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MEDIA RELEASE: Workplace Diversity Results

Managing an ageing workforce has emerged as the leading issue for New Zealand's larger companies while wellbeing and flexibility are the top concerns for the country's small and medium organisations, according to the first EEO Trust Quarterly Diversity Survey.

The survey, carried out by AUT University's New Zealand Work Research Institute, attracted over 1460 respondents and has been developed to provide a benchmark for diversity in New Zealand workplaces.

EEO Trust chief executive Bev Cassidy-Mackenzie says the strong response to the survey which included Auckland Chamber of Commerce members shows New Zealand companies are serious about understanding the level of diversity in their business and seeing how they compare to the wider workforce.

"To make progress in achieving a workforce that more accurately reflects the demographics of the population – in terms of age, ethnicity, gender or disability – we need to know what it is about diversity that our companies are grappling with. We're undertaking this survey series so we can take stock and then support companies to make changes that will broaden the talent pool they're working with." says Cassidy-Mackenzie.

"The fact that smaller companies have highlighted wellbeing and flexibility shows that it might be the mechanisms that support diversity that are presenting obstacles."

Auckland Chamber of Commerce Chief Executive Michael Barnett, says the results highlight the different issues that small and large organisations grapple with.

"For example, ethnicity, gender, bias and bullying and harassment were of notably greater concern for large organisations than for small organisations."

AUT University's Professor Tim Bentley, who is heading the EEO Trust diversity research, says bias was highlighted as an area of concern for 31% of all small and medium companies while almost half of all large organisations (48%) identified bias as an issue.

The survey also highlighted some shortcomings in the level of policy in place to address diversity issues.

Despite ageing being identified as the top issue among larger companies, over 60% of organisations have neither a policy or programme in place to manage or support an ageing workforce.

"With an ageing population and shifting expectations for the age of retirement, we really need to understand why we're overlooking this rich talent pool and what perceptions are driving this and then we can look at how to change it," says Cassidy-Mackenzie.

Generally, less than half of responding organisations have a policy in place to address each of the various diversity issues. The exception are the issues of bullying and harassment, where 60% of

organisations have a policy in place. Policy specific to disability was in place for 45% of survey respondents.

“However, for most diversity issues, over half of the organisations had either a policy or an initiative in place, indicating that they are taking steps to address these issues,” says Professor Bentley.

The Quarterly Diversity Survey will be repeated in February, May and August next year.

AUT University’s partnership with the EEO Trust and the Auckland Chamber of Commerce will see researchers explore several other areas in 2014 including a gender and leadership study and research into the management of workplace bullying and harassment.

Notes for editors:

The research partnership between EEO Trust and AUT University is part of a wider programme of research activity being undertaken by AUT University’s New Zealand Work Research Institute. The Future of Work Programme involves collaboration between the New Zealand Work Research Institute’s specialist research groups and a large network of internal and external partners. The programme is a truly multidisciplinary initiative, bringing together expertise in employment relations, employment law, labour market economics, ICT, industrial and organisational psychology, human resource management, occupational health and safety, tourism and hospitality, and ergonomics.

SIDEBAR

Diversity by numbers

- 1468 NZ companies responded to the first Quarterly Diversity Survey
- Wellbeing was the top concern for small (48%) and medium (55%) companies
- Ageing was the top issue for large organisations (63%)
- Flexibility was an issue for nearly half of all respondents
- Ethnicity, gender and bias, bullying and harassment was more of an issue for large companies
- There are serious gaps in diversity policy – less than 50% of respondents had policies in place to address each of the diversity issues with the exception of bullying and harassment

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