



ADNSW Inclusive Recruitment Project: Final research report

Barriers and enablers of recruitment for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

March 2024

Report prepared for Anti-Discrimination NSW by The Insight Centre

Disclaimer

In preparing this report, we have presented and interpreted information that we believe to be relevant for completing the agreed task in a professional manner. We have sought to ensure the accuracy of all the information incorporated into this report. For the quantitative research results, the base (number of respondents who answered each question) and the survey questions are shown at the bottom of each page. Results may not always total 100% due to rounding.

Findings are based on the viewpoints of the respondents who took part in the research. While they reflect a cross section of job seekers, hiring managers and inclusive employers they are not statistically representative of a larger population.

Our analysis of Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) processes, strategies and procedures is based on stakeholder consultations and research interviews with DCJ staff and documentation provided and available at the time of the research.



Report structure



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- Project overview and methodology
- Key insights
- Summary of strategic recommendations



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- Perceptions of diversity statements
- Perceptions of the Capability Framework
- Best and worst job seeking experiences
- Barriers and enablers in recruitment



Phase 3 findings: Employer consultations

- DCJ recruitment process
- Perceptions and experiences of hiring managers and HR advisors
- Interviews with best practice employers



Alignment between job seekers and employers

- Workplace diversity, and recognition of the value of CALD employees are core values held by all participants
- Recruitment process is overly prescriptive and would benefit from greater flexibility
- Panel interviews create particular barriers for CALD applicants
- All participants clearly recognise the impact of unconscious bias



Strategic recommendations

- Facilitate ongoing collaboration and coordination of efforts across government and other sectors
- Prioritise affirmative recruitment measures and targeted programs and initiatives
- Develop additional supports for hiring managers to streamline their access to inclusive recruitment information and strategies
- Consider options for increasing pathways/pipeline into the public service and elevating employer brand
- Increase information available to job seekers around the public service recruitment process
- Consider streamlining recruitment to provide timely and tailored feedback on applications
- Deepen understanding and engagement around exemption process under the Anti-Discrimination Act 1977



Executive summary

- Project overview and methodology
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Project overview and methodology

This research, conducted on behalf of Anti-Discrimination NSW (ADNSW) by The Insight Centre, reports on the enablers and barriers of recruiting staff from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in the public service. The project focuses on recruitment in the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) as a case study, but findings will have relevancy for other public service contexts.

The project considers strategies that employers can use to make recruitment processes more accessible and inclusive to CALD candidates. It also explores how public service agencies can attract more culturally diverse job applicants who may not have contemplated a career in the public service.

Phase 1 involved internal and external stakeholder consultation and a research paper reviewing the literature on inclusive recruitment practices.

Phase 2 used a mixed-method approach to centre the lived experiences of job seekers from CALD communities in identifying barriers they face when seeking a job with DCJ/the NSW public service, including in the application, interview and assessment process. This included a survey of 350 CALD job seekers, four online discussion boards with 37 job seekers from target communities and interviews with 11 previous applicants to roles within DCJ.

Phase 3 engaged with DCJ hiring managers to learn how they can be best supported in addressing barriers and creating opportunities for CALD candidates, and with best practice employers from the private, not-for-profit and local government sectors to consider learnings from other organisational contexts.

Throughout 2024, ADNSW will draw on the findings from this research to undertake a co-design process with relevant stakeholders to design a series of resources to support the implementation of inclusive recruitment practices within workplaces.

This report focuses on the quantitative and qualitative research from Phase 2 and Phase 3.

The data across all phases was highly consistent, reinforcing the value of this project for DCJ, the broader public service and employers more broadly. The following pages outline key insights and alignment of findings across the various research methods and summarise a range of strategic recommendations for consideration.

Key insights

Insights from Phase 2: Job seeker consultations

- 1 Workplace diversity, and recognition of the value of CALD employees are core values held by CALD job seekers.
- 2 CALD candidates easily recognise their own unique strengths and want employers to do the same.
- 3 CALD candidates have an extensive list of markers of an inclusive and diverse workplace – and they assess organisations against this.
- 4 CALD candidates want their time and effort respected, valued and acknowledged – communication is key.
- 5 Recruitment processes should reflect 'open-mindedness', proactively seek to get the best from CALD candidates and be welcoming and encouraging.
- 6 The recruitment process in the public service is seen as slow, overly structured and inconsistent.
- 7 CALD candidates find some aspects of the recruitment process particularly challenging, including interviews, psychometric testing, timed assessments and responding to selection criteria.
- 8 The public service is seen as a desirable workplace, but competitive and potentially rigid and resistant to change.
- 9 Job advertisements, application materials and candidate experience impact job seekers' perceptions of organisational values.
- 10 CALD candidates are aware of and concerned about the impact of unconscious bias.

Key insights (cont.)

Insights from Phase 3: Employer consultations

1 Hiring managers implement a range of innovative strategies and adjustments to support CALD and other diverse candidates – they want to proactively accommodate candidate needs.

2 Hiring managers feel they would benefit from more structured training and support on inclusive recruitment.

3 Communication between hiring managers and the Talent Acquisition team within DCJ can create barriers to candidate care.

4 Hiring managers are aware of and want to know how best to mitigate the impact of unconscious bias.

5 Affirmative recruitment measures – such as identified and targeted roles – are effective in reducing barriers but require internal and external engagement.

6 Targeted employment initiatives can deliver on improving workforce diversity – but should work from strengths-based rather than deficit models.

7 Hiring managers are generally unaware of the exemption process under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* and many feel it could be beneficial for increasing representation of CALD applicants.

8 Collecting workforce data on employee cultural, linguistic, racial, ethnic and religious background is central to tracking the impact of inclusive recruitment efforts.

9 Employers across sectors and industries experience similar challenges, including maintaining a pipeline of diverse potential employees; and recruiting for diversity at all levels and for all role types.

Summary of strategic recommendations for public service employers

1. **Facilitate ongoing collaboration and coordination of efforts across government and other sectors.**

2. **Prioritise affirmative recruitment measures and targeted programs and initiatives. These should avoid ‘deficit’ framings and involve internal and external engagement on their purpose – to address structural barriers.**

3. **Develop additional supports for hiring managers to streamline their access to inclusive recruitment information and empower them to make adjustments for CALD candidates.**

4. **Consider options for increasing pathways/pipeline into the public service and elevating employer brand.**

5. **Increase information available to job seekers around the public service recruitment process.**

6. **Consider streamlining recruitment to provide timely and tailored feedback on applications.**

7. **Deepen understanding and engagement around exemption process under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977*.**



About this research

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Research overview

Phase 1 involved internal and external stakeholder consultation and a research paper reviewing the literature on inclusive recruitment practices.

Phase 2 used a mixed-method approach to centre the lived experiences of job seekers from CALD communities in identifying barriers they face when seeking a job with DCJ/the NSW public service, including in the application, interview and assessment process.

Phase 3 engaged with DCJ hiring managers to learn how they can be best supported in addressing barriers and creating opportunities for CALD candidates, and with best practice employers from the private, not-for-profit and local government sectors to consider learnings from other organisational contexts.

The project has engaged participants across all phases on their understanding and perceptions of the exemption process under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* (the Act), where applicants can apply for approval to allow favouring certain groups of people to improve access to certain jobs, programs, services or facilities. We sought the views of hiring managers and job seekers on the value of these exemptions to improving inclusive recruitment of CALD job seekers within the public service.

Throughout 2024, ADNSW will draw on the findings from this research to undertake a co-design process with relevant stakeholders to design a series of resources to support the implementation of inclusive recruitment practices within workplaces.

This report focuses on the quantitative and qualitative research from Phase 2 where job seekers from CALD backgrounds were consulted to better understand the enablers and barriers in recruitment processes from their own perspectives; and Phase 3 where hiring managers and HR advisors from DCJ and “best practice” inclusive employers were consulted to better understand their perceptions and experiences of implementing recruitment processes.

Research overview (cont.)

This project is intended to support and complement existing strategic work being undertaken within the NSW public service to increase cultural diversity in the workforce and to support diversity and inclusion. We acknowledge here the significant work of teams and individuals within DCJ and the wider public service in working towards these goals.

Work undertaken by DCJ in developing its **Multicultural Plan 2022 – 2025** and **Inclusion Strategy 2021 – 2025** has contributed significantly to the establishment of a culture of diversity and inclusion within the agency and highlights an organisational commitment to these values.

We note the Public Service Commission's (PSC) recently released report exploring CALD representation within the NSW government senior executive cohort, which outlines workforce data and findings from a series of focus groups with employees who identified as CALD to explore opportunities and barriers to successful progression within the public service; experiences of racism and discrimination; and strategies for making the public service a more inclusive place to work.

This work is significant in light of data from the 2023 People Matters Employee Survey (PMES), which canvases the views and experiences of employees across the NSW public service, highlighting how the under-representation of CALD people in the public service is most pronounced at the highest levels of the senior executive cohort.

While the PSC work focused on internal consultations and the senior executive cohort, this research report provides a complementary perspective, having consulted with CALD job seekers and employers both within and external to the public service and focused on levels below executive.

The findings of the PSC report are highly consistent with the stories and experiences shared by participants as part of this project by Anti-Discrimination NSW, which underscores the need for a **collaborative and systematic approach to increasing diversity throughout all levels within the public service** and across all departments and agencies.

Research overview (cont.)

We acknowledge in this work that for any organisation, changes to recruitment processes alone will have limited impact on systemic issues of discrimination and racism.

Recruitment approaches need to be connected to wider strategic approaches and organisation-wide commitment to anti-racism and anti-discrimination.

We are grateful to all the participants and stakeholders in the research and consultation process, who have been generous and open with their time and their stories.



Terminology used in this report

The acronym CALD stands for ‘Culturally and Linguistically Diverse’ or ‘Cultural and Linguistic Diversity’. It has been used in Australian multicultural policy and demography since the 1970s to classify individuals and communities outside of the White, English-speaking majority. The term usually refers to individuals who were born overseas, have a parent born overseas, speak a language other than English or belong to a visible racial or ethnic minority.

CALD is used in Australia by the government for demographic analysis of diversity as well as to determine and deliver on service needs, most often in health, education and social services settings.

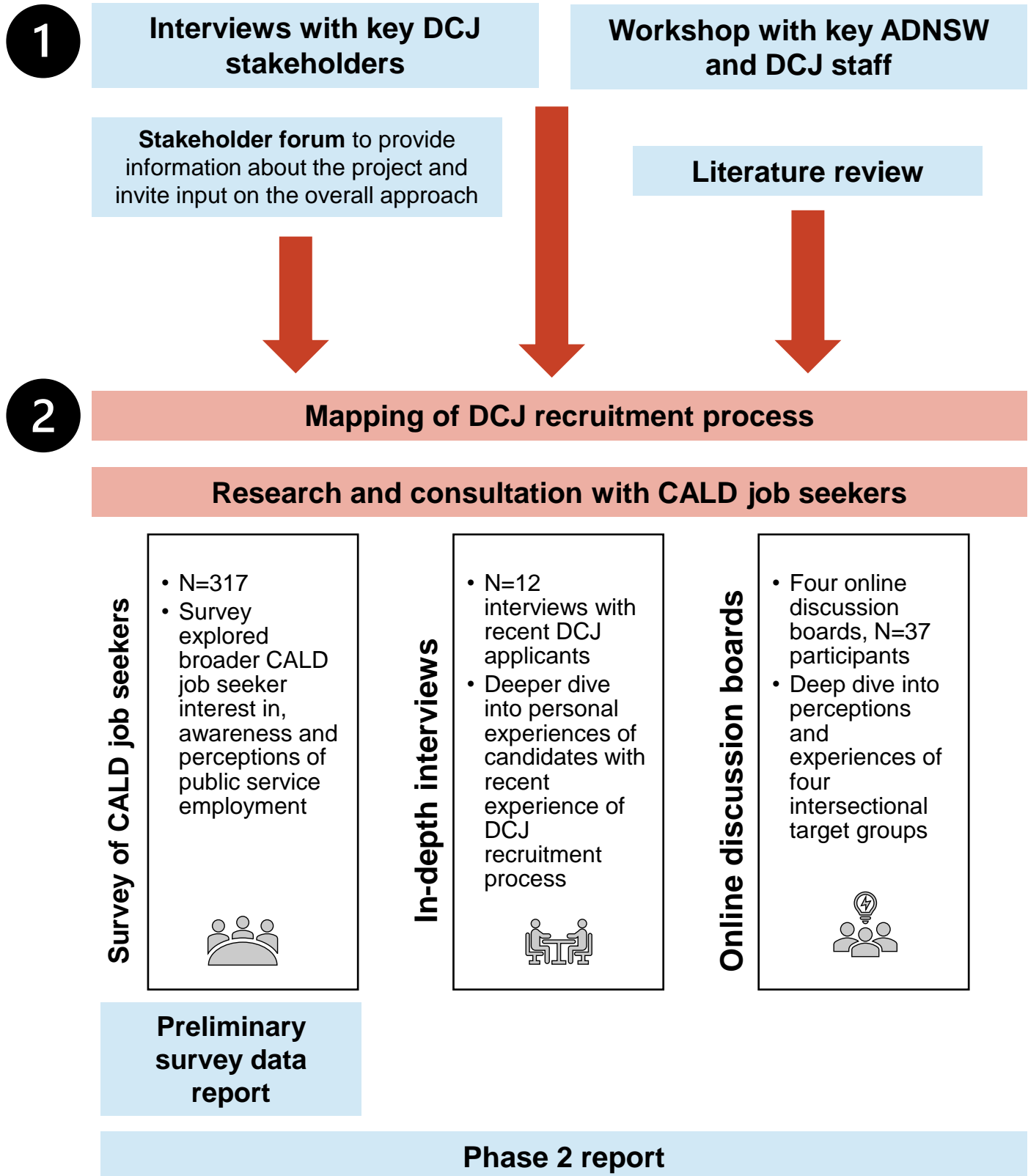
However, within the context of global debates around ethnic and racial categorisation, the acronym is increasingly considered limiting and outdated.

Other terms are now used by researchers, practitioners and communities. In labour market research, Diversity Council Australia (DCA) has adopted the operational term ‘culturally and racially marginalised’ (CARM) to refer to people who are not White.

The term CARM distinguishes this cohort from other culturally and linguistically diverse migrants that face less discrimination in the labour market, such as migrants from Europe or North America. In the UK, the terms ‘minoritised ethnic’ and ‘racialised minority’ are often used to emphasise how social processes and power dynamics act upon these groups. In the US, terms like People of Colour (POC) and Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) have increased in popular usage via the Black Lives Matter movement.

The current project engaged with individuals and communities on their preferred terms. A significant majority of research participants (see page 25) preferred the term ‘culturally and linguistically diverse’ to describe themselves. We reflect this preference by using this terminology in our report. However, we acknowledge that this term does not resonate with all individuals or communities, and remains an imperfect descriptor given the complexity and nuance of cultural, racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious identities.

Project phases (2023)

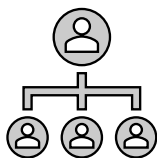


Project phases (2024)

3

Research and consultation with employers

- N=10 hiring managers and HR/Talent Acquisition advisors from within DCJ
- Interviews explored experiences of hiring within DCJ, perceived enablers and barriers for CALD job seekers, what is working well and opportunities for improvement within DCJ



- N=9 employers from the private, not-for-profit and local government sectors
- Interviews explored approach to inclusive recruitment within their organisation
- Case study development



Final research report

This report explores findings and insights from the quantitative and qualitative research with CALD job seekers and employers



ADNSW-led co-design of inclusive recruitment resources for employers

Methods and approach for Phase 2

The following section outlines further detail about the methods and approach across Phase 2: the survey of CALD job seekers, interviews with previous DCJ CALD applicants and discussion boards with target groups of CALD job seekers. Although questions varied somewhat across the three data collection components, findings have been grouped according to consistent themes that emerged across the components.

Survey respondents were asked to respond to questions pertaining to their cultural, racial, ethnic and linguistic identities according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics standards on collecting data relating to cultural and linguistic diversity. The sample size of specific groups was not large enough to make inferences about people from specific racial or ethnic communities. Instead, this data has been reported by demographics where a sufficiently robust inference could be made.

To ensure anonymity, interview and discussion board participants were screened for self-reported CALD identities relating to target groups but were not required to provide further details about their specific ethnic or racial background.

For example, for the African and Middle Eastern discussion board, respondents self-identified as belonging to this group, but were not required to give further details.

Survey

An online survey was administered between 18 September and 30 October 2023 to participants recruited via existing stakeholder lists held by DCJ (n=117) and via a third-party panel recruiter specialising in CALD recruitment (n=200). A total of 317 complete responses were received. Participants were required to self-identify as CALD and have been looking for a job within the past two years.

Participants were invited to respond to questions covering the following topics:

- Awareness of and interest in public service jobs
- Expectations of the public service recruitment process
- Perceptions of barriers as CALD applicants

Methods and approach for Phase 2 (cont.)

- Awareness, level of comfort and concerns with recruitment tasks
- Responses to foundational 'enablers' e.g. diversity statements, flexible work statements and *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* exemption statements.

Discussion boards

Discussion board participants were recruited through an optional expression of interest within the survey and via circulation of a recruitment advertisement to DCJ stakeholder networks.

Online discussion boards covered four target groups. These target groups were identified as priorities for consultation through the literature review, external stakeholder forum and workshop with DCJ/ADNSW staff completed as part of Phase 1, as well as through feedback gathered through DCJ/ADNSW's usual community engagement activities.

The four discussion board groups were:

- CALD women
- People from an African or Middle Eastern background
- CALD graduates
- CALD job seekers qualified for frontline roles

Discussion boards were held online and were open for three days to enable participants to respond in their own time and to maximise engagement with tasks and with each other.

Participants were invited to respond to a series of questions and prompts exploring the following:

- Perceptions of/responses to actual DCJ job advertisements and selection of various diversity statements and images
- Discussion of job seeker experiences: concerns about the process; enablers that supported/encouraged them and why; and barriers or reasons for discomfort.

Qualitative data from discussion boards is reported throughout this document according to participants' self-identified target group.

Methods and approach for Phase 2 (cont.)

Interviews

Interview participants were also recruited through the EOI process within the survey and via circulation of a recruitment advertisement to DCJ stakeholder networks.

All interview participants self-identified as CALD and had applied for a job with DCJ in the past five years.

Interviews involved in-depth discussion of their past experiences: concerns about the process from application to onboarding; enablers which supported/encouraged them and why, and conversely, barriers or reasons for discomfort.

There were a range of limitations which suggest some of these findings are specific to the sample we consulted.

Our recruitment focused on CALD job seekers likely to have the requisite qualifications for and interest in public service roles in order to focus on the experiences of job seekers within the 'target market' for public service opportunities (both frontline and professional).

This approach, along with recruiting via existing stakeholder networks and with primarily online outreach, means that the job seekers consulted have predominantly been people living in metropolitan areas who have relatively high levels of English proficiency and formal education.

Future studies would benefit from conducting research with CALD job seekers in regional and rural areas; who predominantly speak language/s other than English at home and who have a broader range of educational experiences.

Methods and approach for Phase 3

Potential participants from Diversity Council Australia's Inclusive Employer Index lists were contacted by Anti-Discrimination NSW to solicit their interest in participating in a semi-structured in-depth interview with senior researchers from The Insight Centre. Participants were purposefully selected to include a range of sectors and organisational sizes.

Interviews involved in-depth discussion about their organisation's journey in terms of hiring for a more culturally and linguistically diverse workforce. We asked interviewees to outline challenges their organisations have faced, and to talk through their experiences of implementing specific initiatives to support candidates from diverse backgrounds. This incorporated discussing steps in their 'standard' recruitment process and how they may be adapted for applicants from CALD backgrounds, and their perceptions of what hiring managers from their organisations need to successfully recruit more diverse candidates.

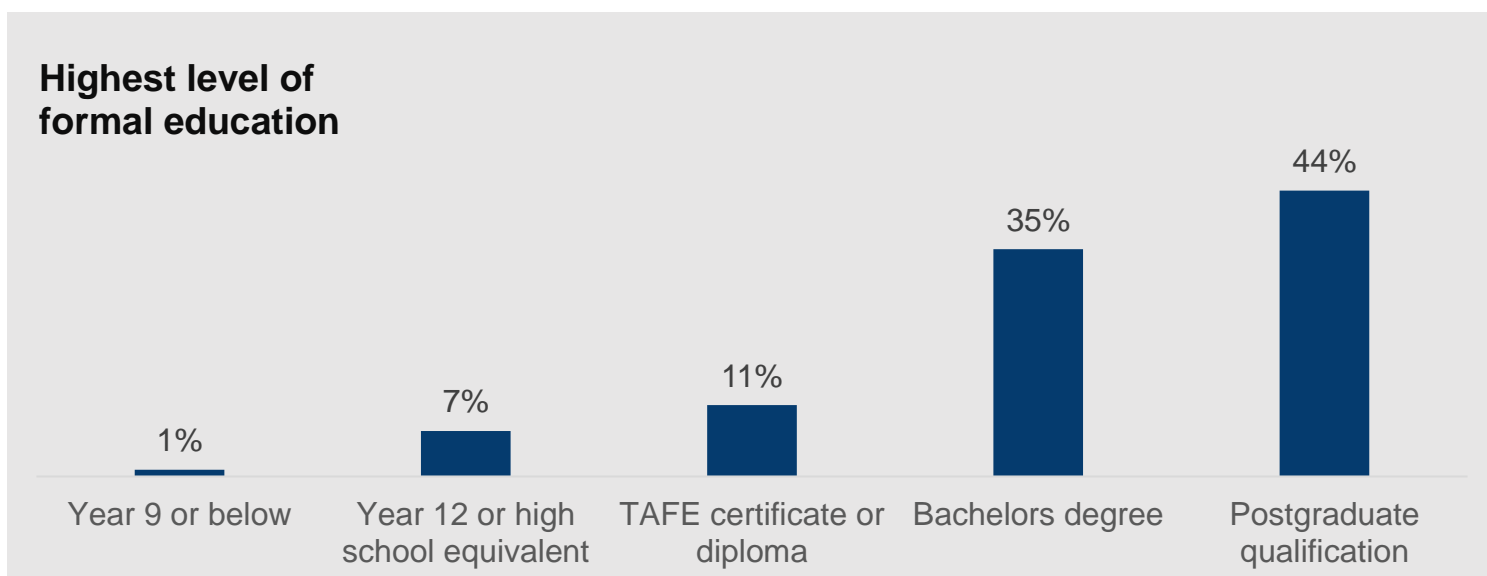
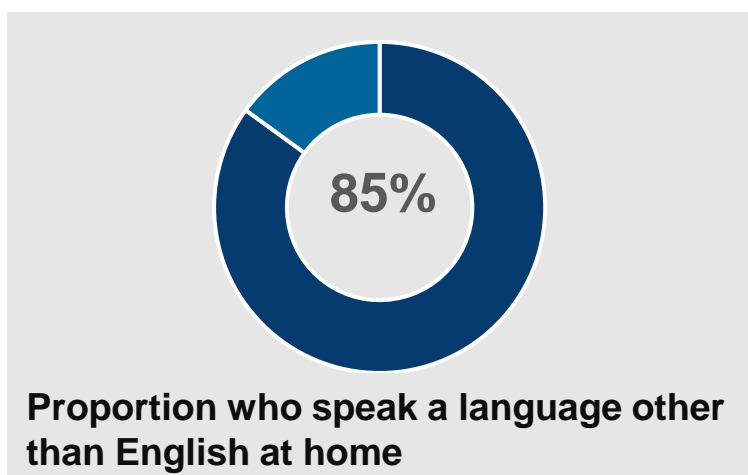
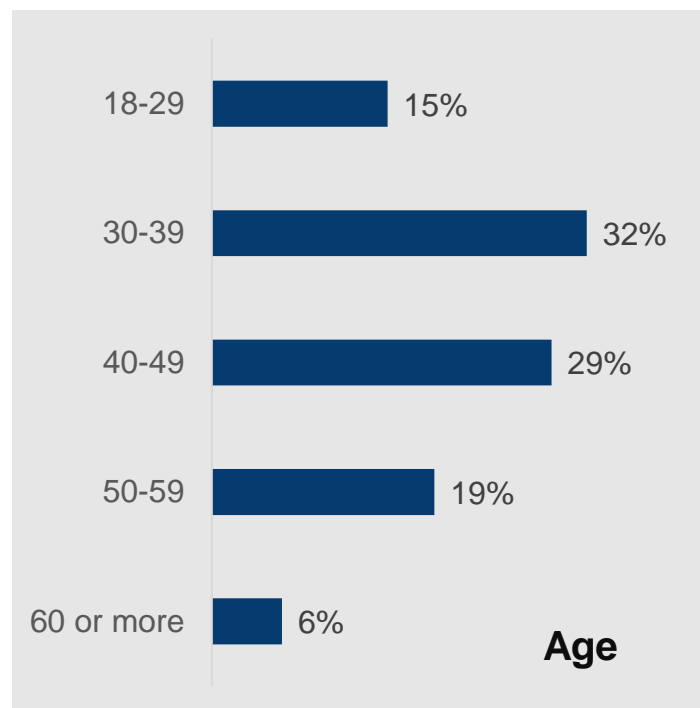
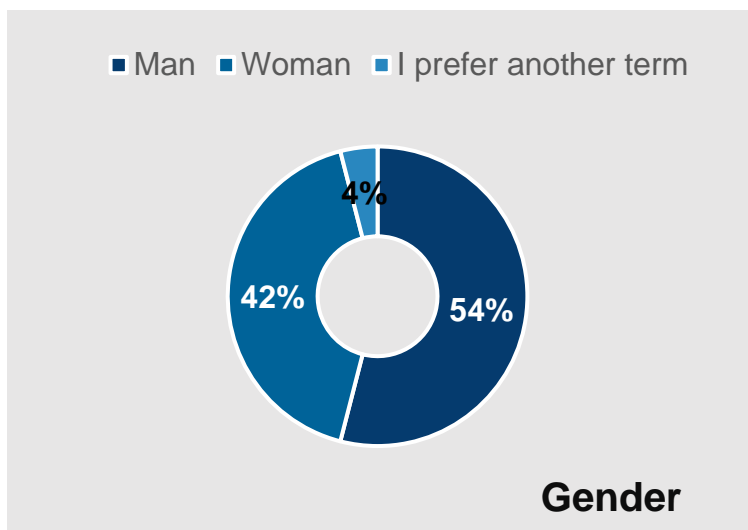
Our research canvassed a small sample of employers from a non-representative cross-section of sectors. Future research would benefit strongly from replicating this exercise with a broad range of employers across organisational size, sector, and industry.



Phase 2 findings: Job seeker consultations

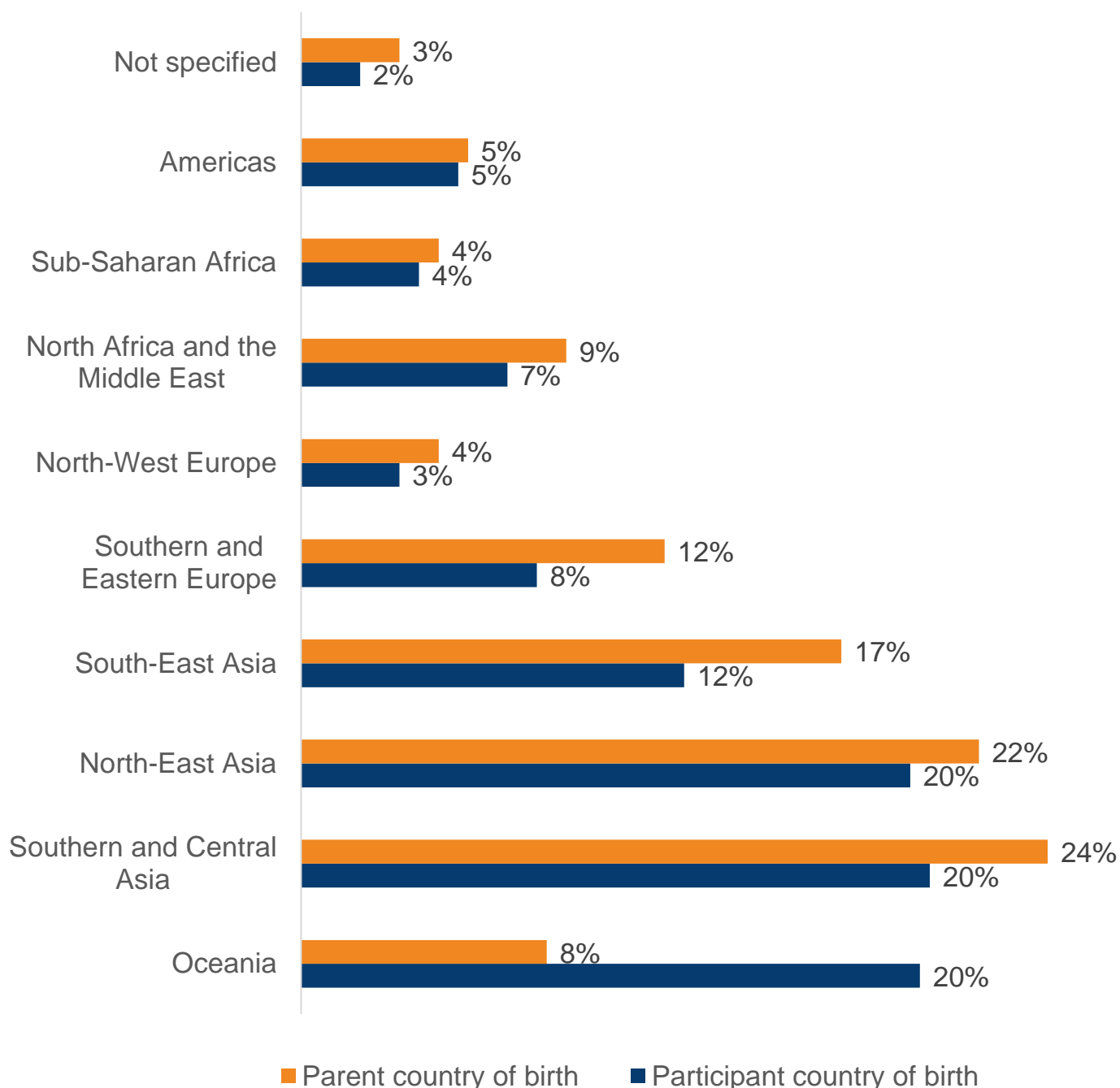
- Survey demographics
- Preferred terminology
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- Best and worst job seeking experiences
- Barriers and enablers in recruitment

Survey demographics



Survey demographics (cont.)

Country of birth of participants and their parents



Variable created by (i) coding birth country of the participant to the broad categories of the Australian Bureau Of Statistics Standard Australian Classification of Countries (SACC), 2016 and (ii) then coding whether EITHER parent was born in the broad category; Sample size = 317

Preferred terminology

To explore preferred terms that people from diverse backgrounds felt captured their cultural, racial, ethnic, linguistic and religious identities, survey participants were asked to reflect on which of the following terms, if any, they would use to describe themselves:

- Culturally and/or racially marginalised
- Person of Colour
- Belonging to a racial or ethnic minority
- Culturally and/or linguistically diverse

All participants selected at least one description and they were able to select more than one.

‘Culturally or linguistically diverse’ was the most commonly selected, followed by ‘belonging to a racial or ethnic minority.’

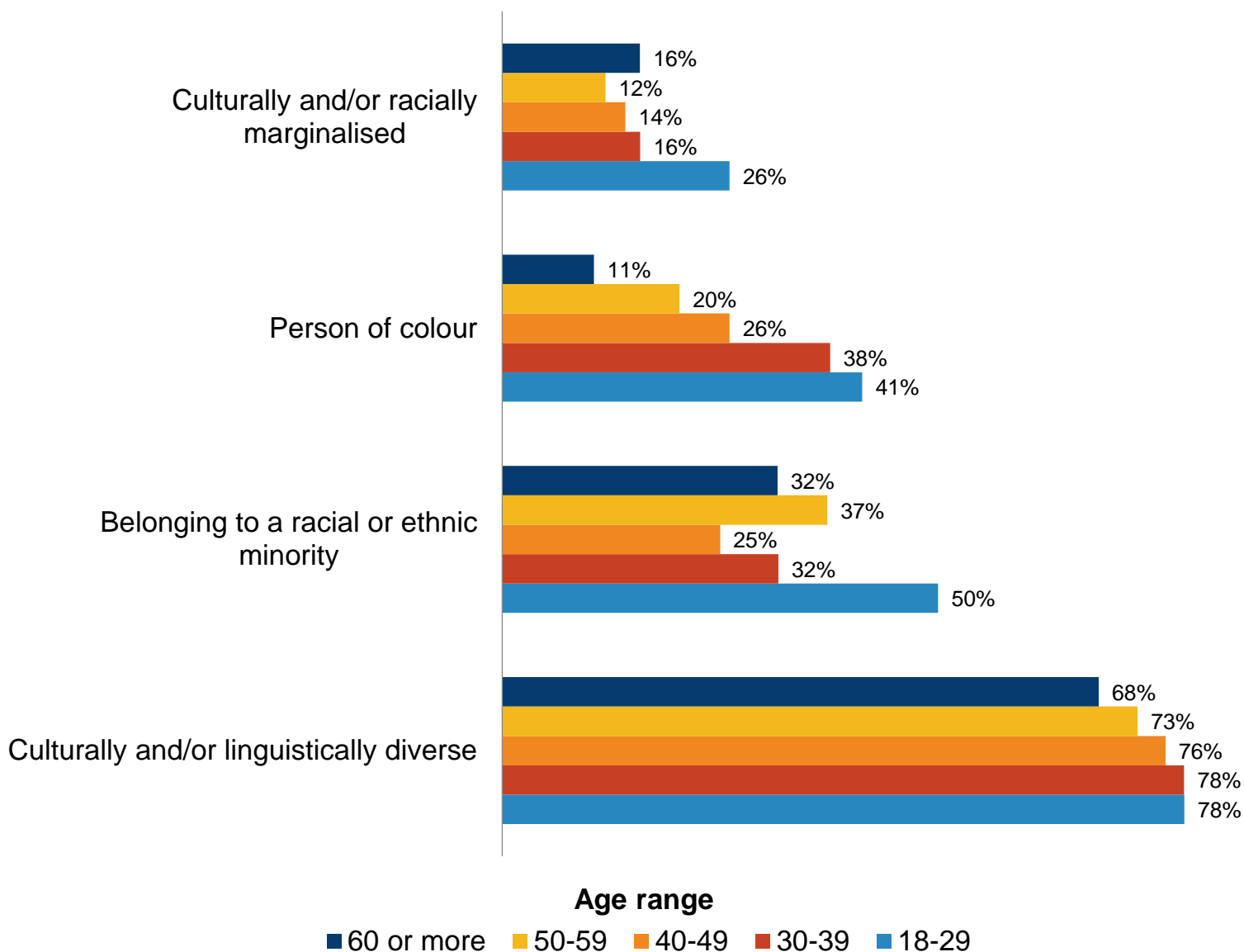
Results indicated that preferred terminology was largely consistent between genders, except that 35% of men compared to 27% of women identified with Person of Colour.

However, differences according to age grouping were stark. A **significant majority of people in all age groups identified with the term CALD**, however **this decreased with age**. Results for “belonging to a racial or ethnic minority” were mixed, with people aged 30-39 and 40-49 years old less likely than older age groups to refer to themselves as such.

Overall, **people in the youngest age group** were considerably **more likely to use each of the identified terms** to describe themselves. More recently emerging terminology e.g. Person of Colour; culturally and/or racially marginalised were less likely to be selected by older groups.

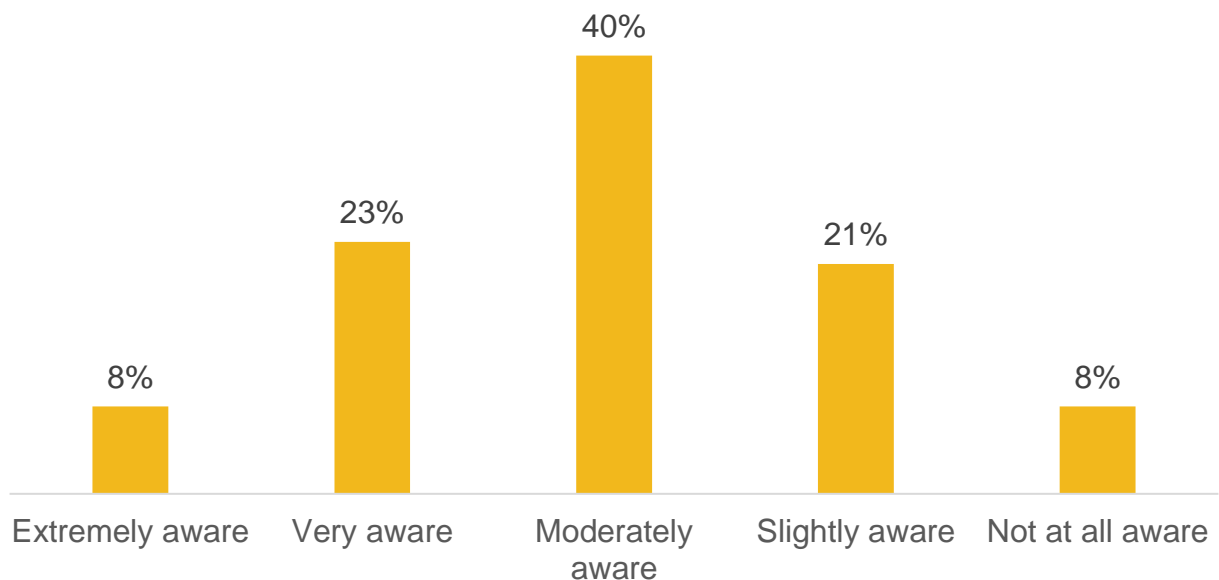
Preferred terminology (cont.)

**Q: Which of these, if any, would you use to describe yourself?
Per cent by age; Sample size = 317**



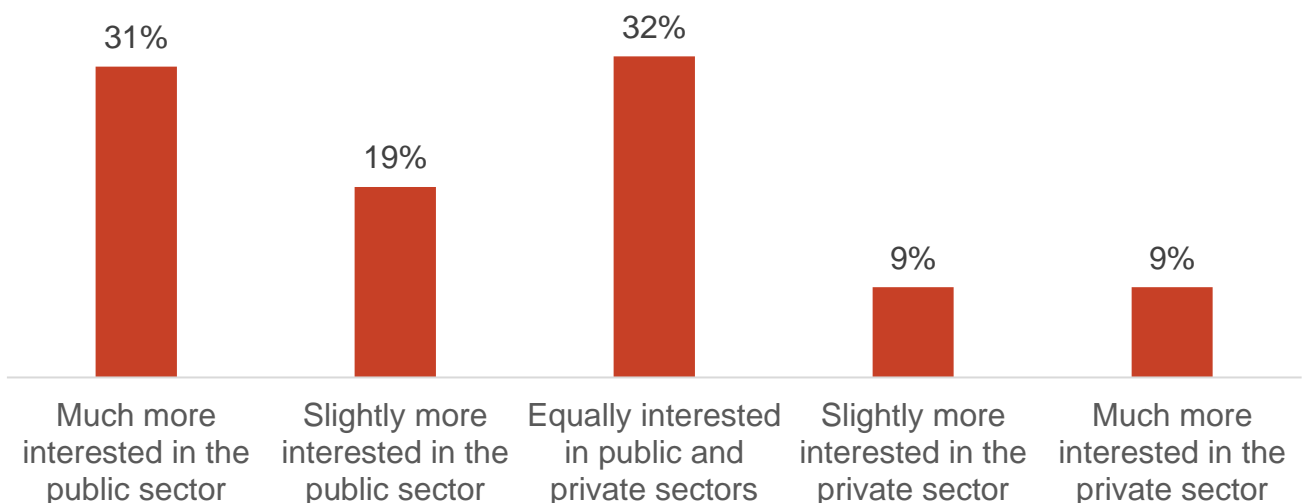
Perceptions of the public service

Awareness of job opportunities within the public service



Q: How aware are you of the kinds of job opportunities available within the public service?
Sample size = 317

Interest in public service versus private sector job opportunities



Q: How interested are you in pursuing job opportunities within the public service?
Sample size = 317

Perceptions of the public service (cont.)

Participants were aware of and strongly interested in careers within the public service: **95% of survey respondents were aware of the kind of job opportunities that are available in the public service**, with 72% at least moderately aware.

90% of survey respondents were interested in pursuing job opportunities within the public service. Further, 51% of survey respondents were more interested in the public service, compared to 18% more interested in the private sector.

Although survey participants were broadly interested in opportunities within the public service, perceptions shared by interview and discussion board participants of the public service as an employer for people from CALD backgrounds were considerably more mixed.

Perceptions of working in the public service were varied and were often informed by participants' level of exposure to the organisation i.e. if they worked there or had friends who did.

“From the outside, what I see is that there are a lot of people of diverse background working in junior positions. My experience is that often there are people in managerial positions that focus on diversity who are of White Anglo-Saxon background and speak English as a first language. So I feel like the government is interested in diversity for front line facing positions and not for managerial positions. That diversity is not filtering up at all.”

Recent DCJ applicant interview

“It’s [an] unnecessarily bureaucratic, traditionalist approach and very monoculture. It has entrenched hegemony. The issue is the organisational cultural fabric is the face of modern day Australia. [...] How do you tap into that diverse pool of talent where 50% of the nation is foreign born or, has a parent, foreign born? It requires a radical shift from what constitutes a traditional approach to how you recruit. [...] If you have conversations with folks vastly skilled but diverse culturally, they would never care about applying for such jobs, never, even when they're fitting.”

Recent DCJ applicant interview

Perceptions of the public service (cont.)

Common perceptions were that the public service:

- Is **highly sought after and competitive**, and difficult to get into initially.
- Offers **well-paying and stable** employment and careers, with the ability to move departments. People tend to work there for many years – even decades.
- Offers **flexible working arrangements** (i.e. working from home or working reduced hours) for those in appropriate roles (i.e. non-client facing).
- Can be **'rigid'** in working styles, bureaucratic, resistant to change and very structured. Some noted that this would **limit their ability to bring their own strengths** to a role.

Those who had not worked in the public service or did not know anyone who worked there were more likely to view the public service positively, listing the benefits above but also that they perceived the organisation as having “accountability”.

They thought the people who worked there would need to be diligent in their work, and that there would be systems in place to deal with bullying and harassment.

There was a perception from those who had been trying unsuccessfully to break into the public service that the bar was set too high for entry, that CALD applicants were likely to be ‘put off’ from applying for roles because of barriers to entry.

“The jobs have a higher rate of pay are stable and once you are in the public service it is easier to move to other departments.”

African and Middle Eastern background discussion board

“I know for a fact that working for the public service is a great privilege, the staff retention is great and people tend to stay for many decades there.”

Graduate discussion board

Perceptions of the public service (cont.)

“They are definitely roles I am considering exploring as I know a few people who have taken up graduate roles in the public service and had a very positive experience with both the other people working there and the role itself.”

Graduate discussion board

“It has structures for long, productive careers. They are rigid, and deeply steeped in bureaucracy. Static, predictable and artificial, perhaps to make it appear cordial.”

African and Middle Eastern background discussion board

“I would not go to the public service if I wanted a community facing role - the bureaucratic processes would make it difficult for me to work in a way that I feel would be best.”

African and Middle Eastern background discussion board

Graduates in particular had a highly positive view of the public service and saw it as a workplace to aspire to working in (although they recognised it was highly competitive). One participant reflected that the “structured” nature of the work made it appear not to be a “fun” place to work for a young person.

Some participants also expressed a belief that people working in the public service had to be “very careful” about what they said publicly and how they interacted with the public.

Very few graduates knew people working in the sector.

Those from **African and Middle Eastern** communities focused on the bureaucracy, and how the public service could be slow.

This group included some who had experience working in the public service and/or knew people who worked there. These participants had a less “rosy” view of the public service and said that while it had its benefits (as above) it could be “toxic”, with some favouritism. Others also held concerns about just how inclusive it was as a workplace, a view also held by many in the CALD women group.

Perceptions of the public service (cont.)

“The recruitment practices varied drastically according to the department. There is no consistency, so unless you are an insider, it is hard to know exactly what you need to write in your cover letter to respond to the capability framework. The application process is really time-consuming and intimidating for most applicants.”

CALD women discussion board

“I think it looks good but to be honest with you, I have myself applied to a role with the department and the recruitment process is very slow.”

CALD women discussion board

“I feel like I am just stuck in an impasse and cannot move up or out of DCJ after working here for nearly 9 years now. I have been tempted to change my name on my resume many times, wondering if it is my very ethnic sounding name that does not let my application pass through the initial shortlisting.”

CALD women discussion board

CALD women were the most critical group – and appeared to have the most direct experience with the public service (by working there, having friends there or applying for jobs).

While they could see the benefits as listed above, they were also sceptical of how inclusive and diverse the workplace is in practice. One participant described what they saw as a “lot of performative diversity in advertising” without real attention to inclusion and diversity in the workplace culture. This group also noted that while representation was apparent in junior positions this did not extend to leadership.

Some of these women had applied for jobs in the public service and found the process to be both slow and a little confusing as the processes varied greatly between departments. This group were also the most likely to express direct concerns about discrimination in the recruitment process.

Views on workplace diversity and the recruitment process

Workplace diversity was important to job seekers – not only for their own well-being, job satisfaction and career opportunities, but because it is a value they believe in. Importantly, they want to work for an employer who shares those values.

In participants' view, diversity and inclusion is not just about including CALD employees in a workforce, it is **valuing, encouraging and incorporating** the unique perspectives, skills and work approaches that they bring.

On a personal level, diversity and inclusion also means facilitating opportunities and encouraging CALD employees to be comfortable “expressing their culture”. This may be through cultural dress, or the way they interact with others or simply by celebrating cultural or religious events or holidays.

Workplaces that lack diversity and inclusion can be unsafe for participants and also perceived as “a waste of their time” – job seeking is a time-consuming process, and participants do not want to invest in applying for a workplace that will not value (or accept) them.

Participants also firmly believed that organisations working with CALD communities should themselves have CALD employees, preferably from those same communities and represented throughout all levels, including senior leadership.

Participants suggested several markers of a diverse and inclusive organisation, but they believed that you could never truly tell until you started working there.

The markers they looked for were **diversity in the workforce (particularly senior leadership)** and/or on the interview panel, as well as **specific inclusion policies** on their website. They also looked at potential employers' **values, vision and mission**, particularly looking for references to diversity. Some made contact with past and present employees and read reviews on websites such as Seek.

Perceptions of the recruitment process

It was clearly critical to participants that organisations (and specifically recruitment panels) be open-minded in their search for a candidate, and that they **facilitate opportunities for applicants to demonstrate their unique skills and potential value**. Most of all, participants wanted interview panels to **recognise the unique value of CALD employees and what they bring** to the workplace. For participants, the **recruitment process is reflective of an organisation's culture**: if you are not valued during the recruitment process, you will likely not be valued once you are working there.

Along these lines participants thought **good interviews allowed them to find out more about the workplace to see if it was a good fit for them**. In terms of the interview process specifically, participants wanted to see diversity on interview panels, or at the very least the panel members to have had diversity training.

They preferred interviews that were less scripted, and where interviewers showed a genuine interest in them and their value as a CALD employee.

There were also a number of things that made interviews challenging for CALD candidates, including being “rushed” through the interview and being judged on their “likeability”, something some mentioned wasn’t “the norm” in interviews in their culture. Along these lines some participants felt that attributes that were valued in Australian interviews such as confidence and self-assurance were not reflective of what was valued in their culture, e.g. being humble, thoughtful and reflective.

Participants believed that CALD employees brought several high value skills and attributes to a workplace, including **resilience and empathy** and a potential shared lived experience with the organisation's clients. Participants also thought that being multilingual and multicultural allowed them to “think differently” and bring a “different or unique approach”.

Perceptions of the recruitment process (cont.)

"I am particularly passionate about fostering a work environment where people from various cultural backgrounds, with diverse languages, are not only welcomed but celebrated. I aspire to be part of a team where diversity is not just tolerated but actively embraced."

African and Middle Eastern discussion board

"Diversity and representation in the workplace is very important to me, but I also recognise that Australia is pretty far behind and has some catching up to do."

CALD women discussion board

"It's kind of like, are you here because of your diverse background and the tokenism of it? And it's a fine line, especially within particular organisations and sectors."

Recent DCJ applicant interview

Some participants also touched on **attributes they perceived to be beneficial to a workplace**, including "not playing politics or gossiping", "sticking to the rules", "working to a high standard with high expectations" and working in a "structured, disciplined and focused way".

Participants tended not to attach specific labels like 'racism' or 'discrimination' to negative experiences when job seeking, but often described incidents of very apparent racial and ethnic bias which **prevented them from progressing** based solely on their name or the image attached to their application. Others stated examples of people making assumptions about their English proficiency that were belittling.

This suggests that asking CALD job seekers to report racism or discrimination is likely to lead to underreporting.

Participants also reflected on what they perceived to be **authentic versus tokenistic diversity** and shared experiences where they felt their backgrounds and experiences were genuinely valued, as compared to being recruited to roles and/or having experiences in the workplace where they felt like a "token diversity hire".

Perceptions of diversity statements

Survey participants were invited to respond to a series of statements which reflect organisational commitment to recruit people from diverse backgrounds. Some of these were taken from actual DCJ job advertisements, whereas others featured in inclusive recruitment toolkits identified through the previously completed literature review.

Read the statements below that might appear in a job advertisement. Would these make you more or less likely to apply?

Statement in job advertisement	More likely	Neither more nor less likely	Less likely to apply
This role targets people who identify as having a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background. We encourage people who identify as CALD background to apply.	71%	17%	11%
Inclusion and Diversity lies at the heart of how we recruit. We continue to hire great people with a wide variety of skills, experience and backgrounds. This includes people with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, women, people identifying as LGBTIQ+, culturally and linguistically diverse people, carers and other diversity groups.	67%	25%	9%
This role targets people who are of [Participant's selected ancestry] descent. We encourage people who identify as of [Participant's selected ancestry] descent to apply.	64%	19%	17%
When it comes to choosing talent – we are colour blind, gender blind, age, sex and identity agnostic. Our sole focus is talent. We are proud to be an equal opportunity employer. We have a clear vision: to be the place where talents of all types can thrive and do their best work and help to enrich one another.	60%	24%	17%

Perceptions of diversity statements (cont.)

For the statements that would make them less likely to apply, we then asked survey participants to elaborate on 'why':

1. Inclusion and Diversity lies at the heart of how we recruit....

"The terms inclusion & diversity have become box ticking KPI focused. They are now terms that I refuse to use and filters that let me know which spaces to avoid."

"It's worth noting that effective implementation of diversity and inclusion initiatives requires ongoing commitment, awareness, and the establishment of inclusive policies and practices throughout the entire employee lifecycle."

2. When it comes to choosing talent – we are colour blind...

"The idea of colour, gender, age, sex, identity "blind" - minoritised communities do not want you to be "blind" to them, and this statement suggests you are after the status quo, and do not value or even understand diversity. Discrimination is embedded in systems and institutions. If you ignore diversity, you're likely to also ignore discrimination that impacts diverse communities."

"We want the workplace to recognise our unique identities and also address the specific barriers that we are facing."

3. This role targets people who identify as having a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background...

"My cultural background is something I've had issues understanding at times but I wouldn't want to be in a role solely because of that. I don't want it to be a criteria in the application but more a firm value with goals or measures in place to achieve it."

4. This role targets people who are of [Participant's identified ancestry] descent. We encourage people who identify as of [Participant's identified ancestry] descent to apply.

"This statement would raise questions and concerns for me because I have never seen a role ask for that. I have seen roles that target the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander community but not for Indians."

Perceptions of diversity statements (cont.)

All of the example diversity statements made the majority of participants more likely to apply.

This suggests that overall, **diversity statements on job advertisements are important to signal an inclusive workplace** and to encourage CALD applicants.

Negative feedback on diversity statements was mixed, with some feeling they are a 'tick a box' exercise that cannot adequately reflect organisational commitment or employee experience.

A small number had strongly negative sentiments and **strongly disagreed with the use of diversity statements and targeted roles at all**, with negative comments mostly centred on the lack of 'meritocracy' they signalled.

For example, one survey participant wrote that *"forced inclusion and wokeness over actual talent/skills disgusts me. I don't want to get in on a quota."* Another highlighted that the statements *"suggest a targeting of race hiring rather than ability and experience. Seems a political place to work rather than a meritocracy."*

For some, these statements simply raised questions around their purpose, or were unfamiliar, in particular the affirmative statements that stated recruitment was targeted towards CALD candidates or a specific CALD group.

As such, further education for job seekers on *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* exemptions and affirmative recruitment statements to clarify how they can support people from diverse backgrounds could be valuable.

Perceptions of the Capability Framework

Discussion board and interview participants were shown a prompt document containing examples of focus capabilities from the Capability Framework which had been extracted from a previous DCJ job advertisement. Participants were asked whether they were familiar with the Framework and their views on whether it is helpful to applicants.

Most discussion board and interview participants had seen this Framework and/or had seen “something similar” in other job ads. However, one participant stated that there was little knowledge of the Framework in the wider recruitment industry, with job seeking support programs for CALD job seekers seldom having insight into the Framework.

The Capability Framework was criticised for being:

- **Overly long, and “wordy”** – especially on top of already long and wordy public service job ads. Some participants stated that this often appeared by the third or fourth page by which they were starting to lose focus.
- **Unclear language** – this was a view only held by some, but for these participants the words used (‘courageous’ was an example) could be difficult for an English additional language speaker to understand in the context of the application.
- **Too limiting and focusing recruitment on just behaviour and personality** – some participants thought this would overlook their own talents and experience.
- **Unclear about its purpose** – participants questioned whether it was something they needed to respond to, or something to use as a guide for their examples in their cover letter or broader application.

For others, the Framework helped them have a clear understanding of what was expected from them, and what they might need to focus on in an application or interview. It was also seen to help those who might have a lack of experience (but could be a good fit otherwise).

Best and worst job seeking experiences

Good experiences

Participants were invited to share their best and worst experiences while job seeking and to elaborate on what made those experiences the best or worst.

The common aspects of a **'good'** experience applying for a job included:

- **Frequent communication:** Keeping applicants updated throughout the process.
- **Progressing quickly:** Moving the recruitment process through in a timely manner.
- **Friendly and welcoming:** Ensuring the interviewee feels valued, that the interview panel are engaged, warm and friendly (ice-breakers are helpful).
- **Positive and helpful:** Interviewers try to “get the best out of you”.
- **Recognition of the value of CALD candidates:** The recruiters and/or interview panel recognise the unique value of CALD employees and give them time and access to demonstrate that (along with encouragement).

Additionally, one participant mentioned that they had received the interview questions the day before to allow them to prepare. This was something that other participants in this group thought was an “impressive idea”.

“I was very nervous about the interview but the panel made me feel at home. They seemed genuinely interested in my responses and that gave me the confidence to speak from the heart. I got the job and that gave my career the pathway it needed.”

African and Middle Eastern discussion board

“It felt like a conversation, and the recruiter was genuinely interested in how I could contribute to the organisation.”

CALD women discussion board

Best and worst job seeking experiences (cont.)

Bad experiences

The common aspects of a **'bad'** experience applying for a job included:

- **Lack of communication:** Never hearing back after lodging an application or even after going to an interview, and no feedback when requested after being unsuccessful.
- **Interrogation not an interview:** Panel interviews that feel like an “interrogation”, not about getting to know the applicant.
- **Disengaged interviewers:** This included interview panel members who appeared to not be listening, or who were immediately disinterested in the applicant.
- **Time consuming and seemingly pointless tasks:** Participants raised an example of extensive “homework” tasks that were given to them, after which they never heard back.
- **Tokenism, or ‘ticking a box’:** Some participants felt that their involvement in the recruitment process was just to tick a box or “tokenism”. This was often because the position had already been filled or the panel wanted a certain person, but also occasionally what they perceived to be an attempt to give the appearance of diversity and inclusion.
- **Generally, not respecting the time and effort of applicants:** This is reflective of a number of the points above – participants invested heavily in their applications and were discouraged when they never heard back or received a generic response, such as “there were a high volume of applications and on this occasion yours was not successful”.
- **Perceived discrimination:** due to their visa status or possible lack of skills was also raised by some participants. This included being told they couldn't be offered the advertised (ongoing) job but rather something casual or short term due to their visa status or lack of skills/experience.

Best and worst job seeking experiences (cont.)

"I find it disheartening when recruiters or hiring managers don't follow up after a job application or an interview. I firmly believe they have a responsibility to provide feedback and closure to job applicants. Such communication is not just a professional courtesy but also an ethical responsibility. Clear and timely feedback, whether it's a success or a disappointment, is crucial. It allows job applicants to move forward in their job search rather than linger in uncertainty, fostering a more respectful and efficient recruitment process."

African and Middle Eastern discussion board

"The worst experience so far was with a panel of 3 members all from the same background pretty much making it obvious they don't like my accent and I knew I wouldn't get the job."

CALD women discussion board

"I recall I applied for a job and 5 months after I had applied, I was informed of the outcome. I found it very disrespectful of my time and effort - I worked hard to apply for the position and all they need to do is send an email as soon as they know the outcome."

African and Middle Eastern discussion board

"My best experience would be when I applied for my current role. I feel the interview process was very relaxing in a way that I feel very welcomed the minute I walked in the door and I can tell from the people I saw and chatted with, instantly, that this is a workplace that values diversity. The interview process was enjoyable, I felt that I was chatting and engaging in a conversation as opposed to being interviewed. They were very clear with the process and follow up and made sure that I was updated throughout every stage of the recruitment. Even after they hired me, they gave me feedback on why I was their chosen candidate."

CALD women discussion board

Barriers and enablers in recruitment

Survey participants were invited to respond to a series of actions that might make it easier for them during their job seeking process or which could be a barrier to them securing a role within the public service. They were also asked to rate their level of comfort with a series of recruitment tasks and processes. Similarly, discussion board and interview participants were asked to discuss factors they perceived to be barriers to their previous job applications within the public service. The following section provides a breakdown of these findings and further nuancing according to the data collection component and wording of the questions.

Enablers in recruitment

Survey participants were asked *“to what extent do you agree that the following would make it easier for you in the job seeking process?”*

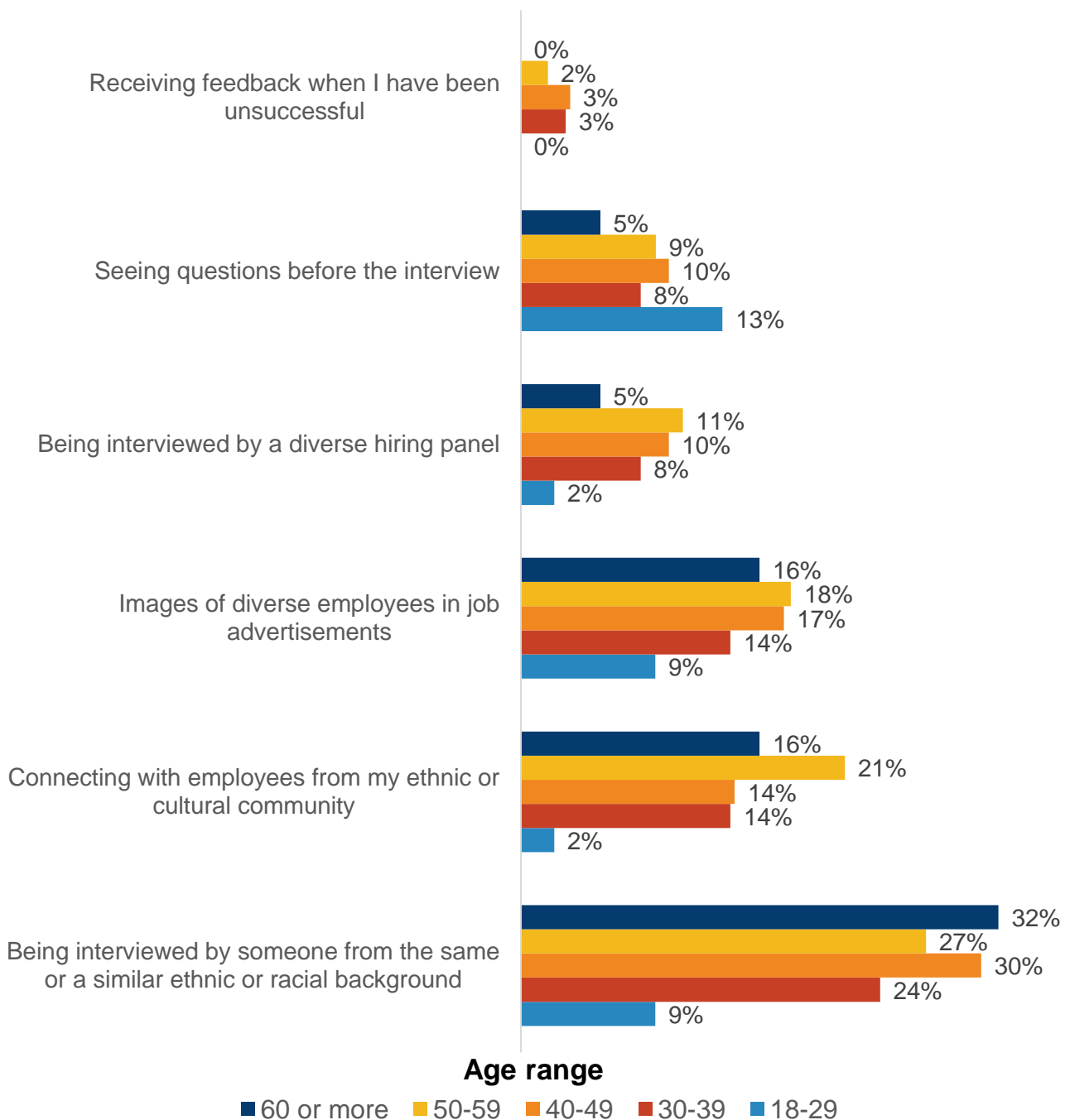
The results suggest that **job seekers aged 18-29 years would find it most beneficial to see interview questions before the interview**, which may reflect their level of confidence and experience in completing recruitment tasks.

Generally, **people in older age groupings would find cultural, racial and ethnic-specific supports** more beneficial than people in the youngest age group.

Few respondents rated hearing back promptly from the employer or receiving feedback when they have been unsuccessful highly as an enabler or ‘helper’ for general job seeking, although these are ranked as significant in terms of barriers to success in the public service specifically.

Enablers in recruitment

Q: To what extent do you agree that the following would make it easier for you in the job seeking process – Per cent who either somewhat or strongly agree, by age.
Sample size = 317



Barriers in recruitment

Barriers in recruitment

Survey participants were also asked: “How much do you agree or disagree that the following could be barriers to you securing a job in the public service?”

The issue of **receiving timely and tailored feedback** was strongly consistent throughout all research components, along with a perception from participants that **personal connections and “insider” knowledge of public service recruitment processes was required** for their job applications to be successful. The issue of perceived discrimination was similarly prevalent for participants.

The findings relating to feedback may appear somewhat contradictory; however, it is highly likely participants responded to the specific wording of the question (enabler to job seeking versus barrier to securing a job in the public service). While they did not necessarily perceive feedback to be an enabler in their job seeking more broadly, it was strongly considered a barrier to success within the public service application process specifically.

Barrier	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
I haven't received feedback on previous applications so I don't know why I have been unsuccessful	65%	18%	17%
I don't have local networks or industry connections	61%	17%	22%
I don't know where to get support and advice	57%	19%	24%
Facing discrimination from employers due to my ethnicity, race or religion	56%	18%	26%
I feel my international experience is not valued in Australia	51%	25%	24%
I have family or community commitments and need flexible or part-time work	49%	17%	34%
Cultural differences in the job application processes	49%	18%	33%
My English proficiency	34%	8%	58%

Barriers in recruitment (cont.)

1. Intensive and time-consuming process

Participants reflected that the **job application itself took far longer and was more demanding than in other sectors**, particularly due to the Capability Framework they needed to respond to.

As the application is particularly time- and resource-intensive, receiving tailored feedback is seen as a way to acknowledge applicants' time and effort.

Participants perceived there to be a **lack of consistency** between departments or positions **in what is expected for an application**, and some applications are far more (in their view unnecessarily) demanding than others. One participant shared an example of having to prepare a policy brief for a junior role, a time investment that had not been required of them for more senior positions.

Discussion board and interview participants often felt that the time between applying and hearing an outcome was too long.

Participants who shared this view described having to make difficult decisions about accepting roles that may not have been their preference, simply because they had not received any feedback or updates on a public service role they had applied for.

“Different agencies require different things. E.g. for an assistant role, I was asked to complete a policy brief in 24 hours and send to the panel before the interview. This was a lot more work than what I was required to do for a senior management position. There isn't any consistency in the recruitment process.”

African and Middle Eastern discussion board

“[The time between application and hearing an outcome is] long, to be honest. It is very long. And although I think most of us would expect not to hear back from them for about a month...it took them four or five months to get back to me.”

Recent DCJ applicant interview

Barriers in recruitment (cont.)

2. Lack of quality feedback on applications

The majority of interview participants and a significant number of discussion board participants reported receiving **insufficiently general or no feedback on previous job applications with DCJ**. Across the survey, interview and discussion board participants, lack of feedback was a significant barrier to their ability to secure a job in the public service, as they did not know how to improve their applications in future.

Two interview participants recounted experiences of applying for roles internal to their teams after having acted in them for a period of time and being given positive feedback on their performance. However, their applications for the substantive roles were unsuccessful, and applicants described being given highly generic feedback that did not adequately explain why they were not successful, nor how they could improve in future.

This led participants to feel confused and angry, caused them to question their own abilities and **negatively affected their perception of DCJ more broadly**, with one participant seriously considering quitting altogether. These comments speak to strong impacts on morale, retention and the pipeline to seniority for CALD employees. Applicants outside of the public service described feeling deflated, disrespected and less inclined to apply for public service roles again when they either did not receive feedback, or received generic feedback that did not enable them to learn from the experience.

“At the time my director didn't shortlist me [for an internal role] because he said my resume was not up to standard. That's all he could say. I mean, I've led my team for five years, so they know me by my resume.”

Recent DCJ applicant interview

Barriers in recruitment (cont.)

3. Language and cultural bias

Participants perceived there to be **limited opportunities for career progression** within the public service due to their non-English speaking backgrounds, even though they spoke multiple languages, had one or more tertiary qualifications and extensive, relevant experience. This was particularly true for women across both interviews and discussion boards.

Many applicants reported finding it easier to express themselves in writing and had been perceived as having less advanced English skills when required to express themselves verbally.

The expectation in Australian recruitment processes that applicants speak freely and often about their individual achievements, rather than situating their contribution as part of a group, is considered in many cultures to be an undesirable behaviour.

Further, **group interviews are perceived to be misaligned with some cultures** in which it is expected that people wait to hear others' perspectives before sharing their own – which is fundamentally at odds with the Western assumptions of leaders being extroverted, prominent voices in discussion.

This pressure is amplified along gender lines.

“When we're talking of diversity, people have different ways of thinking and different ways of answering. You can't just really expect one standard answer, you know.”

Recent DCJ applicant interview

“We were told when we were young, be thinking three times before you speak...If I just look at it [the interview question] and start talking, that's reckless. That's one of the qualities that we don't want for our culture, right? And yet the way that interviews in the public service often happen, it's like they expect you to come up with an answer on the spot.”

Recent DCJ applicant interview

Barriers in recruitment (cont.)

4. Insufficient information easily accessible to all applicants

There was a general sense that, unless you were applying for a role within your existing team or knew someone who worked in the team where a role was being advertised, **job advertisements and/or position descriptions provided insufficient information** about the work of the team and therefore created a barrier to applicants being able to sufficiently tailor their cover letters and/or responses to selection criteria.

Participants generally felt that, although they were **expected to respond to the Focus Capabilities in their applications**, there was insufficient guidance on how to do so, unless you knew where to locate it e.g. the Capability Framework resources on the Public Service Commission website.

Participants acknowledged the challenge of balancing a need for confidentiality (such as in a Ministerial office) with providing an equitable environment for job seekers that did not rely on having existing networks internal to the team/department in question.

Those who had **informal supports** with experience of job seeking in the public service sought their advice to prepare their applications and felt this was highly beneficial to the outcome.

Participants believed that success in public service job applications **depends on knowing specifically what public service hiring managers want** and how the information should be structured at the various stages of the application process.

Those who did not have these supports reported feeling disadvantaged because they did not have access to this knowledge/information.

Barriers in recruitment (cont.)

5. Inflexible and inconsistent interviewing approaches

Many participants expressed **confusion about interviews** within the public service, expecting them to follow a behavioural questioning style (where they would respond using the STAR – Situation / Task / Action / Result approach), but reporting that they had instead been asked non-behavioural questions. For example, rather than being asked to “Give an example of how your leadership style supported development of a high performing team”, they were asked “What do you think makes a high performing team?”

Participants reported feeling **unsure of how to respond** when the phrasing of interview questions did not align with their expectations and, more often than not, they were unsuccessful in such interviews.

Participants felt that interviews in the public service were “**stilted**” and left no room for them to talk about their unique strengths. One participant suggested it was like **being interviewed by “a machine”**.

Overall, participant responses reflected a perception that inflexible and inconsistent interviewing approaches were a significant barrier to them securing a role within the public service. These responses are supported by research outlined in the literature review which suggests that CALD applicants can be disadvantaged by an inflexible interviewing approach.

6. Discomfort with recruitment tasks and processes

Survey respondents were asked “*Thinking about when you are looking for or applying for jobs, how comfortable do you feel about the following tasks?*” and provided a rating from very uncomfortable to very comfortable.

The table on the following page provides a breakdown of the proportion of participants who felt either uncomfortable or very uncomfortable about completing a variety of common recruitment tasks. More participants felt uncomfortable completing assessment tasks, selection criteria, psychometric testing, behavioural interview and the health assessment/statement of pre-existing conditions.

Barriers in recruitment (cont.)

Recruitment task	Proportion uncomfortable
Assessment tasks, e.g. Timed written task	31%
Responding to selection criteria	23%
Psychometric testing	23%
Behavioural interview	21%
Health assessment, statement of pre-existing conditions	15%
CV / Resume preparation	10%
Supplying local references	10%
Online application process	6%
Criminal record checks	3%
Working with Children Check	2%

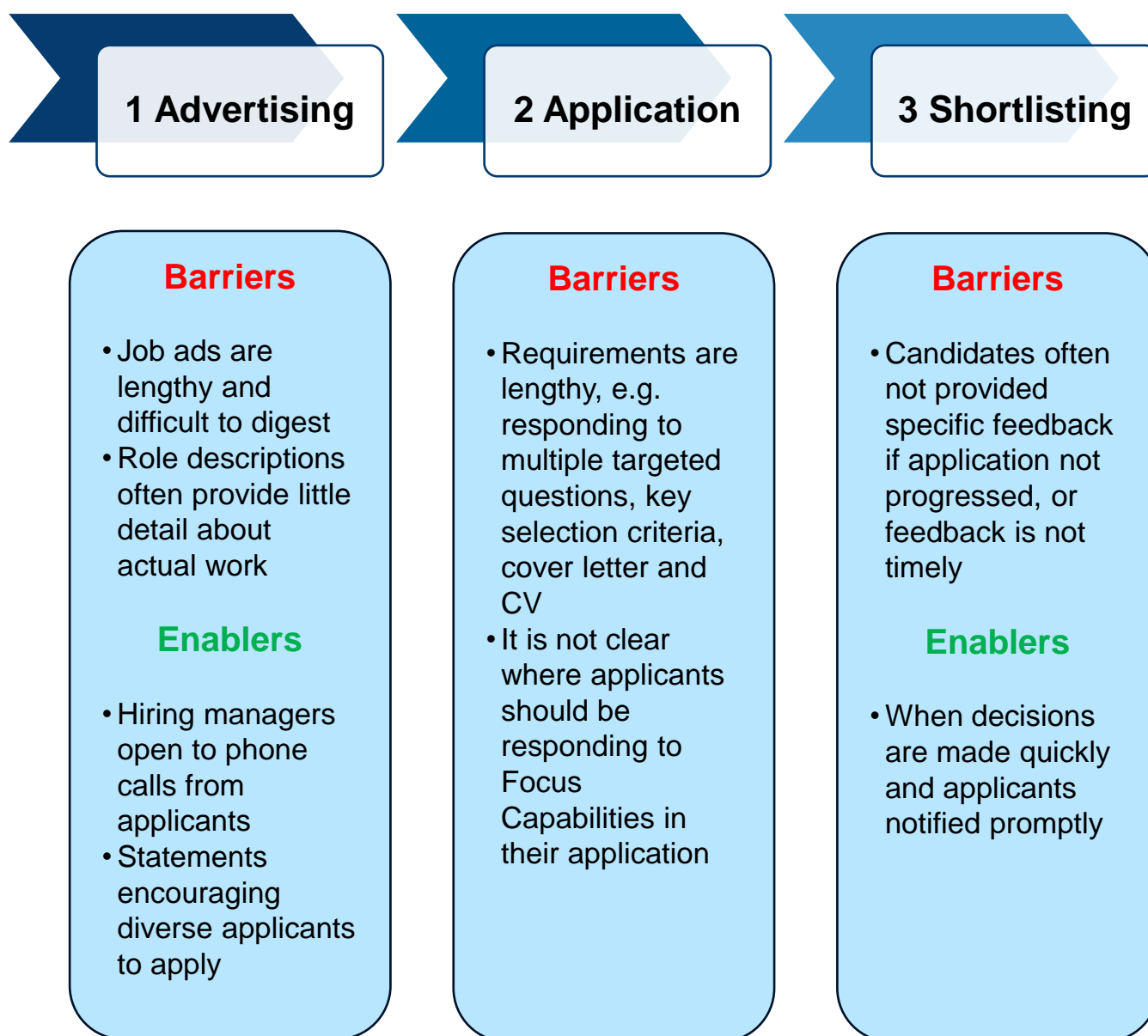


Phase 3 findings: Employer consultations

- DCJ recruitment process
- Perceptions and experiences of hiring managers and HR advisors
- Interviews with best practice employers

DCJ recruitment process

Consultations were undertaken with various key stakeholders within DCJ to map each stage of the recruitment process, from advertisement through assessment and interview to understand potential barriers and enablers for candidates from CALD backgrounds. The figure below and continuing on the next page is a synthesis of findings in barriers and enablers from these consultations.



DCJ recruitment process (cont.)

4 Assessment (Psychometric)

Barriers

- Candidates and hiring managers often feel psychometric assessments are not culturally appropriate or necessarily good predictors of the best applicant
- Time pressure can be a barrier if English not applicant's first language

5 Assessment (Interview)

Barriers

- Interview panel often culturally homogenous
- Interviews feel stilted, extractive
- Interviews are time-pressured and candidates often feel rushed

Enablers

- Questions provided ahead of time

6 Outcome

Barriers

- Feedback to applicants may be significantly delayed or not provided at all
- Feedback perceived as too generic to be helpful to subsequent applications

Perceptions and experiences of hiring managers and HR advisors

Hiring managers want to proactively accommodate candidate needs

All hiring managers outlined their experiences of adjusting standardised recruitment tasks to meet the needs of candidates from CALD backgrounds, and many believed that **other hiring managers were often unaware** of what options were available to them under the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013* (GSE Act).

Hiring managers felt there was an **onus on candidates to identify and request adjustments** in the recruitment process and felt this was not optimal, as candidates may not want to 'rock the boat' or feel their request would be perceived as burdensome (and therefore potentially impact their application). Interviewees overwhelmingly expressed a desire to **create a culture of 'candidate care'** where hiring managers proactively sought information about any potential candidate needs and designed the recruitment tasks accordingly.

There was a general sentiment that the **standard recruitment process was unnecessarily inflexible** and could be better aligned with the needs of candidates.

Communication between hiring managers and DCJ Talent Acquisition team creates barriers to candidate care

Some hiring managers conveyed **challenges in communication with the Talent Acquisition team within DCJ** that meant information about candidate needs was not always being passed on to hiring managers. One participant gave an example of a candidate contacting the recruiter from Talent Acquisition and requesting interview questions beforehand to support their linguistic needs; however this was not conveyed to the hiring manager.

The hiring manager thought the applicant had simply asked for the questions ahead of time without a legitimate need, so declined the request. The applicant then contacted the hiring manager directly to ask why their request was declined.

Perceptions and experiences of hiring managers and HR advisors (cont.)

Another hiring manager explained a situation in which they had said to Talent Acquisition they wanted to hire someone with a disability, as the role they were recruiting for required a high level of engagement and consultation with people with disability. The hiring manager asked Talent Acquisition whether they could identify anyone from a Talent Pool who might be suitable, but the candidate list they received had no references to disability or suitability for the role.

Hiring managers are implementing a range of innovative strategies to support CALD and other diverse candidates

Hiring managers and HR advisors are implementing a range of initiatives within their teams and divisions to support CALD and other diverse candidates. For example, one division had developed a “Diversity” team of hiring managers interested in inclusive recruitment. They were **actively sharing information** about inclusive recruitment best practice and **trailing a range of different initiatives**, including a Yarning Model style of interview.

Another team had **developed a structured training program** to support hiring managers to recruit candidates from diverse backgrounds and were in the process of **developing an internal list of appropriately trained hiring managers** to optimally support candidates from diverse backgrounds through the recruitment process.

A third hiring manager recounted a recruitment process they had recently completed where they implemented a trial of temporary contract roles for candidates from diverse backgrounds, **without requiring the typical public service capabilities or level of experience**. The trial was very successful, with four roles filled. Hiring managers expressed a willingness to share relevant information and learnings across DCJ for other teams who may be interested in adopting these initiatives to support improving diversity in recruitment.

Perceptions and experiences of hiring managers and HR advisors (cont.)

Hiring managers use a range of adjustments to the standard recruitment process to meet candidates' needs

Many hiring managers reported **holding phone calls with potential candidates** who are interested in applying to briefly get to know them and understand any relevant factors that should be taken into consideration e.g. a lengthy period of overseas experience and recent return to the Australian job market. Many also **share questions before interview** to enable candidates to reflect on and prepare answers beforehand and, where feasible, **explore alternative assessment and interview methods**, e.g. an hour-long practical assessment where the candidate sits in the actual role (rather than, say, a written task); a Yarning Circle approach which involves a more informal style of interview that feels more like a conversation. The hiring managers we spoke to reported trying to develop a culture of “candidate care” within their teams and **adopting a flexible approach** to support candidates with whatever their specific needs may be, e.g. contextualising questions or asking them in a different way to elicit the same information.

Hiring managers are generally unaware of the exemption process under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* and many feel it could be beneficial for CALD applicants

Most of the hiring managers we spoke to were **not aware that employers could apply for an exemption or certification** to allow favouring certain groups of people to improve access to jobs, programs, services or facilities. Many hiring managers reiterated their concerns about a **lack of cultural and/or linguistic diversity at the senior leadership and executive level** and were curious whether such exemptions could be granted to prioritise CALD applicants at these levels.

Perceptions and experiences of hiring managers and HR advisors (cont.)

Some expressed concerns about such **exemptions being perceived as a “tick box” exercise** to improve diversity and were **eager to ensure that any such implementation would be supported** by additional structural and process-level changes to create a culture that genuinely supported and encouraged cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity within DCJ. Many participants were interested to find out more about how the exemption process could be applied to roles within their area.

Hiring managers feel they would benefit from structured training

All hiring managers we interviewed reflected that they learned the process of recruiting in DCJ experientially - they **did not receive formal training or direction**. Participants recounted relying on asking questions of Talent Acquisition to learn how to use the systems and understand what was required of them throughout each stage of the recruitment process. Several participants felt they had to **“know the right questions to ask and the right way to ask them” of Talent Acquisition** in order to get the information they needed. They found **unfamiliar jargon and acronyms used in communication from Talent Acquisition confusing**.

In response, some hiring managers instead **consulted with other roles within Human Resources** to give them the “plain English” information and tips they were looking for. Overall, hiring managers and HR advisors felt **all new hiring managers would benefit from receiving structured training** in the systems, processes and procedures required to successfully recruit for a role, particularly in terms of strategies for inclusive recruitment.

Perceptions and experiences of hiring managers and HR advisors (cont.)

“Something that we learned from the Diversity and Inclusion team is that we can try different styles of recruitment. We trialled the Yarning Model instead of having the stock standard questions to assess the five capabilities, we did it through more relaxed, much like the back and forth we're having here... You know, how do you feel about these sorts of situations or, you know, give us some more information about you. We ended up getting a much more fully formed holistic picture of each candidate and found that the people that were successful in that recruitment were not necessarily the people that would have been successful through the standardised panel interview process.”

“A few years ago we did mandatory Aboriginal cultural awareness training across DCJ. Do you think that we'd ever have a time where we do the same, but for culturally and linguistically diverse capability training, but not just like one of those click through on the Aboriginal culture - where we all actually met in person and talked about these issues with a trainer who was a leader in Aboriginal education. That's what it would hopefully look like. If we did that sort of training, with an in-person component where people are actually brought together physically with community.”

“We ran workshops to train hiring managers... We were time pressed, like I would like to involve other cultural awareness elements to it, but just as a bare minimum we did talk about reasonable adjustments, we did talk about prompting, that it is OK to prompt candidates. We did talk about making them feel welcome and comfortable, interviewing people from diverse backgrounds... I think it just prepares the hiring manager and that calms the candidate because they've been thought of.”

Perceptions and experiences of hiring managers and HR advisors (cont.)

“Even when we're doing the stock standard panel interview (which I think is meant to make sure that there's equality and that you ask you the same questions fairly)... [Reflecting on my own past experience as a candidate] I still get weird questions like about my name, or why my English is so good...And if I'm going to get those questions anyway, then clearly the panel interview process isn't working to create that fairness anyway.”

“It ends up touching not just recruitment, but it touches the kind of cultural environment that you're creating in the workplace. If you constantly require people to volunteer their adjustments, you're just not going to create safety.”

“There is that personality assessment, I don't pay a lot of attention to that because it is a timed thing. If you're reading something in English, but English is not your first language and it's timed and you're stressed, I feel like your brain's not working at probably the optimum. I was interviewing somebody that I'd worked with already for, I think, six months and they got some strange scores on that personality assessment. I thought to myself, I think it's because they've had to sit there, think about the question. They've run out of time, panicked and selected something they may not have selected if it wasn't timed.”

Interviews with best practice employers

We interviewed leaders from nine organisations of varying sizes (from boutique not-for-profit to large multinational) from the private sector, not-for-profit and local government to understand their experiences of implementing inclusive recruitment strategic initiatives.

The following employers agreed to be identified in the report:

- City of Sydney
- IKEA
- John Holland
- Thoughtworks
- VioletCo Legal & Consulting

Those who asked to remain anonymous represented employers from across the legal, technology, and local government sectors.

Interview themes

In interviews, we asked participants about their **perceptions and experiences** of implementing inclusive recruitment practices. We were interested to learn more about their **organisations' journeys to hiring for a more diverse workforce** and their views on **barriers and challenges for employers** more broadly in doing so. We invited participants to provide a **snapshot of cultural and linguistic diversity** across their organisation at present; share the **outcome/s and impact** of inclusive recruitment initiatives they had implemented and to detail **relevant learnings** for other employers.

We also did a 'deep dive' into the various **tasks and processes in their 'standard' recruitment process**, to identify points at which they adapted standard practice (or where there were further opportunities to do so) to support applicants from CALD backgrounds. Where applicable, we were also interested to learn about their **experiences of applying for an exemption/s** under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* and their **views on this process as an option for increasing recruitment** of people from CALD backgrounds (or where organisations were not aware of the process, if they had any views on the potential benefits of the process as we described it to them).

Interviews with best practice employers (cont.)

Key insights

Targeted initiatives deliver maximum impact on improving workforce diversity. Employer experiences of delivering specific initiatives targeting particular diverse candidate groups had more measurable and tangible outcomes and impact than 'accommodations' within standard recruitment models.

Some of the key strategies employed in these initiatives included:

- Adapted recruitment processes to meet the needs of diverse candidate group/s.
- Involvement of people from the target group in candidate assessment and selection.
- Providing holistic and ongoing support to candidates both pre-employment and once candidate has commenced in the workplace, particularly around navigating workplace culture and communication, professional development and networking.
- Structured training for hiring managers and team members who would be involved in recruiting and supporting diverse candidates once in the workplace.

Collecting workforce data on employee cultural, racial, ethnic and religious background is central to ensuring employers can appropriately support their CALD workforce from recruitment and throughout their employment with the organisation. There were a small minority of employers we interviewed who did not collect routine workforce data of this nature and they explained it created significant challenges for quantifying, understanding and forecasting the needs of employees from CALD backgrounds. Understandably, these challenges were magnified for larger organisations.

Interviews with best practice employers (cont.)

Common challenges

- 1. Developing and maintaining a pipeline** of diverse potential employees. Many employers described the challenges associated with creating a steady pipeline of applicants from groups that were underrepresented within their organisations. To address this, employers described using multiple channels across a number of different environments:
 - Recruiting directly through community-based organisations delivering services to their target group/s;
 - Using existing community forums, for example a stall at a community event, or recruitment fair, or at a broader cross section of universities; and
 - Creating pathways into ongoing employment or development programs as an incentive, for example fast-tracking appropriately qualified and experienced interns into their graduate program.
- 2. Increasing diversity throughout all role types and organisational levels.** Every employer we spoke to reported challenges in increasing the representation of CALD people within certain role types and throughout all organisational levels. This was particularly true of highly specialised roles and senior leadership/executive levels. The specific initiatives outlined within interviews exclusively targeted entry- or graduate-level roles within the organisation, and so the possibility of initiatives targeting senior leadership/executive-level workforce diversity warrant further exploration.

Interviews with best practice employers (cont.)

- 3. Balancing organisational/business need with supporting development** of applicants from diverse backgrounds. It was a universal challenge for employers to juggle the need to recruit into a vacant role and weigh up the benefits of recruiting someone with the exact skills, expertise and qualifications demanded by it, with the potential benefits of recruiting a candidate whose skill-mix may not align perfectly but who showed significant potential for development. Employers acknowledged that the barriers faced by CALD candidates required them to think laterally in order to increase diversity within their workforce. They described ongoing challenges in having these discussions with hiring managers, who were often focused on the time- and resource-pressures of having to fill a vacant role.

Overall, **employers were strongly supportive** of implementing inclusive recruitment strategies to increase the cultural, racial and linguistic diversity of their workforce. Participants gave numerous examples of the benefits of having diverse teams, both in terms of the range of perspectives and experiences feeding into the work itself (which they believed strongly improved the quality of their offering) and in terms of the workplace values and culture that their diverse workforce were integral to developing.



Alignment between job seekers and employers

- Workplace diversity, and recognition of the value of CALD employees are core values held by all participants
- Recruitment process is overly prescriptive and would benefit from greater flexibility
- Panel interviews create particular barriers for CALD applicants
- All participants clearly recognise the impact of unconscious bias

Alignment between job seekers and employers

1. Workplace diversity, and recognition of the value of CALD employees are core values held by all participants

All participant groups want CALD colleagues' unique contributions encouraged, recognised and valued. They want to work for an employer who shares these values. Both hiring managers/HR advisors and previous applicants reflected on the lack of diversity at the senior leadership and Executive level within DCJ. These participants expressed a desire for greater representation of people from CALD backgrounds.

2. Recruitment process is overly prescriptive and would benefit from greater flexibility

Job seekers want to be able to demonstrate their strengths, not just respond to criteria or standardised questions. They want the process to move quickly, and to be more consistent across departments. Hiring managers similarly felt that the recruitment process felt too structured and constrained to enable candidates to best showcase their skills and experience, and conveyed a sense that other hiring managers did not know what adjustments they could make to the process while still adhering to their legislative obligations.

3. Panel interviews create particular barriers for CALD applicants

All participant groups felt there were barriers for CALD applicants in panel interviews, both in the environment itself feeling pressured, impersonal and often culturally homogenous (unless effort had been invested to have diverse membership on the interview panel) and the wording of the interview questions asking interviewees to display attributes they perceived as desirable to Australian recruiters – such as individual achievement, confidence and self-assurance (attributes that were counter to what was valued in their culture).

4. All participants clearly recognise the impact of unconscious bias

This was particularly true when participants believed their names had prevented applications from progressing to an interview, or when they felt interviews and assessment criteria favoured 'Western' cultural norms. Many hiring managers expressed a desire for the public service to implement 'blind' recruitment, where all identifying information is removed from candidates' resumes and applications so they can be assessed on their skills and experience alone (although, as our previous literature review indicates, this is not sufficient in isolation to address all barriers experienced by CALD applicants).

Strategic recommendations

- Facilitate ongoing collaboration and coordination of efforts across government and other sectors
- Prioritise affirmative recruitment measures and targeted programs and initiatives
- Develop additional supports for hiring managers to streamline their access to inclusive recruitment information and strategies
- Consider options for increasing pathways/pipeline into the public service and elevating employer brand
- Increase information available to job seekers around the public service recruitment process
- Consider streamlining recruitment to provide timely and tailored feedback on applications
- Deepen understanding and engagement around exemption process under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977*

Strategic recommendations for public service employers

These broad recommendations highlight a range of opportunities arising from the data for leadership within DCJ and the public service more broadly to consider improvements to recruitment processes and the supports available to CALD applicants. They may be relevant to multiple teams and portfolios or require newly established working groups for further consideration or implementation. These recommendations are based on specific feedback from the research from CALD jobseekers and hiring managers and HR advisors within DCJ. They have not been formally accepted or approved by DCJ for implementation.

1. Facilitate ongoing collaboration and coordination of efforts across government and other sectors

- Leverage the existing work, skills and expertise of ADNSW; the DCJ Diversity and Inclusion team; Anti-Racism Unit; and the Multicultural Network, among others within and external to DCJ, to champion and advance inclusive recruitment initiatives relating to people from CALD backgrounds.
- Consult broadly with internal teams to identify all relevant initiatives and engage with the Public Service Commission to explore developing a public service-wide structure (a network, or Community of Practice, for example) to enable interested employees, hiring managers and leaders to share information and learnings about implementing inclusive recruitment practices within their agencies.
- Consult with a broader range of employers outside of the public service to share knowledge and learnings and identify opportunities for implementation within the public service. The Inclusive Employers we spoke to were generous with their time and expertise and were keen for ongoing engagement with public service employers.

Strategic recommendations for public service employers (cont.)

2. Prioritise affirmative recruitment measures and targeted programs and initiatives. These should avoid 'deficit' framings and involve internal and external engagement on their purpose – to address structural barriers

- Hiring manager and inclusive employer experiences validate the research literature - structured recruitment programs and initiatives can be highly effective to increase CALD representation. But CALD candidates and employees want the focus and language of these initiatives to centre on their strengths, their value and on addressing structural barriers to their employment and their progression, rather than on their need for 'development'.
- Similarly, affirmative recruitment measures – like exemptions and targeted and identified roles – are also likely to be more effective than standard recruitment processes. But CALD candidates can be uncertain or concerned about the purpose of these measures and the potential impact on their progression within an organisation. Both internal and external engagement is needed so candidates, hiring managers and staff understand the purpose of affirmative measures – to address structural barriers. Offering affirmative measures for range of roles at all levels – including senior roles – is important to sustain inclusion across the organisation.

Strategic recommendations for public service employers (cont.)

3. Develop additional supports for hiring managers to streamline their access to inclusive recruitment information and empower them to make adjustments for CALD candidates

- Explore developing a structured training program for new hiring managers that includes a cultural sensitivity/competency component and practical strategies for supporting applicants from CALD backgrounds, such as ensuring that assessment tasks are designed to reflect the real-world working conditions of the role, providing questions to interviewees ahead of time, developing interview questions that translate the Capability Framework in a meaningful way for interviewees, and running interviews in a Yarning Circle-format.
- Develop and maintain an internal register of hiring managers who have completed training and (if they choose to self-report) lived experiences that may benefit interview panel convenors, e.g. disability, CALD background, gender etc.
- Consider developing a repository of resources for hiring managers to easily access information about the kinds of adjustments that are available to support applicants from CALD backgrounds. For example: tipsheets for navigating practical ways to support CALD applicants during the recruitment process; culturally appropriate interview questions that both support interviewee comfort in a time-pressured environment and ensure hiring managers can solicit information needed to adequately assess candidate suitability.
- Work with Talent Acquisition to optimise information flows to hiring managers to ensure all relevant candidate information is provided at the earliest stage of recruitment (e.g. if candidates contact Talent Acquisition to explore potential adjustments or convey specific needs); and ensuring talent pool lists are targeted to hiring managers' specified needs.
- Review the potential of offering universal adjustments for interviews – for example, receiving interview questions ahead of time, having extra time to answer questions, and unstructured components of interview schedules to provide opportunities for candidates to speak to cultural competencies, community experience or other strengths outside core criteria.

Strategic recommendations for public service employers (cont.)

4. Consider options for increasing pathways/pipeline into the public service and elevating employer brand

- Innovate to better market DCJ as an employer of choice for CALD applicants.
- Include photos / videos of actual staff in job ads, and photos of CALD employees in leadership positions.
- Consider the role of candidate care in increasing positive employer reputation in target communities – positive candidate experiences (whether successful or unsuccessful) are a pipeline to referrals and build positive organisational reputation in target communities.
- Consider strategic approach to outreach with communities and organisations e.g. undertaking roadshows for caseworker roles to provide information on what these roles entail.
- Consider expanding or formalising existing applicable models to develop pathways into the public service. Our research outlined examples of structured, CALD-targeted contract positions or paid internships as a pathway to permanent roles, but ongoing support to remove structural barriers to progression and retention is critical.
- Increase engagement and capacity building with CALD job seeker support services in the community to ensure they can effectively support applicants to apply with the public service.

Strategic recommendations for public service employers (cont.)

5. Increase information available to job seekers around the public service recruitment process

- Provide clarification to job seekers on the Capability Framework.
- Consider the value of making Public Service Commission resources on the Capability Framework more visible to applicants.
- Ensure all job advertisements contain sufficient information on role and work portfolio, including reviewing position descriptions to include information on what a typical day looks like, what kinds of work/projects the role has been responsible for, broad areas of work and how the role works within the team or department.

6. Consider streamlining recruitment to provide timely and tailored feedback on applications

- Consider opportunities to streamline communication of shortlisting processes to ensure all applicants are notified of unsuccessful applications within one week of shortlisting occurring.
- Review supports available to hiring managers to ensure they have sufficient time and training to provide timely and tailored feedback to applicants who are unsuccessful at interview.

7. Deepen understanding and engagement around exemption process under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977*

- ADNSW to consider developing and implementing a public education and communication campaign to provide a brief overview of the aims and objectives of the exemption process and further information about application requirements.



Appendix: Inclusive employer case studies

- IKEA
- John Holland
- City of Sydney
- Violet Co Legal & Consulting

Case study: IKEA

- IKEA is a values led purpose driven organisation with a desire to have a positive impact on society and reflect the diversity of the communities in which it operates.
- For the past three years, IKEA Australia has been working with a community-based partner organisation on a paid internship program supporting refugees and asylum seekers. IKEA partners with Community Corporate, a small social enterprise, who helps source, screen and prepare candidates interested in the program.
- To date, there have been 198 graduates from the program.
- The program initially provided two months' paid work experience in entry level roles at IKEA to enable interns to demonstrate their capabilities and gain hands-on training and experience in the workplace.
- After the initial pilot, IKEA invested in making the program a permanent part of its recruitment strategy, offering long-term, ongoing employment opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers.
- IKEA and Community Corporate co-deliver cultural confidence training for hiring managers and teams supporting new coworkers.
- IKEA now focuses on changing societal narratives around refugees and asylum seekers and forming strategic partnerships to increase impact.

“By evolving our investment from temporary contracts to stable, ongoing career opportunities, we can amplify this human impact while also supporting the growth of our business” **Harriet Pope, Refugee Workforce Inclusion Leader**



Case study: John Holland

- John Holland is proud to be Australia's leading building, infrastructure and end-to-end rail and transport company and are currently delivering many of Australia's largest infrastructure projects. They also operate buses, trains and trams.
- The Social Inclusion Team's work involves supporting diverse groups facing barriers to employment to gain access to construction roles – as well as building partnerships with Aboriginal-owned businesses and social enterprises. The Social Inclusion Team's community engagement expertise has been crucial to forming longstanding partnerships with community-based organisations to develop a pipeline of diverse talent.
- Partnerships with organisations like CareerSeekers, a pre-employment training and internship program for refugees and asylum seekers, have been very successful. Since 2020, John Holland has hosted 125 refugees and asylum seekers in 12-week professional internships, approximately 85% of whom have received on-going employment.
- CareerSeekers provides support for both interns and John Holland team members and managers to ensure their experience moving into the work environment is seamless. CareerSeekers also invest considerable time with participants to develop their skills in workplace communication and familiarity with the workplace culture to set them up for success when they commence work with John Holland.
- The partnership with CareerSeekers started with a single intern in 2018, who ended up staying with the business. The project team that employed the intern went on to deliver the next project and the experience with the first CareerSeekers intern was so successful that the project invested in creating four internships.
- To build on that success, John Holland signed a national partnership with CareerSeekers in 2020. Completion of the CareerSeekers program can offer a streamlined pathway into the John Holland Graduate Program for appropriately qualified candidates.
- This provides a structured two-year program of learning, training and mentorship for graduates across a range of disciplines, including: engineering, architecture, quantity surveying, computer science/data science or statistics/IT, law, and business/commerce/finance, among others.

Case study: John Holland (cont.)

- The Social Inclusion Team has found storytelling about the lived experience of employees from CALD backgrounds to be a powerful way to create connections within the business. The team regularly develops case studies about the lived experiences of employees from their inclusive recruitment initiatives to share internally.
- They also proactively seek out opportunities to give CALD employees, particularly those from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds, a platform within the organisation, by providing access to meetings and networking opportunities with leaders to support professional development.

“We work with a lot of subcontractors and smaller construction companies...by their exposure to our systems and our partnerships, we feel like we are able to influence the rest of the industry as well and create that diversity at other organisations as well.”

Greg Rafferty, Manager, Social Inclusion



Case study: City of Sydney

- The City of Sydney (the City) has had a progressive approach to diversity and inclusion for some time. The journey started with addressing gender equality and pay equity about 10 years ago. It then expanded to supporting people from marginalised groups like Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people of diverse sexualities and genders, and people from CALD backgrounds.
- The City has a range of volunteer employee networks that are self-governing, with chairs and co-chairs, including an Executive sponsor. The networks help decide strategies and action plans. Established employee networks include the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employee network, City Women's network, DiverseCity (the City's culturally diverse employee network), City Pride, the Young Professionals Network, and the new Disability Employee Network.
- The City is adopting Diversity Council Australia's term "culturally and racially marginalised" (CARM) to include people who are not White and recognising the impact of race and racism in their lives. With the shift in terminology, the City is working on how to operationalise this internally and, in particular, how to reflect it within workforce data. Employees are invited to self-nominate as CARM in their internal HR portal and are informed that "this information is helping us decide and design solutions that better improve our awareness, understanding and success in supporting people".
- The City routinely collects feedback on recruitment processes and tasks from internal CARM candidates after the process is complete. Developing a culture of psychological safety, where employees feel comfortable to share their experiences, concerns, questions and ideas, is key to improving the experience for employees throughout all levels.
- Twenty-four per cent of the City's employees self-disclosed that they are culturally diverse. Thirty-four per cent of the City's employees were born overseas, representing 102 different cultural backgrounds and 63 languages spoken other than English. Paid internships have been provided to people from CARM backgrounds, with a focus on refugee and humanitarian support.



Case Study: Violet Co Legal & Consulting

- Violet Co Legal and Consulting is a boutique practice focused on legal support and consultation projects with a mission to have a positive impact for women, gender diverse people, and First Nations people, founded five years ago. Violet Co provide legal support around employment law, mediation and sexual assault.
- Karen Iles, the Director and Principal Solicitor, is the hiring manager and oversees recruitment at Violet Co. Avoiding unconscious bias when recruiting in a small and growing organisation can be challenging and so, in a recent recruitment, Karen invited a Violet Co partner and a junior staff member to run the process, through reviewing application, shortlisting and running preliminary interviews, while Karen led the final meet and greet with the preferred candidates.
- Karen believes the wording of job advertisements can create barriers, especially for women and linguistically diverse applicants. Requirements like "excellent written and verbal communication skills" may deter capable applicants. Criteria that are pitched at or below the right level for the role, as diverse candidates often 'undersell' their own capabilities. The approach at Violet Co focuses on advertising relationships, flexibility, work-life balance, and signalling that the workplace is a safe, understanding workplace.
- Karen has successfully recruited First Nations people, victim-survivors of violence, mature age women, and LGBTQ+ people. She attributes this to the nature of Violet Co's work attracting marginalised people, and finding ways to signal the workplace is a safe space. A diversity of perspectives inherently strengthens outputs.
- Karen outlined her experience in completing the exemption process under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* on behalf of clients wishing to undertake targeted recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. She thinks requiring exemptions prompts important conversations and planning, particularly around ensuring successful candidates in targeted roles are adequately supported once in the workplace and do not face backlash or discrimination from entering the organisation through an affirmative process.

Case Study: Violet Co Legal & Consulting (cont.)

- Karen suggested harmonising exemption criteria across states and territories to benefit national organisations and proposed overhauling current frameworks to be strength-based and inclusive.

“I try to lead with relationships and who you'll be working with and what they're like, and who you'll be interfacing with. What relationships are your key accountabilities - putting people first rather than the job.” **Karen Iles, Director and Principal Solicitor**



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