

# Organisational capability - Employment Screening Services



employment  
screening

## Key functions

In Queensland, the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000* requires those who work with children (under 18 years of age) in certain categories of paid or voluntary employment, or those who operate child-related businesses, to undergo a Working with Children Check.

The Working with Children Check is a comprehensive assessment of a person's suitability to work with children based on their criminal history, if any. Those found suitable to work with children and young people following this comprehensive criminal history check are issued with a blue card, which they must produce to be able to work with children in Queensland.

Blue cards have been required for new paid employees since 1 May 2001, for self-employed people since 1 February 2002, and for volunteers since 1 May 2002. From 1 September 2003 the check will expand to include all child care services.

The check is required for the following categories of child-related employment:

- residential facilities
- school boarding houses
- school employees other than teachers
- churches, clubs and associations involving children
- counselling and support services, and
- private teaching, coaching or tutoring.

At 30 June 2003, the Employment Screening Services Unit had a staff of 29 FTE staff (at 30 June 2003), including a core establishment of 9 FTE staff and 20 temporary staff, engaged to meet demand for screening from an estimated 100,000 volunteers. Staff numbers are supplemented by the use of temporary agency staff as the need arises.

## Highlights

Queensland was the first state in Australia to introduce screening of volunteers who work with children and young people (in 2001-02). Over the 2002-03 financial year, volunteers and the organisations for which they work have increasingly accepted the blue card as an important child protection strategy. The Commission has seen these organisations move to ensure that all members involved in activities with children or young people hold a blue card.

Queensland's blue card system has been so successful it is now being considered for adoption in other jurisdictions in Australia.

The Commission has adopted a continuous improvement approach to the operations of the Employment Screening Services Unit. This has included negotiating improved turnaround times with external agencies which provide criminal history information, reviewing process and staffing levels in the Unit and streamlining resource allocation strategies.

The Commission is also looking at screening and licensing processes of other agencies in Queensland and interstate, with a view to adopting best practice in the use of technology, workflows and client communication.

## Outcomes and achievements

From 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2003, 105,588 blue suitability cards were issued. Of these:

- 18,694 were issued to new paid employees
- 6,897 were issued to self-employed people carrying on certain child-related businesses
- 79,994 were issued to volunteers, and
- three were issued to current employees at the request of their employers who had concerns about their suitability.

The breakdown of cards issued by category is:

- residential facilities – 2,267
- school boarding houses – 255
- school employees other than teachers – 32,474
- churches, clubs and associations involving children – 48,845
- counselling and support services – 13,033
- private teaching, coaching or tutoring – 8,714

In 2002-03, 318 applicants renewed their suitability notices after two years.

In 2002-03, 26 applicants were issued with negative notices which prohibit them from working with children.

126 applicants withdrew their applications from the process after being challenged by the Commission to provide more information. These people cannot work in child-related employment. Of these, 84 applicants decided not to proceed when further information was sought by the Commission about their criminal histories. This figure illustrates the deterrent effect on those not suitable to work with children and young people.

In addition to the applications withdrawn as a result of being challenged, 1,754 applications were withdrawn by the Commission after applicants provided insufficient identification, no

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further documentation was provided as requested by the Commission, or for other reasons.

Nine applicants appealed against the Commissioner's decision to issue negative notices in 2002-03. Only one appeal succeeded, resulting in the decision to issue a negative notice being overturned. These figures support the thoroughness of the Commission's processes in assessing people's suitability to work with children.

Over the year, the Commission provided over 9,000 information kits to relevant organisations and individuals requiring screening. The figures indicate the continuing strong interest in this important child protection strategy.

#### Review of Part 6 of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000*

The Working with Children Check came into effect on 1 May 2001 following passage of the *Commission for Children and Young People Act 2000 (Qld)*. Part 6 of the Act relates to employment screening for certain child-related employment and child-related business.

Section 164 of the Act requires a review of Part 6 be undertaken within two years of the introduction of the employment screening provisions. The review began on 1 May 2003, and is being conducted by officers of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet in consultation with the Commission.

The review is an opportunity for community members to express their views about the blue card. As community expectations around child protection issues may have changed since the introduction of the Commission's legislation, the review provides an opportunity to consider other categories of people and businesses that should be subject to a Working with Children Check.

A discussion paper will provide the opportunity for members of the public to make submissions.

## Outlook

The Employment Screening Services Unit will continue to review and refine its procedures and systems in 2003-04 to enable continuous improvement in its standard of client service. A review of the processes, workflows and staffing levels in the Unit will be undertaken. The Commission is also looking at the possibility of operating a paperless office and electronically obtaining criminal history searches to improve timeliness and cost efficiency.

With the commencement of the screening of all child care services on 1 September 2003, up to 20 additional staff are expected to be employed in the 2003-04 financial year.

The Employment Screening Services Unit will continue to improve the exchange of information with the Queensland Police Service about changes in the criminal history of those holding a current suitability card, or those who have applied for a suitability card to work in child-related employment.

