



Australian Government

Department of Defence

# Defence Guide to Managing Diversity in the Workplace

Managing Diversity  
2004  
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Produced by the Defence Equity Organisation  
as a guide for all Defence personnel

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## INTRODUCTION

Defence is committed to creating a work environment where all personnel are treated fairly and are valued as members of the organisation. Defence is made up of a wide range of people, drawn from all walks of life, with an array of different backgrounds. Defence personnel are often required to work in unique circumstances and under stressful conditions. It is important for the organisation that everybody is able to contribute to Defence's goals to the best of their ability.

With such a diverse workforce it is inevitable that issues resulting from these differences will occur from time to time. The Defence Guide to Managing Diversity is designed to provide commanders, managers and supervisors with a practical tool to assist in the management of a diverse team. Defence recognises the importance of managing this diversity to ensure our cohesion and operational effectiveness.

This publication is a resource only. It is not a definitive response to every situation.

## WHAT IS DIVERSITY?

The term Diversity is in wide use today. What it relates to is valuing the differences that everybody brings to the workplace, and creating an inclusive environment in which they can effectively contribute.

## EXAMPLES OF DIVERSITY

Some of the characteristics that contribute to diversity are:

- Life experience
- Work experience
- Values
- Personality
- Age
- Ethnicity
- Cultural background
- Family responsibility
- Religious beliefs
- Sexual orientation
- Language
- Gender
- Disabilities
- Political opinions
- Nationality
- Level of education
- Rural/Urban affiliation
- Socio-economic background
- Marital status
- Responsibilities as a carer

## PRINCIPLES OF DIVERSITY IN DEFENCE

Defence is committed to incorporating the principles of diversity into everyday operations. If that is done all Defence personnel will be treated in a fair and inclusive manner within the workplace.

The principles are:

- Treating each other with respect and dignity
- Recognising people as individuals and valuing differences
- Utilising all the contributions people can make to the team
- Making judgement based on fairness and merit
- Eliminating unfair, artificial and inappropriate barriers to workplace participation
- Consulting people on policies and decisions that affect them
- Providing appropriate means to monitor and address discrimination and harassment

## THE BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY

A diverse workforce has many benefits:

- Increased workplace creativity that leads to the development of new and different ideas.
- People are matched to jobs resulting in the employment of the most qualified and suitable personnel for each position.
- Teams can be structured around people's strengths and weaknesses.
- Good morale.
- Fewer complaints.
- Reduced litigation and compensation.
- More time to focus on the primary task.
- Defence reflects community standards.
- Defence is seen as an attractive employer.
- Retention of personnel.
- Commanders, managers and supervisors will be confident in giving direction and instruction without fear of being wrongly accused of harassment or discrimination.
- Productivity increases when people feel they are appreciated and their contribution is valued.

## DIVERSITY AND CAPABILITY

Managing diversity properly means that Defence can enhance its effectiveness and operational capability by having a more flexible, cohesive workforce with a higher morale. This is particularly important for combat effectiveness because it enhances respect for command relationships and the acceptance of individual and collective discipline.

A workforce that is flexible has greater problem-solving capability, is innovative, focused on the primary goal, is more productive and wastes fewer resources.

Many incidents involving diversity issues can be avoided through positive leadership, setting a good example and appropriate training. Managers, commanders and supervisors need to highlight the positive aspects of a diverse workforce and the added benefits that they bring to Defence.

## THE COSTS OF NOT MANAGING DIVERSITY

Not managing diversity is costly. Consider the following:

- Innovation is reduced.
- Defence is not seen as an attractive employer.
- Experienced and highly trained personnel leave.
- Greater risk of litigation.
- More time spent managing complaints.
- Reduced morale and lower team ethos.
- Lower operational efficiency and less productivity.
- Potentially bad publicity.

## MANAGING DIVERSITY COMPLAINTS

Harassment or discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity, colour, culture, religion, language or place of birth is unacceptable behaviour and is to be managed in accordance with DI (G) PERS 35-3 Managing and Reporting Unacceptable Behaviour.

Managers, commanders and supervisors have a duty of care for their personnel and must act on all complaints. They are to:

- Take all reasonable measures to eliminate and prevent unacceptable behaviour and to prevent recurrence.
- Respond promptly, seriously and with sensitivity to a complaint of unacceptable behaviour.
- Ensure that all parties to the complaint/incident are informed of the options for resolution.
- Take all reasonable action to ensure that everyone involved in the complaint/incident is aware of, and provided access to the range of support services.
- Ensure that no one is victimised or unfairly disadvantaged.
- Discourage misconceptions about the complainant, respondent or witnesses.
- Report the incident of unacceptable behaviour to the Defence Equity Organisation.

There are six recommended steps to managing specific complaints and issues. It is in the best interest of Defence for managers, commanders and supervisors to resolve the issue at the lowest level possible. On receipt of a complaint or upon observing the unacceptable behaviour the commander or manager must take action within three weeks. After the initial report to the Defence Equity Organisation, the following steps should be followed:

- Step 1. Conduct a quick assessment of the situation and determine whether the matter can be resolved informally or requires more formal action.
- Step 2. Provide advice and support to all personnel involved.
- Step 3. Conduct any further inquiry if required.
- Step 4. Implement an appropriate resolution strategy.
- Step 5. Provide ongoing support after the complaint has been resolved.
- Step 6. Report the resolution to the Defence Equity Organisation.

## GENDER DIVERSITY

Discussions of gender diversity commonly include two terms: sex and gender. These terms are commonly interpreted as having the same meaning, which is incorrect.

**Sex** refers to the biological, anatomical and physiological differences that distinguish males from females.

**Gender** refers to socially conditioned characteristics or typical behaviours. It can be described as the way men and women are perceived to be different in social contexts.

Defence consists of men and women who are required to work together harmoniously.

According to the Defence Census 2003, the current Defence APS population is made up of 65% males and 35% females. In the ADF 87% of full time serving ADF members are males and 13% are females. Therefore, in many workplaces within Defence women will be a minority.

It may be the case that within your workplace there are only one or two women. To ensure maximum operational effectiveness and workplace efficiency it is important that gender diversity is well managed. Following is a list of common issues and concerns that may arise in the workplace.

Language can be inclusive or exclusive. There have been cases where litigation has occurred as a result of allegations that the use of exclusive language led to discriminatory behaviour. For example, to always refer to the commander or manager as 'he' does not reflect reality and ignores the part that women play in the organisation. Exclusive language leads to an unconscious bias. Below are recommendations about making sure language is inclusive.

Comments that are sexual in nature, rude jokes and innuendo can make women feel uncomfortable in the workplace. However, it is important to note that such comments may also be offensive to men.

Words likely to offend include, but are not limited to:

- Sweetie
- Honey
- Darling
- Obscene language

Women can often feel ignored at meetings, especially when men outnumber them. Comments they make may be ignored which over time can result in a reluctance to contribute to meetings at all. This then restricts the amount of input and flow of ideas at meetings and can result in less innovations and creative solutions to problems in the workplace.

It is often assumed that women are responsible for domestic responsibilities in the home. However, men are also involved in household duties and child care. It is important not to assume that women with children will necessarily take more time off than women without children, and that it is a woman's role to take time off to care for children, not a man's.

Gender based harassment in a workplace, whether it is directed to either males or females cannot be tolerated. All personnel have a basic right to work in an environment free from harassment. Any behaviour that constitutes, encourages or promotes harassment is unacceptable.

## Management Tips

- As a manager it is your responsibility to work to create an environment where open discussion of these issues is encouraged. Ensure that staff are aware that they are able to speak freely with you about these issues and that you will take appropriate action.
- At meetings encourage comment from all participants. Be aware that women may be being 'spoken over', their comments ignored or their participation absent. If you see a woman's comments being ignored then it is important that you make a point of addressing these comments.
- Be careful not to make assumptions about women in the workplace who have children. Do not assume that these women do not want further promotion and responsibility simply because they have a family.
- Do not assume that men will not take time off for family reasons.
- Make sure inclusive language is used. Some examples are:

### Instead of

A supervisor must plan his work

The average soldier worries if his pay is late

The applicant should fill in this form using his or her handwriting

To man

### Use

Supervisors must plan their work

The average soldiers worry if their pay is late

Applicants should fill in this form using their own handwriting

To staff / to operate

## Case Study

You are the supervisor of the clerical section in a unit that has no female members. The section has recently employed an APS Administrative Support Officer and she commences next week. What do you have to do to ensure that the workplace is inclusive and that no discrimination or harassment occurs?

## Possible Answers

- Ensure everyone knows what is appropriate behaviour in the workplace and the standards you require.
- Ensure the APS employee has a support mechanism.
- Ensure you are available to discuss any concerns she may have.

## Resources

- DI (G) PERS 35-3 Managing and Reporting Unacceptable Behaviour
- Defence Equity Advice Line 1800 644 247
- Equity Adviser Network
- State or Territory Defence Equity Coordinator
- Sex Discrimination Act (1984)

## ETHNIC DIVERSITY

Australia has the second highest population diversity in the world. Since World War II 5.7 million migrants and refugees have made their homes in Australia. These people represent 232 countries and speak 193 languages. Further to this a total of 23% of Australians were born overseas and 1.25 million people speak a language other than English at home.

The different backgrounds, skills and innovative ways of thinking that such a diverse population adds to a society, are things that Defence needs to take full advantage to enhance its capability while competing in the shrinking recruitment pool. It is important that Defence is, and is seen to be, a safe and attractive workplace for all personnel, regardless of their background or ethnicity. As the Defence population becomes more and more diverse, managers, commanders and supervisors will need to deal with more issues related to ethnicity and different cultural backgrounds.

Behaviour that is normal for one ethnic group may be offensive to another. Understanding, appreciation, awareness and sensitivity are the greatest tools available to leaders when dealing with ethnic and cultural diversity in the workplace. Be aware of your own attitudes and behaviour, the attitudes and behaviour of your staff and the effects they have on others.

People who speak English as a second language often retain an accent that can vary in intensity from slight to very strong. This accent can sometimes be mistaken for lack of ability or intelligence and can inhibit career advancement.

## Management Tips

- When you are dealing with a person who is culturally different from you, you will need to invest more time and conscious effort in interacting with that person than you would if you were dealing with someone who was very much like you. The foundation for creating an inclusive workplace is communication.
- Here are some steps that will enhance your ability to create an inclusive workplace.

1. To Listen. Actively listen to everything the other person has to say, including all expressions of feelings. Then respond to what is being said, not how it is said. Stay calm, confident, and open to all information.

2. To Evaluate. Determine the cause of the problem: a violation of expectations? A misunderstanding of jargon? Lack of role clarification? Avoid expressing anger, shock, or amusement.

3. To negotiate. Agree with the other person's right to hold his or her opinion, and explain your own perspective. Offer options, and allow the person to choose any option that does not cause harm to any party.

4. To Accommodate. Explain pertinent organisational values and assumptions. (To act effectively, the other person needs to understand the organisational system and culture.) Explain – and demonstrate, if necessary – the actions that may need to be taken.

- Ethnic jokes are commonplace in Australian society and it seems that no ethnic group is exempt from this ridicule. However not all people can laugh off derogatory insinuations directed at their cultural or ethnic heritage. The mannerisms and idiosyncrasies of these individuals are also often used as a source of amusement for co-workers. You need to ensure that there is no persistent teasing and that people are not upset by the jokes.

### Case Study

You are the manager of a workshop on a large RAAF Base. Your workplace employs a number of Service members, APS employees and also contracts a significant amount of maintenance work out to local service providers. One of your employees has only recently migrated to Australia from central Europe. He is a fully qualified tradesman and meets all of the criteria for the position. His first language is not English. What do you need to do to ensure you have an inclusive workplace?

### Possible answers:

- Make sure your work area is made aware of appropriate behaviour.
- Ensure the tradesman fully understands what is required from him, including safety instructions.
- Ensure there is no persistent teasing about his accent or ethnic background.
- Listen carefully, and do not assume that because he has an accent he does not understand or is dumb.
- Provide access to cultural diversity training.
- Research the culture of his country of origin.
- Find out if there is another person with his background.

### Resources

- DEO Cultural Diversity Training Program (CD ROM)
- Domain on line training 'Cultural Diversity'
- DI(G) PERS 35-3 Defence Multicultural Policy
- DPI 1/2002 Defence Multicultural Policy
- DI (G) PERS 35-3 Managing and Reporting Unacceptable Behaviour
- Cultural Awareness Training Fund
- Defence Equity Advice Line 1800 644 247
- Equity Adviser Network

- State or Territory Defence Equity Coordinator
- Information and presentations on working with diversity are available through the Defence Equity Coordinator for your State or Territory
- Local ethnic community links
- Racial Discrimination Act (1975)
- Useful information on various countries and their cultures is available at the Department of Foreign Affairs' website: <http://dfat.gov.au.geo/>

## RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Another product of recruiting and retaining our employees from an increasingly diverse population is that the number of religions observed by our employees has also steadily increased. Australia is one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world. Exact figures on the religious representation within Defence are not possible, as religious faith has not, thus far, been included in the Defence Census. Within the workplace religion has largely remained an unseen and private aspect of people's lives. However, as the diversity increases our employee population will consist of people representing a wide range of religious beliefs and practices.

Individuals who have a comprehensive understanding of a specific belief or religion are also an important asset, particularly in terms of dealing with the Australian community, being deployed overseas or when involved in international relations.

There is also a secondary facet to religion in Defence. Many of the customs and ceremonies that are part of the fabric of the Defence environment are built around a religious framework and Defence is often tasked with active participation in religious events such as State Funerals or commemoration services. There will be occasions where members of the ADF are required to participate in religious activities that have nothing to do with their own religion if they even have one. These occasions are a part of the normal employment of ADF members and should be managed as such.

Australia recognises major Christian religious holidays as public holidays, chiefly Christmas Day and Good Friday. Non-Christian holidays are not usually officially recognised. This may result in a number of concerns for both ADF and APS personnel within Defence. Commanders, managers and supervisors may inadvertently schedule meetings on days that are of religious significance to their colleagues, which may cause tensions in the workplace. ADF personnel may also find it difficult to observe their religious practices whilst carrying out military duties and even more so when on operational deployment.

Religious beliefs and practices are commonly used as the brunt of jokes and general offensive banter. Whether this is intentional or not, it is unacceptable in a workplace that wishes to encourage diversity. Derogatory comments directed at any religious group are not appropriate.

There are a number of religious practices that conflict with the way that business is conducted in Defence. These may include the need to pray during the day, special dietary requirements, dietary restrictions during religious celebrations, the wearing of special clothing such as a turban, refusal to have medical examinations and refusal to accept blood transfusions.

## Management Tips

- The fundamental principal for managers, commanders and supervisors to adhere to is that of 'reasonable adjustment'. There is an expectation in Defence that a member will be permitted to practice religious beliefs and customs providing that they do not have a negative impact on work objectives and goals, operational capability, efficiency or group cohesion. The practical application of religious beliefs and customs in the day to day activities at the work place can generally be easily accommodated through negotiation and understanding.
- Where practicable and possible, allowances should be made to work arrangements and structures, with a mutual understanding that there will be occasions, such as operational deployments or heightened Unit or work section workloads, where allowances are restricted. In simple language, a leader or a manager should be as flexible as possible but 'no' is sometimes the correct answer. There will be many times when individuals will be given sufficient flexibility to fully observe religious requirements, but there will remain some occasions where it is simply not appropriate or practicable to do so. DI (G) PERS 26-2 ADF Policy on Religious Practices of ADF Members provides guidance and details for dealing with specific issues such as religious holidays and customs.
- Any issues relating to religious diversity need to be managed sensitively. Ensure that there is no unacceptable behaviour in the workplace based on religious beliefs.

### Case Study

A new APS employee has just started in your area and has identified to you, as his supervisor that he is of the Islamic faith. He wishes to carry out his religious observances as much as possible. What can you do to create an inclusive workplace and allow him to meet his religious observances.

### Possible answers

- Talk to the new employee to find out what the observances are and see whether the workplace can be adapted to meet them. There are times when it may not be possible.
- Identify what can be met, and what cannot be met, without undue pressure on other members of the group. For example, how much time does he need for prayers? Is this comparable to the time smokers take?
- Ensure that you do not timetable activities when he will be meeting religious requirements, unless absolutely necessary.
- Ensure that there is no harassment based on religion.

### Resources

- A Practical Reference to Religious Diversity - Guidebook
- Domain on line training 'Cultural Diversity'
- DI(G) PERS 26-2 Religious Practices of ADF Members
- DI (G) PERS 35-3 Managing and Reporting Unacceptable Behaviour
- Cultural Diversity Training Fund

- Defence Equity Advice Line 1800 644 247
- Equity Adviser Network
- State or Territory Defence Equity Coordinator
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act (1986)

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

The CDF and Secretary are committed to giving all Defence people a fair go. A person's sexual orientation does not affect their ability to perform tasks or complete assignments and therefore has no bearing on employment. Heterosexual, gay, lesbian and bisexual people serve our country with the same professionalism and dedication. Nevertheless, gay, lesbian and bisexual people may face barriers that are not widely understood by those with whom they work.

Our workplace behaviour is often unconsciously hetero centric. This can have an enormous impact on any homosexual or bisexual people in the workplace who may have chosen to keep their sexuality private. Our sexuality is much more than just our private sex lives; it encompasses all of the aspects of life that we share with a partner. Imagine what it would be like to never feel comfortable discussing holiday plans or what you did on the weekend in case you inadvertently mentioned your same sex partner's name.

An understanding, tolerant and non-discriminatory workplace is essential before people feel that they are able to be open and honest about their sexuality. Such an environment is not compatible with homophobic attitudes and behaviours. Confronting the stereotypes and homophobic attitudes that may exist in the workplace is an important step in creating an inclusive work environment. As a commander, manager or supervisor confronting stereotypes and creating an inclusive work environment is largely your responsibility. Very often people who have homophobic attitudes do so because they have little knowledge and understanding of the area.

The Defence Equity Organisation has an interactive training course on its website called 'Understanding Homosexuality'.

### Management Tips

- It is important to actively discourage any behaviour within the workplace that is discriminatory towards any sexual orientation. This includes derogatory comments; offensive jokes and e-mails, offensive print material and the use of common 'put-downs'. This is an ongoing process that will require you to address the unacceptable behaviours as they arise. Make it well known that these behaviours will not be tolerated in the workplace and lead by example.
- Remind people that asking after their work colleagues' boyfriend, girlfriend, husband or wife carries with it certain presumptions. Encourage the use of more generic terms of reference such as 'partner'. Again the best recommendation is to be aware of these habits, encourage others to be aware of their own habits, and to lead by example. When planning for workplace functions keep in mind that not all employees will have a spouse

or partner of the opposite sex. Be aware of this when wording invitations. Instead of using the term spouse be more inclusive and suggest bringing along a friend, partner or significant other.

### Case Study

A member of your team has just disclosed to you that he or she is a homosexual. The member has been a part of the team for over two years and is efficient, effective and appears popular among the other team members. In the course of his/her last performance appraisal he/she has stated that he/she is really enjoying the work and the people around him/her and intends to remain there as long as possible. What can you do to ensure there is an inclusive workplace?

### Possible answers

- Find out whether the person intends to disclose to the rest of the team.
- If the person intends to disclose publicly, then support them and ensure you are there when they do so.
- Demonstrate your acceptance to the team.
- Point out to the team that the person is acknowledged as being efficient and effective, and this disclosure does not change that.
- Encourage your team to do the Understanding Homosexuality training course if they are interested.
- Monitor to ensure that there is no harassment in the workplace.

### Resources

- Understanding Homosexuality - interactive training tool from the DPE Intranet site: [defweb2.cbr.defence.gov.au/dpeequity](http://defweb2.cbr.defence.gov.au/dpeequity)
- DI(G) PERS 35-3 Managing and Reporting Unacceptable Behaviour
- Defence Equity Advice Line 1800 644 247
- Equity Adviser Network
- State or Territory Defence Equity Coordinator
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act (1986)

## AGE DIFFERENCES

The average age of the Defence population has steadily increased over the last 10 years. Mature age entry recruits are now common place and ADF members, APS employees and Defence contractors are frequently working in environments where the gap between the youngest and oldest is large. Age disparity is not unique to Defence and the ageing population mirrors that of the Australian society.

There can be some specific challenges created for leaders. People of different age groups often approach tasks differently and have different attitudes to work. There may be large differences between maturity levels and even levels of physical fitness, which may in turn, create issues within the work force. Managers, commanders and supervisors need to apply work practices that take into account these differences and should not make decisions based on stereotypes.

It is a common misconception that older workers are uncomfortable with new technologies and are resistant to change. This stereotype can mean that older workers are often overlooked when training opportunities arise. Many older workers welcome opportunities to further their skills and learn about new technologies and processes, especially if it will enhance their workplace performance and thus job security.

While some older workers may find it difficult to adjust to a work environment that has changed significantly since their initial employment, however, the majority will not. More workplace changes have occurred in the last ten years than in the last thirty years. Therefore, it is not surprising that most employees, both young and old, are feeling the effects of this change.

Generally speaking, older workers have maturity; they are committed to their job; have a good deal of corporate knowledge, and are keen to learn new skills. However, young people may also have these attributes. Managing the performance of older people can be difficult as a number of social norms affect our behaviour when interacting with older people. Managers may not want to hurt feelings or feel reluctant to criticise an older person. Older women may face particular barriers in the workforce. Women make up more than two-thirds of part-time workers and over half of all casual workers in Australia. Many women have been out of the workforce for extended periods of time, usually in their childbearing years. This means that many women have broken career patterns and limited job experience, despite their skills, which can jeopardise their employment prospects.

While it is not useful to stereotype older workers, the same applies to young workers. It is not unknown for young people to be refused a promotion because they are young, and the assumption is that they do not know enough or have enough experience to do a job. Or it is assumed that they will move on after a short time.

Commanders, managers and supervisors must learn to manage work places where there is a diversity of ages.

## Management Tips

- Do not stereotype older workers and make negative assumptions about their ability to adapt to change or engage with new technology. Look at people individually and maintain open lines of communication with everyone.
- All performance issues should be dealt with promptly, irrespective of the age of the staff member, in order to maintain an effective and efficient workplace. Continual performance monitoring allows any issues to be dealt with before the behaviours become habit and

thus increasingly difficult to change and manage. Regular, brief meetings with all staff will give commanders, managers and supervisors the opportunity to keep on top of issues as they arise.

- Older and young workers may appreciate and benefit from flexible work practices.

### Case Study

You are the supervisor of a small IT unit. Most of the people are young. An older person is transferring in. What do you do to ensure that you have an inclusive workplace?

### Possible Answers

- Ensure that your requirements for appropriate standards of behaviour are clear to your staff.
- Make certain the older person is appropriately trained, and if not, organise training immediately he/she arrives.
- If the person is an older person is a woman, do not assume that she will always provide your work areas morning teas. This can also be a gender issue. Ensure people take it in turns.

### Resources

- Age Discrimination Act (2004)
- Defence Equity Advice Line 1800 644 247
- Equity Adviser Network
- State or Territory Defence Equity Coordinator

## PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines disability as “the outcome of the interaction between the person with an impairment and the environmental and attitudinal barriers he/she may face.” Disability is a loose umbrella term of any or all of:

- an impairment of body or function eg a loss of limb
- a limitation in tasks or actions
- a restriction or limitation in participation in various life situations such as work, sport or other leisure activities

The word ‘disability’ has a lot of stigma attached to it, which is usually based on lack of understanding and knowledge. It is important to notice that disability does not just refer to

extremes, such as loss of both legs, but is a continuum. In fact, many of us have or will have some disability in our life – be that impaired hearing, a joint damage or back problems, reading glasses or a stroke.

Facts about Disability:

One in five or 20% of Australians has a recognisable disability that affects one or more of our abilities. This disability may affect the way we do things such as our mobility, our ability to deal with stressful situations or our ability to communicate as easily.

Many people who now have a disability may have spent most of their lives without any disability, for instance people who have acquired a disability as a result of a motor vehicle accident.

A person's disability is always specific to that person, and so brief attempts to describe disabilities in a general sense will always be inadequate.

There is a difference between disability and impairment. Impairment refers to physical, mental or thinking limitations that we may have such as an inability or reduced ability to walk or speak. In contrast disability refers to the disadvantage or restriction of activity that society imposes on us which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments excluding them from the mainstream social activities. This includes things like access problems to services or buildings, or the availability of specialised equipment or facilities.

There is a difference between disability and handicap. A handicap is a physical or attitudinal constraint imposed on a person regardless of whether or not that person has a disability. Thus a person may be deaf, but by using a hearing aid coupler fitted to a telephone they are not handicapped when using the telephone. There is also a difference between disability and poor health.

People with mental health problems often experience prejudice, fear, stigma, discrimination or ridicule from people in society. It is important to remember that mental health problems are not a sign of personal weakness, but something that anyone of us can develop through a lifetime due to changing life circumstances or events, or as a result of extreme stress or medical conditions. Almost one in five Australians (17.7%) experienced a mental disorder at some during the last 12 months. At some stage in their lives, one in five Australians will experience some form of mental health problem, varying from mild or temporary to severe or prolonged. The most common mental disorders are depression, psychosis, schizophrenia and anxiety disorders.

## What the Law says

In general, it is the law in Australia that:

- People with a disability must be given an equal opportunity ie not discriminated against in gaining employment.
- A person's disability should only be taken into account when it is relevant to do so.

- Employment of a person with a disability may necessitate some work-related adjustments in order to meet the specific requirements of the person.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 defines disability as:

- A total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions;
- A total or partial loss of the person's body;
- The presence of serious/chronic illness;
- Learning disorders; and
- A disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgement or that results in disturbed behaviour.

The definition covers conditions that exist now, have existed in the past, may exist in the future.

The law recognises two forms of unlawful discrimination against people living with a disability:

## Direct

Disability discrimination that treats a person less favourably because of their disability than a person without that disability would be treated in the same or similar circumstances.

## Indirect

Disability discrimination that happens when a 'condition' stops a person with a disability, or an associate of a person with a disability from doing something. A 'condition' includes physical barriers, policies, procedures, practices, selection or admission criteria, rules or requirements.

## Workplace Adjustment

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 states that whenever it is necessary, possible and reasonable, employers should take into account a person's disability and make appropriate adjustments to the work environment to accommodate such a person.

Where a person with a disability can perform the inherent requirements of the job with some alterations or adjustments, Defence will make these adjustments or alterations unless this imposes unjustifiable hardship on Defence.

Reasonable adjustment may include one or more of the following types of adjustment in relation to:

- workplace or work related premises, equipment or facilities, including provision of additional equipment or facilities;
- work related communication or information provision, including the form or format in which information is required;
- work methods;
- work arrangements, including hours of work and use of leave entitlements;

- work related rules or other matters necessary to enable a person to comply with rules as they exist;
- training, transfer, higher duties, or other forms of opportunity to demonstrate or develop capacity in a position;
- provision of interpreters, readers, attendants or other work related assistance at meetings and courses, and
- provision of training to co-workers or supervisors.

## Inherent requirements and why are they important?

If a person with a disability is able to carry out the essential activities (inherent requirements) of a job, the law says that they must be given the same opportunity to do that job as anyone else.

- The inherent requirements of a job are the tasks that must be carried out in order to get the job done.
- They are not all of the requirements of a job.
- Inherent requirements are about achieving results rather than the means for achieving a result.

For example, in a warehouse it is an inherent requirement of the job that boxes and equipment can be lifted. Therefore, a person who cannot do this does not meet the inherent requirements of the job. On the other hand, if a person has to evaluate a tender document, it is not an inherent requirement that this be done from a screen or a hard copy. The requirement is that the tender document be evaluated. Therefore a vision-impaired person may require software that turns print to braille or sound. It would therefore be discriminatory not to employ that person on the grounds that they could not meet the inherent requirement of the job.

## Management Tips

- Put the person first and the disability second. Do not assume that you know what the person can or cannot do. Ask that person what they need to help them do the job, if anything.
- Avoid making the assumption that if a person has a physical impairment, that they have other problems, such as learning difficulties. In the majority of cases this is not true.
- When planning a meeting where a person with a disability will be in attendance, consult with that person first about their requirements, eg access to the building or facilities.
- When talking or working with someone in a wheelchair, seat yourself at the same level rather than looking down at them, and respect their personal space.
- Change your language, and do not refer to the 'deaf' or the 'disabled', rather use phrases which place the person before their disability, such as: a person with a disability; a person with a hearing impairment.
- If you have a person with a disability in your area, find out about the condition, remembering that conditions impact differently on individuals.
- If you have a staff member with a disability that may affect their mobility, inform your floor warden so that the required emergency procedures can be put in place in case of an evacuation.

## Case Study

You are the supervisor of a work unit. A person with Multiple Sclerosis works in your area as part of the team. There is a requirement for a significant amount of travel coming up and you know that the person at times has problems in maintaining balance. There are three people, including the person with MS, who would have to travel. What do you do about organising the unit's travel?

## Possible Answers

- Discuss with the person with MS their feelings about travel and let them identify if they can do it. If they feel they can travel, share out the travel among the three people.
- Ask the person if they need any particular assistance and if necessary inform the areas with which they will have meetings.
- In conjunction with the staff member, and other people in the area, draw up a contingency plan, just in case the person is unable to travel at the last minute.

## Resources

- The ADF Mental Health Strategy All Hours Support Line: 1800 628 036 or Outside Australia: 02 9425 3878
- DPI 3/99 Procedures for the Provision of Equipment and Services for Departmental Civilian Personnel with Disabilities
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Defence Equity Advice Line 1800 644 247
- Equity Adviser Network
- State or Territory Defence Equity Coordinator

## Useful websites:

- Defence Equity Organisation: [defweb2.cbr.defence.gov.au/dpeequity](http://defweb2.cbr.defence.gov.au/dpeequity) or [www.defence.gov.au/equity](http://www.defence.gov.au/equity)
- Depression and anxiety: [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)
- General mental health: [www.health.gov.au/hsdd/mentalhe](http://www.health.gov.au/hsdd/mentalhe)
- Schizophrenia Fellowship: [www.sfnsw.org.au](http://www.sfnsw.org.au)

# ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS

There are two distinct groups of indigenous peoples in Australia, Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The two groups are ethnically and culturally distinct and have experienced different histories.

The Commonwealth Government has defined an indigenous person as someone who is a descendant of an indigenous inhabitant of Australia, identifies as an indigenous Australian, and is recognised as Indigenous by members of the community in which he or she lives.

Differences in land tenure systems, patterns of kinship, marriage and descent, social organisation as well as local belief systems, result in a great deal of regional variation within the Indigenous Australian community. All cultures are dynamic, and Australia's indigenous cultures have changed continually over time and will continue to do so. There are also vast differences between indigenous peoples living in rural or remote areas and those living in urban areas.

While indigenous peoples have some aspects in common in culture and experiences, they should not be viewed as all having the same traits, expectations and behaviour. Lifestyles, cultures, traditions and politics vary from community to community.

Indigenous Australia represents more than 250 different languages and over 700 dialects. It is possible that if the individual you are speaking to comes from a community that still speaks primarily in traditional languages, English may be the fourth or fifth language spoken by that person.

In some indigenous communities there are very strict rules concerning who should speak to whom, about what, and when and where that conversation should take place. Adherence to these protocols requires people to be extremely careful in their way of approaching sensitive issues. For example, the mourning process is a time when it may become extremely important that cultural protocols are not violated. In some communities it is prohibited to use the name or have images of people who are deceased. This may last for months or even years until all relevant ceremonies have been concluded. Where this protocol is observed this may extend to showing images or photographs of the deceased.

In some communities, particularly more remote and traditional communities, direct, prolonged eye contact is considered rude. In fact, it may be a sign of respect to avert your eyes and turn your ear to the person who is addressing you! In some indigenous communities complex systems for communicating almost entirely through body language exist using different parts of the body to communicate. Sensitivities to touching may be different depending on the cultural practices of a given community. For example, more open displays of affection between men may be more acceptable than touching in public across gender.

## Management Tips

- A good rule of thumb when you are unsure of cultural factors that may be impacting in the workplace is to ask sensitive open-ended questions of the individual involved. If your question relates to an area that may be culturally sensitive or censored take the hint if the person consistently avoids the question or changes the subject.
- In interaction with indigenous people, you could ask yourself the following questions:
  - Is English the second language of the person you are trying to communicate with?
  - Are you reading the person's body language correctly?
  - Is the person you are speaking with in a position to make a decision without consulting others in his/her community?
  - Are you the appropriate person (age, gender, position etc) to be discussing this matter?
  - Are you making assumptions about values, attitudes or behaviour that may be inappropriate to this person's worldview?
- Do not make assumptions about, or stereotype, indigenous cultures.

## Case Study

An APS6 indigenous employee has worked for Defence for six years. His immediate supervisor is an EL1. During the time he had worked for Defence he had always taken leave to attend a cultural festival held annually at his community some distance from his place of work. There is a new non-indigenous APS5 who has started to work in the same team this year. When the indigenous employee requests leave this year to attend the cultural festival, the APS 5 complains to the EL1 that indigenous people should not get extra leave for cultural purposes, and that it is unfair because he does not get an extra two weeks' leave just because he is not indigenous. In any case, it is a busy time of the year. If you were the EL2, how would you manage the situation?

## Possible Answers

- Clarify for the team that there is no such thing as special leave for indigenous employees. This is a myth. All APS employees are subject to the same conditions of service.
- Put in place cross cultural training and awareness to foster a greater knowledge of indigenous cultural requirements and obligations. Engender an understanding of what it means to be indigenous.
- Ensure the workload is managed and priorities allocated, so that there is not an unnecessary burden placed on members of the team, if anyone is absent.
- Encourage open and honest communication between staff.

## Resources

- DPI 3/2004 National Indigenous Cadetships Program in the Department of Defence
- DPI 3/2001 Defence Indigenous Study Award
- Defence Equity Advice Line 1800 644 247
- Equity Adviser Network
- State or Territory Defence Equity Coordinator
- Public Sector Standards Committee: Overcoming Workplace Barriers for Aboriginal People, Office of the PSSC, Perth 1997
- Employer's Duties of Cultural Sensitivity, Indigenous Law Bulletin March 2003 Vol 5 Issue 23

# ORGANISATIONAL DIVERSITY

In Defence diversity also has an added dimension due to the distinct differences between Services, Groups, locations and employment categories.

The fundamental principles of management are fairly generic but the customs and cultures of the organisations within Defence can sometimes make communication difficult. Individual Units have developed unique languages and even different approaches to similar issues. In a single Service environment this behaviour can become second nature and a person may experience a culture shock when exposed to different attitudes and ways of thinking.

Subordinates will have different expectations regarding fundamental issues, such as performance appraisals and working arrangements, and attitudes to issues such as overtime or extra work may also dramatically differ.

## Management Tips

- Encourage subordinates to be open to different approaches and different ways of achieving the same goal.
- Make yourself aware of the customs and ways of doing business unique to individual organisations, and accommodate as far as possible these different approaches.
- It is normal to expect a degree of good-natured banter between different employment categories and work groups. This may even indicate a degree of respect for each other and can add to the feelings of esprit de corps and camaraderie. However, be diligent that this banter doesn't grow into genuine feelings of resentment or displays of unacceptable behaviour. It is important that, while each group may be managed and employed differently, they are all treated fairly.

## Case Study

You are a supervisor who has been recently posted from an operational unit to a shore establishment. For the first time in your career you will be working side by side with members from all three Services and APS employees. What can you do to ensure you have an inclusive and harmonious workplace?

## Possible Answers

- Make certain you are up to date on the various conditions of service.
- Make sure that all your staff are aware as well, so as to avoid conflict. For example, outline the physical fitness requirements of the ADF members. Explain the flex leave system. Ensure people understand that just because there are differences one employment category is not more favourable than the other.
- If practicable, introduce flexible work practices for all staff, taking into consideration everyone's needs. If there is a work requirement that all staff be in the area at a specific time, irrespective of their needs, make that clear.
- Set out your standards of behaviour.
- Treat everybody fairly, not necessarily the same.

## Resources

- Regional Military/Civilian Personnel Administration Centres
- Defence Service Centre 1800 000 677
- DI (G) PERS 35-3 Managing and Reporting Unacceptable Behaviour
- Defence Employees' Certified Agreement

- DI(G) PERS 36-3 Inherent Requirements of Service in the ADF
- DI(G) PERS 36-2 ADF Policy on Individual Readiness
- DI(G) PERS 16-11 ADF Policy on Physical Fitness
- Training Course: Facilitating Integrated Workplaces
- Defence Equity Advice Line 1800 644 247
- Equity Adviser Network
- State or Territory Defence Equity Coordinator

## CONCLUSION

Managing diversity and working with diversity is not necessarily easy, however, it is essential if we are to maintain the effectiveness and efficiency of Defence. Managing diversity means we make the most of the skills, knowledge and attributes our people bring to the workplace. This necessitates some important management skills:

- Being open minded and tolerating and accepting difference;
- Setting and maintaining appropriate standards of behaviour;
- Maintaining open lines of communication;
- Ensuring people understand the work requirements and have the means of meeting them; and
- Making sure the workplace is inclusive and addressing issues if there are difficulties.

Generally Defence is doing a good job at managing and living with diversity; however, we can do better for the good of our personnel and the organisation.

## DEFENCE EQUITY ADVICE LINES

The Defence Equity Advice Lines are available from 0830 to 2100 EST everyday of the year except Christmas Day.

1800 644 247

1800 803 831

1800 626 254

(International Access Code) 800 DEFENCE 1(800 33336231)

Defence Equity Organisation website  
[defweb2.cbr.defence.gov.au/dpeequity](http://defweb2.cbr.defence.gov.au/dpeequity)  
[www.defence.gov.au/equity](http://www.defence.gov.au/equity)

