positions—the traineeships and graduate programs in particular. And the elected body are really concerned that a lot of the statistics are being reflected by that. The increases are only at the bottom level, not through the middle and senior management positions.

There are some particular concerns around the traineeship program and around the

success rate of the current trainees. What I think we need to remember is that this trainee experience is often the first employment or position that a lot of these young people have occupied. So their experience with employment in basically the public service is really going to be impacted if they have a bad experience initially as a trainee. So I think we need to keep in mind that this is going to impact on them long term. The elected body strongly believe that there needs to be additional support for the trainees. This will see an increase in the number of trainees that go through the program successfully.

We would like to take this time to challenge, I guess, the comment that Robyn made around the ambitions of Aboriginal people within the community. I think that Aboriginal people generally are very ambitious. We have got seven dedicated elected body members and we have got an Aboriginal person sitting across the table from us who is quite ambitious. That statement is probably a statement that does not apply to the whole of the population; it is probably a small population group. Tracing that back to the traineeship program, I think that we really need to make sure that this traineeship program is effective and there are really high standards set for these young people entering the workforce.

With the traineeship program, the elected body are concerned that this is the first employment experience for a lot of these participants. And throwing some of them into a five-day-a-week position may not be the best way to approach it. So there needs to be greater flexibility, whether that be a one, two or three-day-a-week transition-type program. A lot of them are overwhelmed going straight into a traineeship program from no work. So that needs to be really taken into account.

This applies, really, across all ACT government employee positions. There needs to be clear transition pathways, and, with the traineeship program, we have seen a couple of the initial graduates finding it very hard to find full-time permanent employment in the public service following the traineeship program. And that is a big concern for us. We believe there should be a strategic pathway for each and every person that goes through this program.

The elected body also share concerns around the uptake of the graduate program. Reading through the data, I think there were four out of 250-odd that identified as being Aboriginal, which is a great concern. It is also concerning that there are a low number of applications from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A way to promote this program could be setting aside specific positions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These would be marketed as identified positions and they would be able to be promoted by word of mouth in our community. And I am quite confident, as are our other members, that this would increase the uptake of graduates in that program.

So moving on to the retention of staff, retaining staff is a profound issue identified by the elected body. Losing 30 staff last year is not okay. And given that number has been on the rise over the past couple of years, I think we need to really look at doing something to help retain staff. That will be things like making sure that there are meaningful roles attached to their positions, clear career progression, but also greater flexibility in the public service. It is unfortunate that we do not have the current capacity to do secondments across other areas of directorates, which the federal

government can do. If we work to promote those types of activities in the ACT public service, I am sure the retention rates would level out a lot better.

There are concerns around temporary employment, given that about one-third of current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees are temporary. That is not okay. And the disparity in salaries between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and the wider ACT public service being around \$10,000 also is a concern and brings us back to the issue that we have around competing with the federal government. I would argue there are better conditions over there. There are obviously higher salaries. I have got no doubt that a lot of people leave the ACT public service to go across to the federal public service.

As to attracting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, I think, first and foremost, the ACT public service needs to adapt their current recruitment process. I do not think the current process complements the skills and abilities of our community members. I do note that there was some work done previously by the commonwealth through FAHCSIA around this. It may be worth considering how they amended their employment and their recruitment strategies.

Recognising that Aboriginal people are generally attracted to organisations with a critical mass of staff, I think, is one area where we really fall down in the ACT. There are pockets of Aboriginal staff across the directorates. There are no designated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander units, apart from our recently established office.

As to creating a flexible and supportive environment for Aboriginal staff, a lot of our community members have got community and family obligations. We had an elected body forum last week where we had some community members that were carers for their disabled family members, for example. And the stresses and the pressure associated with that need to be considered in the workplace.

As I said before, really meaningful work is needed. Aboriginal people do not like to be put in a corner and do jobs that are not going to benefit the community. So there needs to be real and meaningful work.

As to culture awareness and competence—and Aunty Ros might want to jump in here—the elected body strongly believe that all ACT public service employees should have cultural awareness training, and it has been promoted through reconciliation action plans and the respect, equity and diversity framework. However, there need to be mechanisms put in place to ensure that this is ongoing and that the ACT government directorates are able to assess or put measures in place to ensure that these staff that are undertaking this training are competent and that it is not just a one-off thing.

I guess just to wrap up my opening remarks, what we strongly believe needs to happen is that there needs to be a detailed plan from here to 2015 that will outline how the ACT government is going to achieve their targets. This is relating to the attraction, retention and career progression of our Aboriginal staff. We also believe it is timely to evaluate current strategies across the directorates to find out what is working and what is not. We are happy to take questions.

THE CHAIR: What do you see would be the main benefits of the current strategy and its proposal to increase employment in the ACT public service and the augmentations that you propose as well?

Mr Church: It goes back to the comment that I said before around raising expectations in the community. I think that creating employment in the ACT public service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff will create a lifestyle, an intergenerational lifestyle, where young children have an expectation to go to work, that it is not something out of the ordinary, that going to work and having a good job and going to school and getting education and going to uni is a social norm for our communities.

I commend the ACT government for taking the step to sign up for the employment strategy. And I do note that there is an increase in the numbers, a slight increase. But I really think that there needs to be a greater focus on our middle management and senior management positions in the ACT public service and take away the focus from the entry level positions.

THE CHAIR: What would you see as the main elements of a successful mentoring program in the ACT public service for Indigenous employees?

Ms Brown: I cannot hear you, sorry. My hearing is a bit bad, sorry. What was the question?

THE CHAIR: What do you see as the main elements of a successful mentoring scheme in the ACT public service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees?

Ms Brown: I think the basic element, the fundamental element, is to address the racism and the prejudice. You can tell people what to do and they can change their behaviour, their body language and their verbal language, but subtle racism and prejudice, I think, are the fundamental things that need to be addressed. And it is not just about punishing a racist. They are human beings too and they need support. How come they are a racist? Why are they a racist? That would be a product of their upbringing, I think, or learned behaviour.

So that really needs to be addressed—as far as I am concerned, for cultural reasons—for the whole country, not just for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but also for the non-Indigenous people. If you make somebody feel that they come from the lowest form of life, you have set them up for failure. You walk in and you experience racism, you see it but you also experience it. So if you are going to set a mentoring process up and there is still racism happening—ie, the glass ceiling and stuff like that—it is set up to fail, isn't it?

THE CHAIR: We heard evidence this morning that there has only been one complaint of racism through the respect, equity and diversity framework. What is your response to that?

Ms Brown: Well, there is a backlash. People fear a backlash. Racism is bullying, too. So it is similar to a child telling on the bullies at school—they fear the backlash too

much. And that just propels the racism further, and that bullying and sort of stand-over attitude. Do you agree, Brendan?

Mr Church: I think there is a lot of indirect racism going on as well. Racism these days is generally not someone calling someone a derogatory name; it is indirectly making comments around a person. I would argue that racism in the workplace is giving a trainee a non-meaningful job and just getting them to do the filing, packing the papers away and doing the photocopying. To me, that is saying that that is all the manager or the supervisor thinks that person is capable of doing whereas, in fact, they are actually capable of doing work at a much higher level.

Ms Brown: Yes, and I mentioned the glass ceiling. I think supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to fulfil their potential and increasing the number of senior managers in the public service is a positive way to address racism. It is a great process. You cannot just have a three-hour cultural awareness session. That would be like if I went to China and worked in the public service, because that is how distanced we are in this country between white and black. If I went to China and wanted to know about the people and I had a three-hour course, how is that going to affect me? It would just open up more questions and you would not have much self-confidence.

Mr Church: Could I just digress back to the mentor question?

THE CHAIR: Sure.

Mr Church: Mentoring Aboriginal people is a lot different to mentoring mainstream people. When mentoring an Aboriginal person in the traineeship program, you need to not only consider their professional development but also their cultural, family and community development. Right now the current program is placing too much emphasis on the external mentor and there is not enough internal mentoring happening in the departments. I really think we need to develop that. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentors have the knowledge and understanding of the community, and, at times, there is family. But those three or four elements need to be met before a person can progress. Someone may be progressing really well in the workplace with the traineeship, but then they may have family issues and it all falls over. In the past, some trainees have come from interstate and they have left because they have missed home. So those sorts of issues need to be considered.

THE CHAIR: Could you talk a little bit more about what you mean by “internal mentoring”?

Mr Church: Having a really supportive mentor in the workplace, whether that be a colleague, a manager, or a supervisor. I really think it is beneficial to have someone at a high level that can look down. We have all started at the bottom, and you have got people like Robyn Forester in OATSIA now who have started at the bottom and now they are right up the top. It is really good for our young people to be able to look at a person like Robyn and aspire to be someone like her. A lot of the time our young people in particular and also our lower level employees in the public service have a real fear of the hierarchy in public service. They do not want to go and talk to another person for fear of breaking the public service protocols and all those sorts of things. So we need to break down those barriers. If someone has an issue, they should be able

to go and talk to someone like Robyn about what is happening in the workplace.

THE CHAIR: And you talked a bit about graduates entering the ACT public service. Why do you think so few Indigenous graduates enter the ACT public service?

Mr Church: I personally think Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are attracted to positions and opportunities through how they are marketed. If an Aboriginal person sees a graduate opportunity advertised for the mainstream, they automatically think they are not going to get it because there will be 100 other people going for it. Whereas if there is an Aboriginal targeted initiative which is marketed properly, Aboriginal people are attracted to that. They will go for that and they will know there is support and they will know there is additional information and they will know there will be assistance in applying. Right now I think the current process—including the recruitment processes for the public service—are just too monotonous for our community.

THE CHAIR: And does that in one way support your contradiction of previous evidence around ambition?

Mr Church: Yes.

Ms Brown: Actually, earlier this year there was an employment expo. Unfortunately there was a low attendance from schools and ACT government directorates, and so there was not much information, nothing really tangible for people to grasp. People just walk past a stall, and if there is nothing there to grab your interest you keep going. We all know that; we are people. If something grabs your interest and you can see that you are going to be supported properly within that directorate in the public service, that should be promoted more and directorates should be more committed to attending expos.

MR WALL: Ms Brown, you were talking about racism within the workplace. Is it that it is ignorance or is it that it is an embedded perception, do you feel from your experience?

Ms Brown: Both. It is not a perception; it is happening.

MR WALL: No, I mean, is it because of someone's perception or prejudice or is it because they just do not know any better or they are unaware?

Ms Brown: I think it is both really—ignorance and perception. It is learned behaviour, too. This is a little story, because we are storytellers. I watched a show years ago on *Donahue*, the American TV presenter. He brought members of the Ku Klux Klan on to his show to meet up with African Americans. And one of the Ku Klux Klan members had his little boy, he must have been about three or four. He brought him with him, and he was teaching him bad behaviour. He was saying, "Look at the niggers in the audience," to the little boy. And the African-American people were just really shocked and hurt. And then one African-American man said, "Well, you're really teaching him to be a bad person," not really in those words, but that was what he meant. Anyway, the audience clapped for the African American, and so did the four-year-old little boy. He was too young to be spoiled in his head.

So I think learned behaviour has to be changed, and by people who are respected in government. I heard Gary Byles say earlier that he expects people to do as he does and not as he says. So what do people at his level do? What are they doing if they are expecting other people to do as they do? Not that I am saying he is like the Ku Klux Klan.

MR WALL: Do you think the programs and the practices currently in place in the ACT public service for all employees go far enough towards educating staff and dispelling some of these prejudice issues to prevent racism from occurring?

Ms Brown: Say the question again, please?

MR WALL: Do the training and support and the induction process within the public service go far enough to prevent these things from happening, and, if not, where do you think the shortfall is?

Ms Brown: I would like to see a structure of the journey of that trainee, the journey through that traineeship. I would like to see who is doing the mentoring. I totally agree with Brendan; it has got to be internal mentoring. Maybe it could be a combination of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. If that mentor has not been treated positively in the ACT public service, then maybe they need to experience a change for the new trainees coming through. Do you get what I mean?

Mr Church: Are referring to racism? I am not sure if that is where you are going with your question?

MR WALL: Yes, not just for Indigenous employees or Indigenous trainees but all employees within the public service. Is there enough training and education to try and dispel some of those prejudices that may already exist?

Ms Brown: That is a good question. I think it needs to happen for all people. You cannot promote change just working with one group; you have to work with everybody.

Mr Church: Yes, Aunty Ros commented before about learned behaviours. To put your hand on your heart and say we are all doing enough around racism and things like that through running a one-off, one-hour cultural awareness training, you are kidding yourself. It needs to be ongoing training, development opportunities and working closely with Aboriginal staff and other staff.

Ms Brown: Yes, I think it is a disservice to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and I think it is also a disservice to the non-Indigenous people who are in the two or three-hour program.

MR WALL: And on the support network that is provided and flexibility of employment conditions, you mentioned family play such a significant role for Indigenous people and it is often external influences to their employment that cause things to not work out. Is there enough flexibility, or where should improvements be made from the employment side of things to support the domestic side?

Mr Church: I think it all comes down to understanding. If you have a really understanding manager or supervisor that knows what life is like for an Aboriginal person, then you will probably create an environment that is a lot more flexible and the person will want to be there. If you have a supervisor or manager who is not aware of those cultural and family obligations, you are probably going to create some barriers, and that is when you will see the employee not turning up to work and then moving on to a more flexible environment.

MR WALL: You mentioned before that employment and recruitment processes are often too monotonous for Indigenous people. Can you elaborate on what you mean by that?

Mr Church: You read through selection criteria these days and they are very wordy, and they do not directly relate to the skills and expertise that some of our community members have. They are generic. You read selection criteria across all the directorates and they are exactly the same. They talk about oral and written communication, participative work practices and all that. Our community are not aware of those sorts of words. They are public service-type words that only people associated with the public service would be aware of. It needs to be simplified—what do you bring to the workplace? What do you see your role being? How can you contribute to this role?

MS BERRY: You were talking about ambition and opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Where I live in west Belconnen, there is the highest density of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT. How do you think ACT government departments can get in touch with those people? We heard earlier evidence that it was more through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, through conversations and through word of mouth that people heard about job opportunities. Do you think that is the case or do you think that more needs to be done to get out into the suburbs where people are living to give them that opportunity to have that ambition?

Ms Brown: I think more needs to be done to get out and to try and promote employment in the ACT public service. I think people have to do a real reflection on what the ACT government or any government is about in the country. It should not be a case of forcing mainstream ideas onto Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or ethnic groups which do not feel like their voice is included. It is about public service; it is service to the public. When it becomes hard line, authoritarian—“our way is the only way and we will keep ramming that square plug into that round hole even though it does not fit”—we will distort it. I think it does not do Canberra or the country as a whole a good service.

I think it just sustains the ignorance that is going on in this country. It is really frustrating for people that want to progress the country. I think we are tired of non-Indigenous people inhibiting our progress. “You come and work for us now, but you’ve got to listen to us. We don’t want to hear that stuff about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.” They do not say it, of course, but that is what is out there.

We can promote or government can promote as much as they want. But there is no

cynic like a black oppressed cynic. Do you know what I mean? “They want us to work for us and push their ideas down our throats.” To Aboriginal people, that is part of the assimilation process. There must be change in the public service at all levels. At the director-general level, he or she might have a great idea, but it is getting lost. It is not being monitored, and by not being monitored, it is not being nurtured.

MS BERRY: But how do you think the ACT public service can have those conversations about those improvements with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and organisations such as the elected body? What can be done? Rather than talking, what is something practical that can start from today that the ACT public service could do to break down some of those barriers?

Ms Brown: On the ground, I will tell you what needs to be done: the D-Gs need to be brought together. They need to have forums on how they can stop resisting change and progress and put their ideas into how we can progress this. This is our second term, and we are just saying the same thing. There is so much resistance to change. They have got to stop; they have got to stop resisting change. By them stopping and monitoring what is supposed to be happening down the chain in the public service, then I think that real change will happen. The only way we can do that is through the politicians. You are the only ones, really, that can bring that together.

THE CHAIR: In your estimates hearings, are you seeing a commitment by the ACT public service being demonstrated to implement this employment strategy?

Ms Brown: Not much.

Mr Church: It is slow and steady. A lot of the responses we get when we raise them in the hearings are around the front-end stuff, as I said before—which is the easiest way to go about it. It costs only a minimal amount to employ a trainee as opposed to employing an SES officer. I think there is a commitment, but we are often met with the same argument around there being no money. That is the big barrier at the moment.

Ms Brown: I think no money and no motivation, myself, and so do many of the other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the community. I agree with Brendan; it is human nature to have ambition. There might be some people who are comfortable being at a certain level that suits their lifestyle. But it is human nature to have ambition. If you are ambitious and you want to get ahead and the people in power are not helping that, then, it just destroys your ambition.

Mr Church: I think I misinterpreted your comment a while back about contradicting stuff. In a sense, it is. But Aboriginal people need to be supported to make that first step. I think once you make that first step, then you create an environment where Aboriginal people want to progress. But right across our community, when you talk about engaging with government, people hold off because they are scared of what goes on behind closed doors in government. So I think it is just that support with the initial steps.

MS LAWDER: In your submission you have listed a number of dot points of what the elected body would like to see. One of them is targeted promotion of the ACT

government as a career choice utilising current staff and real stories of success. Can you give me some examples of what you might see as targeted promotion? Can you make some suggestions about how we might go about doing that?

Mr Church: The recruitment and the promotion of public service positions is always going to be challenging. My thoughts around that would be to have people like Robyn and other senior employees actively engaging in the public service network but also speaking with school students. We heard before talk about education. There should be engagement with younger people. Speaking for myself, I had no idea what I wanted to do when I finished school. There were a million and one opportunities out there for me. The message we need to pass on to these young people in the schools is that opportunities are out there, and if you stick by it and if you go to school, you can end up as an SES director in ACT government, as Robyn is.

We have got a lot of successful public servants in the ACT that work in the ACT public service but also in the commonwealth. I really think we underutilise them. A lot of people think the public service is an inflexible job where you come in and you cannot progress, whereas we have examples of that where you can. Getting that out to the community is really hard. But I think the best way would be to engage in the public service network, to engage in schools and provide flyers and brochures around Robyn's career and how she started off. I think a lot of our community are afraid to start. But once they start, then there is no holding them back.

Ms Brown: Let's face it, what they really think is, "If I enter that government, if I go into there, I'm really entering the white man's world." And that is a really scary place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Although we know there are many, many good people in this country, far more than what there is ignorant and abusive people towards Aboriginal people, but they need to experience that by working in government.

Mr Church: And Aboriginal people like to see outcomes. In government you see a lot of policy documents and frameworks which do not mean anything to our community. You can talk to Aboriginal people about government running programs that are aimed at service delivery, I spoke to a couple of young people around the bush healing farm and they said, "Yeah, we'd love to work out there," because they can see that is going to create opportunities for them to work with the community. A lot of our community do not like to sit behind a desk writing policy because they do not see where it hits the ground. It all goes back to what I was saying before around creating meaningful employment opportunities.

THE CHAIR: We have talked a little bit about flexibility this morning, but what sort of flexibility within a workplace do you think is going to assist both in recruitment and promotion?

Ms Brown: I would say flexibility in listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' ideas and incorporating them into policy. I would feel more valued if I was not just writing what someone has told me because they have thought of it and they think it is the right way when you know it is going to be a square peg in the round hole again. It is demoralising if you are not listened to, so long as you have got reasonable ideas and progressive ideas. That would add to the flexibility of

employment. People would want to come to work more. Am I answering your question right?

THE CHAIR: No, you are telling me something I did not ask, but that is fine. It is good evidence. I was really talking about workplace conditions.

Mr Church: Yes, it is a difficult one, workplace flexibility. You have the business hat on and you want a worker at work to do work. Essentially the public service employs people to do work. There are two areas of flexibility I think we need to focus on—that is, flexibility around working hours, and that comes back to your supervisor having an understanding of your personal life or your cultural obligations, and flexibility around the traineeship program, enabling employees to enter the workplace at two or three days a week instead of going the full hog five days a week. But it is really a challenging area because, at the end of the day, you want production out of your staff.

Ms Brown: Definitely. It is sort of like a child going to school. If you say to certain children, “Well, you only need to go two or three days a week if you like,” then they lose interest. So you have to be careful with that. I agree with Brendan; it depends on your circumstances. But you should be committed to the days that you have agreed to work or what you have worked out with your supervisor or manager or whatever. So I do not think that should be applied to everybody.

In my experience, I know that children—that is white or black—whose parents do not send them to school every day get alienated more and more. That, too, is human nature. If you are not going to work all the time, then you do not really feel like going because you are not really in tune with everything. As I said, I agree with Brendan—that is, if there are exceptional circumstances, then that should apply to certain people. Really, it should apply to everybody.

THE CHAIR: Do you think the social determinants which surround Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people which are different to non-Aboriginal people, firstly, the demographics where almost half the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is under 15, give much greater family responsibilities for people and, secondly, the greater burden of ill health on both workers and their families, make a difference?

Mr Church: What was that, sorry?

THE CHAIR: The greater burden of ill health with chronic disease being two to three times that for non-Indigenous people, acknowledged housing conditions with greater levels of overcrowding, the comparative poverty or lack of wealth of Aboriginal families compared to non-Aboriginal families, do you think these actually create a series of pressures upon employees that may be interpreted as a lack of ambition to want to move up into a position with more responsibility?

Mr Church: I think in summary that is probably a fair observation.

Ms Brown: It is a really fair observation. People have that much pressure on them because of housing and the health, and they are areas in this society that are anomalies, too. They need to be addressed, or they need to be eased in the short term. It is just getting worse, the pressure. In the short term, it needs to be eased and certainly

addressed. But, that is correct; it adds a lot of pressure on that person in the workforce.

Mr Church: But that applies to pockets of the community; that is not a statement you would apply across the whole of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. That is a pocket of our community—the disadvantaged pocket of our community.

THE CHAIR: So, what you are saying is that the Aboriginal community is not homogeneous; it is diverse, there are different communities, different people, different circumstances?

Mr Church: I always use examples in my current role that you have various social groups in the community: you have the high income earners, you have the middle income earners, you have those who are vulnerable and then you have got those who are completely disengaged from any services. They do not have birth certificates, the kids do not go to school. I like to use those four tiers when I am making these comments because you are going to touch the first three. You are probably going to experience a lot of that disadvantage in the third one, but the fourth one is the most concerning for me—they are the people we do not know about. Talking about employment and opportunities for those sorts of people is not even on the radar because they are too busy living day to day.

THE CHAIR: But that fourth group you talked about, that was particularly targeted by that chances program that has been running for the last couple of years.

Mr Church: Initially, yes. But for people who are living day to day, the last thing they are thinking about is getting an education and a job. All they are worried about is putting food on the table and clothes on their kids' backs, maintaining or keeping their housing. They are the fundamentals. They also have a lot of family stresses as well. There are huge issues with crowding in those disengaged families—you have one adult in the house and potentially 10 or 12 kids. Their priority is to protect their kids and not to worry about going to chances or to get a job. That is unfortunate, but it is reality.

THE CHAIR: True. Mr Wall.

MR WALL: We have spoken a lot this morning about what is or is not being done well within the ACT public service, but from your experience within the community, I was wondering if there are any examples you can point to of employers that are getting this right. And what are they doing that is making it work?

Mr Church: I wish I had a whole heap of examples, but I probably do not. Look, I really think it just comes down to having supportive management, whether that be a community organisation or a government organisation. Supportive and understanding management is probably the key for me. There are no real specific examples that I can provide that are about good practice or best practice.

MR WALL: Looking locally as a comparison between the two biggest employers, the ACT against the federal public service, is there much of a difference in key work practices and how they foster the needs of Indigenous people?

Mr Church: I could not comment, because I have never worked over in the commonwealth. I am unsure.

Ms Brown: I think that is something that needs to be found out. What are you doing right? The pay, for a start.

Mr Church: Yes. It comes down to the point I raised before. Aunty Ros just mentioned the salary, but also the flexible working arrangements, the ability to transfer from one department to another and the ability to transfer to other jurisdictions are probably a benefit. But you want to be able to keep your staff in the ACT, obviously.

MR WALL: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Ms Berry.

MS BERRY: Regarding recruitment and how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people get a job in the ACT public service—I have lost my train of thought; I am going to have to come back to it.

THE CHAIR: We will go to Nicole.

MS LAWDER: Earlier, you mentioned—I think you used the words “critical mass”—that some departments or organisations had a sort of critical mass and that word of mouth encouraged more people to perhaps gravitate to that directorate where people knew there was a successful sort of workplace. Do you have any suggestions as to how we can encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people more across the board into those areas that do not have any Aboriginal employees at present, or have very few?

Mr Church: It is not an easy question to answer; there are obviously lots of individual circumstances. But once you have got staff in an organisation, they get to see themselves what opportunities are around. It is just getting them in that door. The way of getting them in that door is through the critical mass—knowing that there are other support structures in there and knowing that there are colleagues that share the same issues they have got. Once they are in there, it is probably up to them personally, and for the directorates to encourage them, to go across into other roles. Going back to the conversation we had before about the ambition stuff, it is about providing opportunities for staff in these organisations to look at these other opportunities and say, “Yes, I can do that.” I think what needs to happen is that they need to get in the door and they need it to be offered to them.

MS LAWDER: For example, do you think it would work if there were a couple of people in one area who you could have a plan to temporarily relocate to another directorate and sort of check it out. Then, if they wished, they could go back to their original area, but otherwise there would be the possibility of staying in the new place and encouraging others.

Ms Brown: I think that is a good idea.

Mr Church: I think it is a good idea. It is certainly worth exploring.

MS BERRY: I will come back to my question. It was more around how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body gets to tell the stories or hear the stories of people who have not succeeded during that recruitment process and why that is—actually being able to put those examples into writing or as a story so that then we can really nail what the issues are. You were saying how hard it is to engage people, particularly those on your fourth key or fourth tier.

Mr Church: Yes. I could not think of a word, either; I just went blank.

MS BERRY: How do we find out with those stories what it was for them—whether it was a social or a community issue, whether it was the language, whether it was support from the public sector or from their own community—so we can get a bit of a picture in a more concrete way? Do you know what I mean?

Mr Church: We have probably only heard a couple of examples from trainees, but I think personally the best way for us to progress that area, to sort of capture it more broadly, is to hold a forum. We are running theme forums these days. Lately we are running forums on out-of-home care and disability and justice. Another key one would be employment. That would create a safe space for all employees to come and share their experiences around what worked, what did not work, why they leave, why they stay.

MS BERRY: Yes.

Mr Church: That is coming from the ground. That is coming from them. I think that is probably the best way to progress that.

MS BERRY: Is that the intention—for the elected body to do that maybe in the coming years?

Mr Church: It is certainly something to take up with other members.

Ms Brown: Yes.

MS BERRY: Those stories are the most powerful ways for us to find out exactly what is going on.

Mr Church: I think—sorry.

Ms Brown: I just want to ask a question.

MS BERRY: Yes.

Ms Brown: Have the directorates provided you, through the structure of what you were just speaking about—what I talked about earlier: the journey, the start and the end of that trainee's experience?

MS BERRY: I know it is not normal for the witnesses to ask questions, but in

response to that question—

Ms Brown: Sorry.

MS BERRY: There is a focus on that, whether the strategy is being delivered properly, and a review of the respect, equity and diversity framework, the RED framework. There will be a whole-of-government survey, which is going to commence in March 2014, which I think might address some of those.

THE CHAIR: This was the answer in response to a question that I asked earlier. I think it was along the lines that there is going to be a census and we are going to be able to get some information about people's career progress over time in the ACT public service. Then we can have a look at that and decide what that means.

MS BERRY: But going back to what I was saying, from the ACT government's point of view, it would be really interesting to hear what is happening on the ground.

Mr Church: Absolutely. I think that with that opportunity, you need to make sure that the community have got to get something out of it. We are often over-consulted, but then there is very little feedback. With that forum, it is probably a discussion that we need to have with perhaps the strategic board around what will come of that forum. If the community members provide that information, what is going to be passed back out to the community, and in what form—a strategy or framework?

THE CHAIR: We have talked a bit around the edges about leadership today and you have talked about engagement with the strategic board and also about heads of directorates. How important do you think leadership on Indigenous employment is? Is it the most critical thing, or is there stuff at the ground that is much more important?

Ms Brown: A combination of the two. The stuff on the ground is important, and the leadership. It is about what I touched on earlier, what we have been touching on about the D-G's accountability—not just giving a direction that this has to happen but having it monitored. I think the two will meet and I think there will be change if the two do meet up—on-the-ground workers, on-the-ground motivation and the motivation of the leadership.

THE CHAIR: How helpful did you find your meeting with the strategic board?

Mr Church: The meeting last week?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Church: Quite good, I think. We always have frank and honest conversations with the strategic board. The unfortunate thing is that there is a genuine commitment from the senior executive, but then it has to go through various levels, and once it hits the ground to the operational staff, we encounter the issues. The government has got great intentions across the board; that has been evident through committing through the whole-of-government agreement. But I would be interested to see how that filters down to the ground. That is the concern, I think.

Ms Brown: The two have to meet. You can sit there and have the most polite meeting, but if it is not happening, then it is just a farce. As I said earlier, there is no cynic like a black cynic. People will just say, “Oh, they’re just talking all the time and making out they’re leading and they’re doing this and that.” The proof is in the pudding, really. If change is not occurring, and if more recruitment of trainees and the glass ceiling are not addressed, I do not think anything is going to progress.

THE CHAIR: We will finish up there. Thank you, Mr Church and Ms Brown for coming along and giving evidence to us.

Ms Brown: Thank you.

Mr Church: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: We will adjourn for a minute or two and then get on to our teleconference.

Short suspension.

BARNETT, DR KATE, Deputy Director, Australian Workplace Innovation and Social Research Centre, University of Adelaide

THE CHAIR: Welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing, Community and Social Services inquiry into ACT public service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for being on the phone with us today. There is a bit of housekeeping I need to do. Witnesses are afforded a range of protection and privileges by parliamentary privilege, and I draw your attention to the privilege statement, which I understand the secretariat have sent over to you.

Dr Barnett: That is right. I have read it and I understand it.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for that. I remind you that proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes and webstreamed and broadcast live.

Dr Barnett: The reason I am speaking to you today is that, for 2006-2007, our research centre was commissioned by the Don Dunstan Foundation in South Australia to do a report that is very relevant to what you are looking at here today. In South Australia, the government, as part of the South Australian strategic plan, had set as one of its objectives increasing Aboriginal people's employment in the public sector in South Australia. It set a target to increase their employment from 1.2 per cent to two per cent of the public sector by 2009. The Don Dunstan Foundation wanted us to do research to see what factors were assisting the target to be achieved and what factors were impeding progress in achieving it.

As I said, we undertook this for the period 2006 to 2007, and we had a very powerful steering committee made up of key Indigenous leaders in the public sector and in the Aboriginal community in South Australia. And they were a tremendous source of support and guidance and opened lots of doors for us in terms of collecting some of our information from Aboriginal people.

We had a five-part methodology. We reviewed the literature on the issue of increasing employment and participation in public sector employment for Aboriginal people. And that included a review of really practical strategies that were being undertaken around Australia and also overseas, particularly in Canada and New Zealand.

We also analysed two sets of public service data. One was from the office of public employment, their workforce information collection, which is profiles and so forth of the South Australian public sector workforce. The other was the department responsible for employment and training, DFEEST, and we reviewed contractor training data—in other words, apprenticeship and traineeship data.

We undertook a survey with 173 Aboriginal employees in the South Australian public sector which was distributed through a network there called the South Australian public sector indigenous employees network, and we got a response rate of nearly 60 per cent from that group. We also did a number of interviews and focus groups with a range of Aboriginal people within the public sector and in the broader Indigenous community, and then we developed some case studies that showed good

practice.

When I look at the findings, I can see a lot of the issues that were raised in a letter to you from the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body. As I go through them, which I can do now, if you like, you will see the resonance between the two.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Dr Barnett: I have half-prepared this in writing so that you will have all this in the form of a formal submission by the end of business today. We did not think we would be able to do it but as I have been preparing it, I found that it was just as quick to prepare the submission. So I will go through the findings for you. Does anyone have any questions about the research before I do that?

THE CHAIR: Let us go to the findings and then committee members will ask a series of questions, if that is okay.

Dr Barnett: Of course, yes. I have pulled out the findings that are relevant to you. When we analysed the public service data, we found that, on the surface of things, the number of Aboriginal employees had increased in the period 2003 to 2006 from 784 people to 1,276 people. And that seemed like a positive finding. But as you will see as I go through the findings, a key conclusion is that just setting a target is a pretty blunt instrument. It does not tell the full story, and it can actually disguise some concerns that you can find underneath.

After looking at the types of employment, which is what we did—we did not just look at how many but the nature of their employment—what we did was compare the Aboriginal workforce with the non-Aboriginal workforce. We found that a smaller proportion of Aboriginal people were being employed on an ongoing or permanent basis—around 50 per cent compared to 63.2 per cent for the broader public sector. And from 2000 onwards, there had been—and this would be common with public services around the country—reduced ongoing permanent appointments and a move to more contract, fixed, short-term employment. However, for Aboriginal employees, this was much more marked than it was for non-Aboriginal employees. That reduction was in the order of five per cent for Aboriginal employees but for non-Aboriginal employees it was more like one per cent.

There had been at the same time a growth in short-term, contract-based employment for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, but more pronounced for Aboriginal people. Between 2000 and 2006, it increased for Aboriginal people from 21 per cent to 30 per cent of appointments, whereas for non-Aboriginal people there was a growth from 15 per cent to nearly 20 per cent of short-term appointments.

When we looked at age, there was a younger age profile among the Aboriginal employees, and we took that into account in our findings. And when we put that together with the greater use of short-term contractual employment, what we found was that for Aboriginal public servants there was a length of service that was much shorter compared with non-Aboriginal employees.

We then looked at salary, and what we found was that there was a far greater proportion of Aboriginal employees being remunerated in the two lower salary groups. Seventy-eight per cent of Aboriginal employees were earning up to \$40,000 or so per annum and also up into the next bracket, up to around \$46,000, compared to 60 per cent of non-Aboriginal employees. Conversely, there were lower proportions of Aboriginal people in the higher salary groupings compared with non-Aboriginal employees.

Of course, this is in part linked to the greater amount of short-term contractual employees but, as you will see when I go on, there are fewer Aboriginal people in more senior levels of the public service. I can give you details of this. It is a bit hard for you to try to take it in verbally than in a formal submission, but the differences are quite significant.

With recruitment, there was also a stronger trend for Aboriginal employees to be coming into the public sector from outside rather than from within. There were fewer than 20 per cent of Aboriginal appointments to the South Australian public sector in 2006 made from within the public sector compared to non-Aboriginal employees.

When we looked at the survey of Aboriginal public servants, what we found was that the thing that was drawing them to come and work in the sector, the largest reason, was to make a difference for Indigenous South Australians. In other words, there was—and this was also clear in our interviews—quite a strong sense of giving back to community and making a difference to your community by being in a public sector role. That was followed by wanting, obviously, to obtain secure employment and what was seen as a good job.

As to barriers to recruitment identified in the survey—and some of these, I think, lend themselves to discussion—we found quite negative perceptions of government and of the public service associated with the historical role associated with British colonisation and the role played by government in relation to the stolen generation. That was, on the one hand, quite a severe impediment for a lot of Aboriginal people.

But for those who acknowledged it but still applied for work in the public sector, it then became something that they had to deal with in their own community—being seen possibly negatively because they were working for government. These are very sensitive issues but also ones which, I think, need a conversation. There were negative perceptions by some of government as an employer, in the sense that there was a view by some that the public service would be overly bureaucratic and perhaps not suit the temperament of some people. An overly formal work style was definitely a barrier for a number.

Other issues were around cultural competence on the part of non-Aboriginal sector employees and particularly a lack of knowledge, as seen by Aboriginal people, of Aboriginal history as opposed to actual cross-cultural understanding, sensitivity and awareness. And I will talk a bit more about that later.

A lot of Aboriginal people were intimidated by the application and selection processes, which they found lacked a degree of cultural sensitivity, and, more specifically, did not acknowledge the need that many Aboriginal applicants had for information just

about the public sector, how it works and how its workplace operates. There was a need for, perhaps, more improved communication directly to Aboriginal communities about what it is like to work in government and in the public sector.

Another issue raised as a barrier was perceived racism and discrimination against Aboriginal public sector employees. I will talk a bit more about that later. Lack of understanding is an issue that we identified and that we could not find anywhere else in the literature. All the others I am raising, other people have identified many times. This issue came out through a focus group and interviews, and those, of course, were used to inform the survey.

But for a lot of Aboriginal employees, there is this quite unique pressure, emotional and mental pressure, that arises from being an Aboriginal employee in the public sector where you are representing the broader Aboriginal community and then back in your community where you are representing the government and the public sector. There is quite a tension between the two.

Added to that—this is something that will come out later when I am talking—there was a need to be working 24/7. You might have fixed hours in the public sector but when you go home your community does not understand that, and there was quite a lot of burnout and exhaustion because of just being on all of the time.

Another barrier to recruitment was the training and qualifications required of many public sector positions that a lot of Aboriginal people either did not have or were not aware that if they were feeling insecure—they might have the skills to do a particular role—there would be training and professional development available to public sector employees which they could access.

The reduced number of permanent, ongoing positions is a key deterrent. All of these barriers I am identifying, we have turned around in terms of recommendations. The issue of critical mass, where you bring in maybe one or two Aboriginal people and they are working in a unit of 20 to 100 people, gives this sense that there is no-one else around who understands, who is like you, and there is a sense of feeling quite alienated.

Those barriers are often multiple. It is often not just one barrier at a time that affects a person or a group of Aboriginal public sector employees or people looking at working in the public sector. And when you get those barriers occurring simultaneously, then what is important is how intense their combined impact is. One of the things we have talked about in our recommendations is that you cannot have a single strategy; you have actually got to have multiple levels of intervention, a bit like a jigsaw.

As to improving the recruitment process, we asked people, of course, to talk about what they would do to make things easier. And those who had kind of hurdled a lot of these barriers said that what had made it easier for them was knowing someone in the unit where the decision was based—and I guess that is something that applies to everyone, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal—having a selection panel that included at least one Aboriginal person, having members on the selection panels who clearly were sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal people and to Aboriginal issues and for the Aboriginal person being well informed about the position itself and about the public

sector as a whole.

The strategies that Aboriginal people have proposed to attract Aboriginal recruits into the service are: ensuring that Aboriginal people are well informed about public sector opportunities and what is required of public sector employees and not to assume that this is a known; then providing that information through Aboriginal networks, not just through mainstream advertisements and the sort of usual recruitment approach; having a supported application, selection and induction process.

I think the University of Sydney—I could look it up and find it for you, but I am fairly sure that this was a model that they had used—had a range of things that you put in place to ensure that recruitment becomes a more informed process. It is about providing information and advice generally about applying for a public sector position and what is involved in the selection process, and using Aboriginal networks and often word-of-mouth networks, not just relying on a written statement, to do that.

It involves appropriate induction. Once the person has been selected, they are not just dropped in on the first day and it is like a survival process. There is quite a structured induction process, and managers are sufficiently culturally sensitive to make that induction process as inclusive as possible.

The next step is having a culturally inclusive workplace where other, non-Aboriginal employees have cultural competence training and, in particular, have training around the history of Aboriginal people and what that might mean. Another is providing ongoing employment with a very clear development plan and pathways and so forth.

In terms of retention, when we looked at the data sets, we found that nearly one in four Aboriginal employees had been with their current agency for less than 12 months compared with around 13 per cent of non-Aboriginal employees. In terms of length of service with an agency, we had similar findings in terms of length of service with the public sector as a whole. Nearly 60 per cent of Aboriginal employees had been in the public sector for less than five years compared to 36 per cent of non-Aboriginal employees.

In terms of resigning and why people leave, more than five per cent of Aboriginal employees reported resigning because of family responsibilities—a lot of that is a cultural family responsibility—whereas only 1.6 per cent of non-Aboriginal employees had resigned for that reason. However, we were not able to do more than speculate about what those reasons were, because the data sets were not sufficiently sensitive to capture that. Also, people tend not to use exit surveys or use them well so that we have a really good understanding of why people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, are leaving the public sector.

Aboriginal employees were more than twice as likely as non-Aboriginal employees to resign because of ill health—2.8 per cent of them compared with 1.2 per cent. Our survey of Aboriginal employees found that in relation to the things that discouraged them from staying on in the public sector, there were five main reasons. Although the SA public sector, like most nowadays, provides cultural awareness-raising training and some cultural competence training, more effort was required for both the employee training and manager training, in particular—and I think I mentioned this

before—around a lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture and history by both employees and managers. The third most frequent deterrent to retaining involved having the knowledge, skills and experience of those Aboriginal employees underutilised, possibly because it was not fully understood from a cultural perspective. Feeling undervalued was another reason. Again, we thought that related to a lack of recognition of individual capacity that might have a cross-cultural bearing. Those three factors—feeling underutilised, lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture and the need for more cultural competence training—were all interrelated.

More material factors were the fourth and fifth barriers to retention. One involved wanting to seek a higher salary and another was around looking for career opportunities elsewhere, outside of the public sector. There were also, but they were not as common, identified experiences of bullying, by 13 per cent of the sample; harassment, by 13 per cent; and discrimination, by 13 per cent. The survey respondents said that those alone were not the key factors making them leave, but that they did add up when the other factors were taken into account.

What about the factors that would encourage people to stay? The highest response, by 78 per cent of the sample, was having secure and ongoing employment. That was followed by being given greater opportunity to contribute to the wellbeing of other Aboriginal people. That goes back to the finding on what attracted people to the public sector: the main reason was wanting to make a contribution to their community.

The third factor cited to encourage retention is having a manager or supervisor with good skills and understanding, followed by having opportunities for training and development. Salary, flexible working conditions and managers who understand or at least try to understand the Aboriginal culture were the next most important group of factors. The important leadership role of management came out as the next factor in terms of keeping Aboriginal employees.

Another key factor for at least half the sample was being in a workplace where the Aboriginal person feels valued as a person, not necessarily for being Aboriginal, and then being able to use their skills and expertise, feeling supported in the workplace and being part of an Aboriginal employee network. These were also very valuable forces for retention.

When we looked through the data set on apprenticeships and traineeships, as with what you have been finding in the ACT, we were finding that commencements had been high due to campaigns to attract young Aboriginal people as apprentices and trainees but that completion rates were much lower than for non-Aboriginal apprentices and trainees. People were leaving before they had completed but the data set was not showing what the reasons were. We speculated that they were very similar reasons to those of Aboriginal public sector employees. And the notion of bringing in Aboriginal apprentices and trainees in larger groups to achieve critical mass might be a factor, combined with having appropriate support. I will talk to you about that in a minute in terms of what we recommended. But it is about not simply providing an apprenticeship and leaving someone to undertake it, assuming that they do not need additional support when they might.

We asked Aboriginal employees in the survey to rate their experience of being a

public sector employee. They could rate it from negative to positive. In relation to the things that people liked most and gave their most positive rating to, the first one was this statement: “I have been able to contribute positively to the Indigenous South Australian community.” That was followed by “Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees usually work well together in my work unit.” I stress “in my work unit” because there was a difference between how people were treated and felt they were treated in their immediate work unit as opposed to the broader public sector. That was followed by: “Most of my colleagues in my work unit work sensitively with Indigenous employees. Most of the managers work sensitively with Indigenous employees.” That is encouraging, because it shows that, if Aboriginal people have been recruited into a particular unit, that unit is generally quite supportive and sensitive.

The more negative assessments relate to the sector as a whole, so outside of their work unit. The second and third most negative ratings were “In my experience, non-Indigenous employees have a reasonable understanding of Aboriginal culture” and “Non-Indigenous managers have a reasonable understanding.” In other words, they rated that low for the sector as a whole outside of their unit. The most negative assessment given was around this statement: “In my experience, Indigenous employees experience racist behaviour.” I have got a table which you will see in the written submission that makes it a bit clearer for you.

In relation to the achievement of the target of two per cent in South Australia, the barriers were around application, selection and induction processes; the cultural competence of employees and managers; providing support to Aboriginal employees that includes mentors, coaches and buddies, particularly in the early stages of their employment; having increased attention to professional and career development, and that includes addressing the lack of formal qualifications which many Aboriginal employees felt that they needed but did not have the confidence to go and pursue without the supported approach; the need in the broader sector to address racism, discrimination and bullying; and the issue of long-term and more secure employment.

Our conclusions from the survey, and then marrying that up with the analysis of the data set, was that, despite some of the negative perceptions that were held of the public service as an entity, Aboriginal people employed in the sector are much more specific in evaluating their own employing unit as opposed to the sector as a whole. They seek long-term involvement with the sector—again, because of this strong motivation to contribute to the Aboriginal community as a whole, while at the same time securing a need for a sense of secure employment and the benefits that this brings.

They talked about the need for specific support that recognises the unique pressures that Aboriginal employees can face when they are caught between the expectations and standards of the public service and the expectations of Aboriginal families and communities—in particular, having their mobile switched on 24/7 because that is what their community expects of them, but that not being understood by their own employers, and the communities not understanding the kind of position that places this person in. That is, I think, something that Aboriginal employee networks might be able to address with each other, but it is important that managers also understand this particular predicament.

Going to our recommendations, we had about 13, from memory, but our major recommendation was that you do not just set a bald target but you have sub-targets that measure not just the quantity of employment but the quality of employment outcomes. And you therefore need sub-targets that apply to retention as well as recruitment rates; that apply to levels of employment; that apply to short-term as distinct from permanent employment; that apply to contracts of training—not just how many were filled, but how many were completed, and what proportion—and also whether employment is in an Aboriginal-specific unit, as much of it is in South Australia, as distinct from employment in a broader, more mainstream unit in the public sector.

Our second recommendation related to focusing on workforce cultural competency development, and not just focusing on raising awareness but making sure that there is a knowledge of Aboriginal culture and history that is understood, that there is skill development around managing cultural diversity in the workplace and, more importantly, that training is ongoing—that it is not just maybe one session every three years.

Our third recommendation related to looking at the role of managers and the important role they play in promoting a culturally secure and safe work environment that actively discourages bullying, racism and discrimination—and that this is accompanied by strategies that encourage Aboriginal employees to report experiences of racism and discrimination. We found a great reluctance to do that.

The fourth recommendation was about paying greater attention to recruitment and work placement using a critical mass strategy rather than bringing people in in tiny numbers.

The fifth recommendation was about recruitment and retention strategies designed to reflect the importance that Aboriginal people place on having the opportunity to work on behalf of the broader Aboriginal community and having their expertise valued and recognised more effectively. Perhaps you can do that by asking people as one of the questions collected in employee surveys.

The sixth recommendation focuses on traineeships and apprenticeships. It is around building pathways for young Aboriginal people into the South Australian public sector, putting a stronger emphasis on early intervention and looking at developing pathways from secondary school onwards. We have seen some very good work being done in the disability sector that involves the supported pathway where you have young people in, say, years 9 and 10 in school doing school subjects who are supported with a disability specialist worker who works with their teachers, leading them into TAFE or another VET sector post school but continuing to have that specialist worker for support. A similar model could easily be applied for young Aboriginal people where you have an Aboriginal worker working with teachers in schools, building a pathway to an apprenticeship and then following into the public sector, which is where we were recommending an increasing number of Aboriginal cadetships and scholarships to this end. They, in turn, are linked to more ongoing employment.

Our seventh recommendation was about the development of a communication strategy in collaboration with Aboriginal communities that promotes the public sector as an employer of choice for Aboriginal people—and that the strategy addresses information gaps that Aboriginal people have about the sector, what it means to work there, what it is like and what would be expected of you, and does not just rely on a very formal written statement but also includes word of mouth through trusted intermediaries. The strategy I remember from the University of Sydney was that they would have information sessions for Aboriginal people and there would be Aboriginal employees giving information about what it is like to work in the public sector, how to apply and what positions were vacant at the time.

The eighth recommendation was focused on recruitment processes, leading on from the seventh recommendation—they lead on from that communication strategy—and that recruitment includes targeted information sessions.

The ninth recommendation was that HR have a good look at policy and practices to see how culturally inclusive they are for Aboriginal people, with more user-friendly wording of job and specific statements; more informed application and interview preparation; and Aboriginal membership of selection panels—and that these be established in policy and practice.

Recommendation 10 was looking at support strategies for Aboriginal people once they have gained employment, and that mentoring, buddying and opportunities for structured networking were recognised as very important and continued.

The 11th recommendation was reviewing the current caps on full-time equivalent positions to ensure that the quantity and quality of Aboriginal employment does not suffer in the process.

The 12th recommendation was that succession planning be established in relation to existing Aboriginal employees and that exit interviews be conducted with all Aboriginal employees if and when they leave the public sector.

Our 13th recommendation was that the public sector develop an Aboriginal workforce development strategy—they already had an employment strategy, but we felt the need for an accompanying workforce development strategy—and consider establishing an Aboriginal workforce development strategy unit with an advisory group and a network of Aboriginal workforce liaison officers.

The final recommendation was that a regular survey be undertaken of Aboriginal employees by an external source as part of the accountability process associated with meeting the two per cent target.

That is what we found. We really produced four reports, and it quite hard to condense it all for you. But that should give you a feel for what we found.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Barnett. We might move to a couple of questions now.

Dr Barnett: Sure.

THE CHAIR: Firstly, your report came out in 2007. In the ensuing five years, what has the South Australian public service implemented, that you know of, that you recommended, and what have been the outcomes from that?

Dr Barnett: I do not know that anything has been recommended from that report. I can check with the Don Dunstan Foundation, who commissioned it. But there have been a lot of cuts in the sector. I am sure you will understand that often the environment has to be right for this kind of reform, and a lot of this is seen as quite resource intensive, though I actually think myself that a lot of it is not that resource intensive. As to the impact, the report was very well received. I know the Aboriginal network in South Australia were very happy with it, because it reinforced everything that they had been saying. I do not know that there has been any action, but I will find out. I will double-check on that for you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Lawder?

MS LAWDER: My question relates to one of the literature review papers. I understand there are differences between different countries with their Indigenous populations, but are you aware from, for example, Canada and New Zealand—you have mentioned they have a strategy, but are you aware of any successful strategies that they have implemented in Canada or New Zealand?

Dr Barnett: I am just going back and bringing that report up on my screen. I remember the University of Sydney being one that we thought had been particularly successful and positive. Let me go down to that section of the report; it is a while since I did that review. There were broader Canadian government initiatives that were undertaken following a royal commission on Aboriginal peoples that was undertaken by the Canadian government. This was a long-term, government-wide strategy called “Gathering strength”. It committed \$350 million to support a community healing strategy.

We found an employment equity positive measures program implemented with the same sorts of objectives that we have just been talking about, and there was the Task Force on the Participation of Visible Minorities in the Federal Public Service, followed by an action plan called “Embracing change in the federal public service”. They made up to \$10 million available annually to implement the action plan. One of the initiatives was called the Aboriginal workforce participation initiative. It was a partnership between government and Aboriginal communities, business and organisations. I am not sure what the findings were on the impact of that. But what I do know from our lit review is that the government was still struggling to achieve equity outcomes for its Aboriginal employees. I do not know what the outcome of those was. What we found in our lit review was fewer evaluations and more descriptions of what was happening.

Similarly, the New Zealand government has had a range of initiatives to increase Maori participation in the public sector workforce. I am just checking through, but we did not find any evaluative material on the impact of those.

MS LAWDER: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Berry, do you have a question?

MS BERRY: In your report you were talking about some of the strategies to address the barriers to the two per cent target. In your recommendation, you talked about recruiting to achieve a critical mass.

Dr Barnett: Yes.

MS BERRY: Just on that and on the two per cent target, taking into account cuts, is a two per cent target too low in your view?

Dr Barnett: The target was going to lift it from, I think, 1.3 per cent, so it was probably an achievable target. The percentage of people in the South Australian population who are Aboriginal, I think, might be nearer to three per cent or 2.6 per cent, so two per cent was probably a workable target, but it would be one that you would want to revisit and see if you could keep lifting. It is probably always wise to start with what is achievable and achieve it or not achieve it. If you are not achieving it, then you should ask why you did not and change what you are doing. If you are achieving it, then you should build on that.

MS BERRY: You talk about acknowledging the expertise of Aboriginal people without relying solely on formal qualifications.

Dr Barnett: Yes.

MS BERRY: That would mean—

Dr Barnett: Tricky, isn't it?

MS BERRY: I do not know that it is tricky, actually, but I am interested to hear how you think that would go in a recruitment process.

Dr Barnett: Let me state it this way. It is easier if someone is applying for a position in an Aboriginal-specific unit. Let us say they are an Indigenous liaison officer. Obviously, you would not take a standard job specification statement for a liaison officer; you would say: "It's an Aboriginal liaison officer. What are the qualities we need?" You would sit down with Aboriginal stakeholders and say, "Well, if they are going to liaise with your community, what is it you want from them?" And you would include those in the essential statement.

That was a recommendation that came from Aboriginal workers, who said, "Sometimes what we can do does not even feature in the job statement, and yet it is a job that requires a lot of knowledge of Aboriginal issues, sensitivities to Aboriginal issues." It might involve extensive experience in working with Aboriginal communities, for example. But then you go to the job specification statement and that is not reflected in it. That is what they were talking about—of individualising each job statement, looking at it from a culturally inclusive point of view and seeing if it does cover things or if it ignores some of the skills and attributes that you would want.

There are a lot of very talented Aboriginal people out there who do not necessarily

have a formal qualification or the one needed for the job but perhaps could be supported to achieve it with some recognition of prior learning thrown in. That is a very individualised recruitment process rather than a blanket recruitment process.

MS BERRY: Thank you.

Dr Barnett: So it depends on the job. If this was a standard job, for a project officer with policy skills, not necessarily having anything to do with Aboriginality, you would have to take a different tack, but you could perhaps, as with someone from a diverse multicultural background, say that these are factors that add value to the position. Again, this is an area that requires conversation with people in HR and a range of other areas: what is it we want for our public service?

MS BERRY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Lawder, do you have a question?

MS LAWDER: As a supplementary to that, I know that often in the public service we go through a process of centralisation and decentralisation. For example, HR functions are often devolved down to line managers rather than being centralised.

Dr Barnett: Yes.

MS LAWDER: Do you think that is potentially a risk to the type of strategy you just described about someone being able to encourage someone to take a job, to be flexible? If it is at the line manager level, that may be more difficult for them to agree and approve, whereas if it was more centralised, perhaps there would be a better understanding of those flexibilities?

Dr Barnett: I agree with you in that any kind of equity-promoting initiative has to be centralised so that people know that this is overarching. It is a bit like occupational health and safety: we all know that things have to be done in a certain way. At the same time, when you have got more devolution to line managers, you have some scope for flexibility but a lot depends on the capacity of that line manager and if they have been trained appropriately—if we are talking about working with Aboriginal employees, that they have had the appropriate training to be sensitive to an individual employee and able to create a workplace where they can flourish.

MS LAWDER: Sure.

Dr Barnett: And that applies to the argument about critical mass. If you have a small unit of seven people and you want to bring in one Aboriginal person, how do you bring in three? You cannot. But you might have a supportive network of other Aboriginal employees who are spread across units and be able to structure it so that they can meet regularly and their managers will meet regularly to overcome that sense of isolation, of being the minority.

THE CHAIR: I am just coming back to when you were talking about Aboriginal employees and their perceptions of the understanding of culture and Aboriginal history. I think you said they reported that within their unit these understandings were

good but that outside their unit they perceived that understanding was low. Do you think this might have something to do with some evidence that we had this morning that people are reluctant to seek promotions?

Dr Barnett: That is an interesting point. It may well be. It may well be that you have a sense of trust with your own unit—it is culturally safe—but the promotion might bring with it a loss of that. We do not know how accurate the perception of the broader service is. The perception you hold of your immediate unit, of course, is an informed perception; you know the people in it. You do not know the other people. You hear of people being bullied or having racist treatment, but you do not know. That can give you a sense that it is endemic and pervasive across the sector as a whole when in fact it is probably not; it is probably isolated to a few areas. But yes, that could be. Or it could be that, as with the need for supported approaches to recruitment and induction, we need supported approaches to applying for promotion.

THE CHAIR: Did your survey or the work which you were doing come across this idea that Aboriginal employees were less likely to seek promotion?

Dr Barnett: I would have to go back and look at it in detail. I will email that answer to you. It is a big survey; it would take me a while.

THE CHAIR: Sure.

Dr Barnett: I do not think so, though, because I have not got it in my summary in front of me. But I will look it up for you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. The third question revolved around racism in the South Australian public service, which you have already talked about quite a bit. We heard evidence this morning that there has been one reported complaint about racism in the ACT public service in a number of years. Was there a greater level of formal complaints within the South Australian public service?

Dr Barnett: Not that I know of. In fact, it is probably underreporting. What people made very clear to us was reluctance to report, lack of confidence in reporting processes and fear that reporting would lead to further intimidation. To be fair, with the other workforce surveys that my unit does, we find the same thing generally in the public sector around bullying—that it is a highly underreported area of activity, with people often too intimidated to report because there is a lack of confidence in reporting processes and what it might lead to.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Barnett. We have run out of time and questions now. I look forward to getting your submission; I am sure that will be very helpful to us.

Dr Barnett: Thank you.

The committee adjourned at 1.01 pm.