

**Australian Parliament  
Joint Standing Committee on Migration  
Submission No. 101**

**Submission to the Joint Standing Committee On Migration  
Inquiry into Multiculturalism in Australia**

**A Systemic Approach to Cultural Competence Development**

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## **1. Submission**

*"People don't get along because they fear each other. They fear each other because they do not know each other. They do not know each other because they have not properly communicated with each other."* Martin Luther King

Effective cross-cultural communication and mutual cultural understanding are essential elements in the development and maintenance of social inclusion and cohesion in Australia's multicultural society. But while the effectiveness and value of cross-cultural training itself has been proven in at least two major national studies\*, and corroborated by international studies, the research identifies significant limitations to the availability of this training to people in government and non-government agencies whose services support immigrant settlement, social inclusion, productivity and workforce participation.

This research and subsequent cross-cultural training program evaluations unequivocally demonstrate the effectiveness of cross-cultural communication training in enabling individuals and organisations to develop their cultural competence, defined simply as the knowledge, awareness, skills and practices necessary to function effectively in situations characterised by cultural diversity. Cross-cultural training (CCT) is highly rated by participants, nine in ten of whom believe CCT should be mandatory in their organisation for all employees in customer or client contact. Eight out of ten believe it should be mandatory

for every staff member, particularly managers. Similar numbers report improvements in customer and workplace relationships. More than six in ten would like further CCT. In view of the fact that the average duration of CCT programs is six hours, these are noteworthy results.

In parallel developments, Commonwealth and state agencies have recently commissioned the production of training resources aimed at enabling agencies and businesses to develop and conduct their own CCT programs. However, most recipients of these resources have identified a need for assistance in developing or sourcing the expertise required to deliver the programs.

The research and subsequent consultations have identified several critical issues for all organisations wishing to develop their professional and individual cultural competence. A starting point is to ensure that the terminology of cultural competence and its strategic implications are understood at the highest levels of Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. Currently, it does not appear that many elected members or senior executives have this understanding. Without leadership cognisance of this aspect of social capital, it is doubtful that any development strategies will be sustainable.

The conclusions of the research are that there are areas for improvement in policy and planning, industry engagement, curriculum and program development, capacity- and capability-building and professional development.

At the systemic and organisational levels, cultural competence needs to be positioned within the broader contexts of social capital and social cohesion and as a core leadership and management competency as a contributor to organisational excellence.

At the professional and individual employee levels, cultural competence needs to be positioned as an essential component of assessing and accommodating the influences of workforce and client/customer cultural diversity.

The acceptance and adoption of cultural competence strategies needs to be achieved, not by warning of the negative consequences of conscious or unconscious cultural incompetence, but by establishing a compelling operational or 'business case' based on the proven benefits. These benefits include improved quality of service to a culturally diverse community, enhanced achievement of service objectives, improved workplace relationships, increased attraction and retention of staff and enhanced community harmony and social cohesion.

Adopting strategic, whole-of-system, whole-of-government approaches to cultural competence development and cross-cultural training will deliver numerous benefits including more effective curriculum, resource and professional development, increased quality of training provision, reduced duplication of effort by agencies and reduced training and development costs.

Demand for CCT is increasing across public and community sector organisations but there is currently insufficient capacity to deliver CCT on the scale required. The average age of CCT professionals in 2006 was 48 years. A significant percentage of experienced facilitators is approaching retirement. Many professionals in related fields are interested in becoming CCT facilitators but require training and support to build their capability to provide services in this complex training area.

While all of these points are relevant to private sector organisations, particularly those with corporate social responsibility strategies, they are most pertinent to government, community and not-for-profit organisations.

In conclusion, consideration for cultural competence development, which includes cross-cultural training, must be factored into every item of this inquiry's terms of reference.

\* *The Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Training in the Australian Context*, Robert Bean et al, Department of Immigration and Citizenship for the Joint Commonwealth State and Territory Research Advisory Committee, Australian Government, 2006

\* *Cross-Cultural Training and Workplace Performance*, Robert Bean, National Centre for Vocational Education Research for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Australian Government, 2008

## **Recommendations**

In order to support the effective, efficient and sustainable development of the levels of cultural competence needed by systems and agencies to maximise the positive effects of migration, several detailed recommendations were put forward by respondents to the two national research studies mentioned above. These detailed recommendations appear in Appendices 1 and 2, which also provide report excerpts that are pertinent to this submission. Some of these recommendations have been acted on, including moves toward state government cultural competence policy and the development of freely available training resources.

The following general recommendations summarise and synthesize the detailed recommendations listed in the research reports.

It is recommended that governments, community and not-for-profit agencies;

1. Establish clear policy and operational cases for developing organisational and professional cultural competence.
2. Conduct state and territory reviews of current cultural competence development practice and activity.
3. Conduct systemic and organisational training and development needs analyses.
4. Develop whole-of-government cultural competence policies, strategies, benchmarks and practical operational guidelines.
5. Mandate cross-cultural training for all managers, staff and volunteers responsible for client and customer services and community relations.
6. Promote the availability and benefits of cross-cultural training to all staff and stakeholder organisations.

7. Develop and provide professional development programs and training resources for existing and new cross-cultural training facilitators.
8. Make cross-cultural training programs available and accessible to communities, non-government organisations and small to medium enterprises free of charge or on a cost-recovery basis.
9. Provide incentives, including tax incentives, for small to medium enterprises to conduct or attend public cross-cultural training programs.

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### **3. Appendices**

Sections of the following excerpts have been underlined where they are deemed particularly pertinent to the inquiry's terms of reference.

Appendix 1: Excerpts from the report *The Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Training in the Australian Context* (Australian Government, 2006)

Appendix 2: Excerpts from the report *Cross-Cultural Training and Workplace Performance* (Australian Government, 2008)

## **Appendix 1: Excerpts from the report The Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Training in the Australian Context (Australian Government, 2006)**

### **The Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Training in the Australian Context**

This report was prepared for the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs on behalf of the Joint Commonwealth, State and Territory Research Advisory Committee

Project Manager and Principal Researcher

Robert Bean, Managing Director, Cultural Diversity Services Pty Ltd

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### **Executive Summary** (Excerpts)

A 15-month national research study of the effectiveness of cross-cultural training (CCT) in the Australian public and community sectors has produced statistically significant evidence that CCT is of direct benefit to employees, their organisations and their clients. The study, which involved a review of the literature, consultations with 195 stakeholders and five surveys involving 718 managers, trainers and participants, has also identified policy, planning and performance issues regarding the future provision of CCT.

### **Key Findings**

- Cross-Cultural Training (CCT) is an important element in the development of individual and organisational cultural competence, which underpins the social cohesion and social capital of Australian society.
- A survey of public sector current practice over the period 2000-2005 produced consistent qualitative evidence that CCT programs were effective in achieving their objectives, although the level of training activity was low compared to estimated levels of demand and recommendations for increased training.
- The majority of public sector and community organisations surveyed expected increased or greatly increased demand for CCT over the next five years, with improving customer service the main driver for this demand.
- Comparisons of pre-training, immediate post training and longitudinal training evaluation surveys involving 515 public sector employees showed statistically significant improvements in their awareness of cultural influences on customer and workplace interactions, knowledge and understanding of other cultures and understanding of organisational cultural diversity policies and issues.
- Due to the brevity of the 39 CCT programs evaluated (averaging six hours) and the general absence of organisational measurements of cultural competence, the training did not result in gains in other areas such as understanding the deeper effects of one's own culture on oneself and in confidence to transfer cross cultural skills to the workplace and to colleagues.
- Over 60% of participants would like more cross-cultural training, indicating their acknowledgement that the development of cultural competence is a complex and on-going learning process.

- CCT training was rated highly by the great majority of participants, 88% recommending that it be compulsory for all staff in customer contact positions.
- The demonstrated fact that even short training programs result in benefits and stimulate interest in further learning indicates that investments in more robust and job-focused CCT will be likely to deliver greater measurable returns for organisations.
- Although the majority of managers surveyed recognised the importance of cultural competence to service quality and workforce relations, few organisations conducted CCT programs on a regular basis or included cultural competence in performance appraisals.
- The future development of cultural competence at all levels of organisations and systems will require its inclusion in formal competency standards and organisational development strategies.
- Cross-cultural trainers identified needs for professional development, for further research and for the development of Australian training resources.

## Conclusions

The effectiveness of cross-cultural training in contributing to the cultural competence of the Australian public sector context depends on a number of related elements.

At the systemic and organisational levels, cultural competence must be closely linked to policy requirements and organisational values and service delivery objectives and expressed in high levels of political, leadership and managerial support for CCT.

At the professional level, cultural competence must be integrated into the standards and competency and performance frameworks of professions and occupations.

At the individual level, CCT is most effective when it addresses the concerns and motivations of participants and is provided within an organisational context that provides opportunities and incentives for applying acquired cross-cultural knowledge and skills to the workplace.

To effectively facilitate the development of cultural competence, cross-cultural trainers need support in the areas of professional and resource development.

Cross-cultural training is an effective strategy in the achievement of organisational performance targets and multicultural policy objectives. Addressing the identified limitations of current practice in CCT will increase its contribution to the development and enhancement of organisational and individual cultural competence.

## Recommendations

### **Recommendation 1: Develop Cultural Competence Management Frameworks, Guidelines and Resources**

Commonwealth, state and local governments should develop and promote planning frameworks, implementation guidelines and supporting management training resources. This will enable systems and organisations to incorporate cross-cultural training into organisational development, compliance and market relations strategies, specifying relevant aspects of professional and organisational cultural competency to be included in reporting requirements as an integral part of performance appraisal of agency heads and senior executives.

**Recommendation 2: Develop a Cultural Competence Assessment Framework**

Commonwealth, state and local governments and community service organisations should develop frameworks identifying the criteria for assessing the cultural competence requirements of job specifications at all levels for use in recruitment, professional development, performance appraisal and career development.

**Recommendation 3: Promote Training Programs and Resources for Managing Cultural Diversity and Cross-Cultural Communication**

Commonwealth, state and local governments, education institutions and community service organisations should more widely promote their existing cultural competence training programs and resources to encourage and assist other public and community sector organisations to assess and further develop their cultural competence.

**Recommendation 4: Provide Cross-Cultural Training Advice and Support**

All levels of government, and multicultural agencies in particular, should establish and promote points of contact to provide information and advice on cross-cultural training to all interested organisations, to promote best practice and to encourage and support the development of cultural competence in the workforce.

**Recommendation 5: Develop Registers of Cross-Cultural Training Providers**

The appropriate agencies at all levels of government should develop nationally-consistent registers or panels of qualified cross-cultural training providers which are accessible to all levels of government and the private sector and which include links to registers in other jurisdictions. The design of the registers should be based on existing training and consulting procurement processes and be informed by work being done in South Australia and Queensland regarding providers of cross-cultural training.

**Recommendation 6: Establish a National Cross-Cultural Trainers Professional Association**

Australian cross-cultural trainers should establish a national association of practitioners in cross-cultural training, consulting, research and development, either as a separate entity or within or in affiliation with existing national and/or international professional bodies.

**Recommendation 7: Support the Professional Development of Cross-Cultural Trainers**

Relevant commonwealth and state education authorities should work with the cross-cultural training field to investigate the possibility of establishing professional development pathways and programs for cross-cultural trainers, including formal tertiary qualifications and continuing professional education, to meet the needs of existing trainers and to attract and develop new trainers to the field.

**Recommendation 8: Conduct Further Cultural Competence Research**

All jurisdictions should identify and commission further research into relevant aspects of cultural competence development including:

- o the overall scope and effectiveness of CCT within the jurisdiction

- the relative effectiveness of different CCT training types, approaches and configurations in contributing to improved cultural competence in job performance in specific sectors industries and professions
- the degree to which occupational or industry systems and practices impede or foster the development and application of cultural competence in the workplace, and
- the extent to which cultural competence learning is integrated into learning pathways in the schools, VET and higher education sectors and applicable to employment and career development.

## **Appendix 2: Excerpts from the report Cross-Cultural Training and Workplace Performance (Australian Government, 2008)**

### *Cross-cultural training and workplace performance*

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Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

#### **Excerpts from the Report**

- In multicultural societies in particular, social capital is underpinned by cultural competence, broadly defined as the ability to work effectively in situations characterised by cultural diversity. A review of the Australian and international literature for this study highlighted a broad recognition of the importance of cross-cultural training in the development of cultural competence and social capital.
- A recent national study of cross-cultural training in the Australian public sector completed by the author found the training to be effective in improving workplace performance and in contributing to multicultural policy objectives (Standing Committee on Immigration and Multicultural Affairs 2006). In that study, as in this, the majority of employers surveyed predicted increased demand for cultural competence and cross-cultural training over the next five years in response to the expanding cultural diversity of employees and customers. Increasing globalisation of business practices was also predicted to affect demand for cultural competence and cross-cultural training.
- This study by Robert Bean investigated the contribution to workplace performance of cross-cultural training, a term used to describe training that develops a person's ability to interact effectively with individuals from different cultures and in different cultural settings. The study is based on a survey of 134 vocational education and training (VET) graduates. The practices and views of 38 training providers and 31 employers on the current and future provision of cross-cultural training are also described.
- The report highlights the positive experiences of VET graduates with cross-cultural training, as well as employers' support for it. It lists the challenges for cross-cultural training as perceived by trainers, a specific challenge being to ensure that there is sufficient and appropriate cross-cultural training embedded in training packages, particularly those covering sales and service industries, industries with high customer contact.



- The findings of this study provide further evidence of the importance of cultural competence for individual and organisational effectiveness and for the creation and maintenance of social capital in Australia's multicultural society. The findings also demonstrate the effectiveness of cross-cultural training and its important role in developing cultural competence. The Australian VET sector, in consultation with industry, has a significant role to play in the further development and sustainability of the nation's social capital.

## Recommendations

The findings of this study show that the provision of cross-cultural training in the VET system is diverse, covers a wide range of qualifications and industries, and is well regarded by students and appreciated by employers. The research also indicates a potentially large increase in demand from a range of industries for VET graduates who are culturally competent, with implications for capacity and capability in the provision of cross-cultural training. VET teachers of cross-cultural training have also expressed the need for professional development and the capacity to develop resources and address important social issues.

The findings of this study point to areas for improvement in policy and planning, industry engagement, curriculum and program development, capacity- and capability-building and professional development.

The following broad recommendations are made with acknowledgement that VET organisations and systems and their client industries are at various stages in the delivery of cross-cultural training and in the development of cultural competence and that the policies and strategies to guide and legitimise the implementation of the recommendations are already in place.

### **VET policy, planning and program quality assurance**

- ✧ Organisations responsible for VET policy development and implementation should review the extent of cross-cultural training provision through the VET sector, in terms of its contribution to meeting the relevant objectives of the current national strategy for VET.
- ✧ Individual VET organisations should formally review their current practices for providing cross-cultural training, in terms of the student and industry needs identified in this study.
- ✧ Individual VET organisations should ensure that their equity and diversity policies and strategies include assessments of the levels of cultural competence required by managers and staff who are required to comply with and implement these policies and strategies.
- ✧ Where the need has been identified, VET managers and staff should receive professional development in cultural competence, including cross-cultural training relevant to their roles and responsibilities.
- ✧ VET organisations should establish benchmarks for the quality of their cross-cultural training programs based on the criteria used in this study.
- ✧ Longitudinal evaluations of the contribution of cross-cultural training to VET graduates' workplace performance should be encouraged.

### **Industry engagement in cross-cultural training program planning**

- ✧ VET organisations should consult with their client industries and enterprises to assess their requirements for the cultural competence of VET graduates in order to determine whether adjustments are needed in current programs or if new programs are required.
- ✧ Industry skills councils should be engaged in reviewing industry needs for cultural competence and cross-cultural training in order to advise future VET policy and planning.

- ✧ VET organisations, state and territory training authorities and industry skills councils should develop and promote information and advice for employers on cross-cultural training options and the business case for cultural competence.

### **Cross-cultural training curriculum and program design**

- ✧ The need for cultural competence should be considered in all planning processes related to curriculum and program development, teaching and learning, and student services.
- ✧ Cross-cultural training program design should address the recommendations of participants regarding the interactivity, duration, relevance, and modes and styles of teaching.
- ✧ Curricula should recognise that the development of cultural competence is a lifelong process and include descriptions of learning pathways appropriate to VET qualification levels.

### **Capacity- and capability-building**

- ✧ Where industry consultations confirm increased demand for culturally competent VET graduates, VET organisations should plan to increase their capacity to provide cross-cultural training at appropriate levels and to ensure that teaching staff are capable of conducting cross-cultural training.
- ✧ Registers of qualified and experienced cross-cultural training facilitators should be established and promoted by state and territory VET authorities.

### **Professional development and resources**

- ✧ Introductory train-the-trainer programs should be developed and promoted to VET teachers and students interested in becoming cross-cultural training facilitators.
- ✧ Professional development programs addressing the areas identified in this study should be developed and provided for existing cross-cultural training facilitators.
- ✧ A national database or clearing house of existing professional development opportunities and training resources should be established and maintained by an appropriate government department or research organisation.
- ✧ Training resources reflecting the Australian context should be developed in the areas identified in the study.