

# 2024 review of the annual reports and other matters of the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People

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## Supplementary questions

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### Recruitment of the Youth Advisory Council

1. During the public hearing, you discussed the efforts to diversify and enhance the recruitment process for the Youth Advisory Council, noting importance of attracting and including young people with a variety of experiences.

a. Please provide detailed information on the specific changes and improvements being made to the recruitment process for the Youth Advisory Council.

The specific changes and improvements made are outlined against distinct parts of the process below.

#### **1. Data informed review**

Following each year of the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) recruitment, the team reviews and evaluates the process undertaken in previous year with a commitment to continuously improve the process.

The team discuss any lessons learned and analyse the demographic data of the children and young people who applied, and those who were selected. This provides us with valuable information to identify any gaps or groups that may be underrepresented on the YAC.

This then enables us to focus on targeted strategies to reach diverse groups and work directly with services, organisations, schools and communities to support the promotion of the Council. These organisations also encourage applications from potential candidates.

This includes reaching out to those in regional, rural and remote areas of NSW, Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, organisations who support LGBTQIA+ groups, and services that support other vulnerable groups.

In addition to our usual strategies, this year, the Advocate and team specifically:

- Targeted in language and regional publications in addition to mainstream newspapers, Sydney Morning Herald and the Daily Telegraph
- Boosted promotions on social media to reach a wider audience
- Targeted youth justice centres, youth justice community offices and programs, as this is cohort (lived experience) which has been previously underrepresented in applications.

#### **2. Direct feedback from previous YAC**

The ACYP team sought feedback from current YAC members on:

- how they found out about the opportunity,
- how ACYP can improve the application and recruitment process to make it more accessible and inclusive,
- their experience of the YAC recruitment process including the information and quality of the YAC face-to-face recruitment day
- their suggestions on strategies to reach a wider audience of young people aged 12-24 years to ensure more have an opportunity to apply.

### **3. Promotion**

The ACYP team reviews annual data to understand the impact of promotions and identify the most effective methods of engagement and mediums for promotion. This includes analysis of the reach and engagement of YAC promotional communications on social media platforms, through Electronic Direct Mail (EDM) marketing to our network of schools, children and young people, relevant organisations and service providers, via community radio, print media, ACYP's webpage and our newsletter. As part of the application process, applicants are also asked how they found about the YAC to inform this review and how we tailor communications. As an example, last year's responses to this question highlighted a trend of schools pitching the opportunity to their Student Representative Council leaders. In 2024, our EDM to schools emphasised the opportunity was available to "all children and young people aged between 12-24 years living in NSW and sought from children and young people from diverse backgrounds and life experiences, who are living in different locations across the State".

The ACYP Participation and Recovery Youth Support Team also focus promotion at a range of youth-focused events across NSW whilst undertaking consultations and attending schools, services and activities. This included promotion at our Advocacy training sessions with children and young people and 17 Youth Week events and consultations.

As a part of the social media campaign, the current YAC members help to design and develop a promotional video to encourage young people to apply. In 2024, applications opened on 18 March 2024 for a five-week period and closed on 21 April 2024.

More recently, the members have also developed 'a day in the life of a YAC member' videos which have been posted and promoted across ACYP's social media platforms. These videos are an important tool to showcase the diversity of young people currently in the YAC, and for others to see young people like themselves represented on the YAC and what it involves.

### **4. Diversifying the Application process**

Since 2023, the application criteria now allow for young people to submit their application in written or video format. This change to the process has been implemented to ensure that the process is inclusive and accessible for all young people, including those living with disability and other complexities. Video applications are encouraged as it can provide a better demonstration of the young person's skills, experience, and views.

### **5. YAC Review process: Shortlisting**

Following the close of applications, there was a further two stages to select a final 12 recommended applicants. The first stage involves the Advocate and three teams consisting of three ACYP staff members assessing applications to shortlist 50 children and young people across three age category groups. These age categories are informed by how many applications are received from each age to ensure a fairly even split across the review teams. It also enables the team to compare like for like aged young people to ensure the initial shortlisting process is fair. This year the age categories were:

- 12 – 15 years of age
- 16 – 17 years of age
- 18 – 24 years of age

The ACYP review team is briefed on the demographic split of applicants and previous membership as well as any local government areas or specific cohorts (for e.g., young parents) who have been underrepresented in previous Council membership. The ACYP review team are advised not to prioritise any applicant based solely on them being from an under-represented cohort but to assess them on the merits of their application taking into account the broader context of their experience and demographics. To progress the review, each team establishes an agreed benchmark of what is considered a more and less suitable application for their age category. Each member of the three teams has the responsibility to score each individual application and provide unbiased comments that focus on skills, background, experiences, and potential contributions to the YAC. Each of the three teams agree their top ten shortlisted applicants and a second tranche of ten applicants from their allocated age group. The Advocate and ACYP review teams meet to discuss, compare and agree a final shortlist of 50 candidates, informed by data to ensure representation across the State in terms of geography, skill and life experience.

## **6. YAC Review Process: Further assessment to inform final selection**

The second stage included the assessment of 50 shortlisted candidates at a face-to-face event. Each year the ACYP team continues to identify and determine the most suitable method for the assessment and selection process of the YAC at this event. During the event young people participate in a range of activities in small groups with young people of the same/similar age. These activities include consultations and solution-based workshops for them to better understand and celebrate their strengths, inform decision making and for ACYP to be able to assess their suitability to become a YAC member.

This year, ACYP also implemented an online briefing event in order to:

- Brief shortlisted applicants on the role of the Advocate, the Office and the YAC
- Facilitate an overview of Educate 2 Advocate training to provide shortlisted applicants with an opportunity to strengthen their skills. They were able to meet the ACYP facilitator and peers that will be on their table at the face-to-face event and be supported to start some pre-work for the Advocate Tank workshop session at this event
- Provide an opportunity for current YAC member to share their experiences and answer questions at Parliament House on Friday, 28 June 2024
- Provide reminders about logistics, preparation for the day and to answer any questions they have ahead of the event.

ACYP invites external observers from across government and non-government agencies to sit with each small group to ensure different perspectives are considered fairly. It also provides an opportunity for adult decision makers across Government to hear from young people directly. This year representatives from across the below agencies and organisations partnered with an ACYP team member to assess the applicants on their table:

- NSW Department of Customer Service
- Multicultural NSW
- NSW Reconstruction Authority
- NSW Health – Mental Health Branch
- NSW Department of Education
- Create NSW
- Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra
- Homes NSW
- NSW Minister for Youth (representative)

The event program is designed to also provide ACYP and guest observers with the ability to adequately assess their skills across criteria as suitable for the YAC to meaningfully influence decision making and represent young people across NSW. In 2024, the criteria were updated to:

- Include 'problem solving' and combine previous categories of engagement and meaningful contribution under 'team work'
- Expand the scoring range from 1 – 5 to 1 – 10 to enable a greater variability when comparing applicants
- Request that comments be provided for each applicant rather than just the top two recommended applicants. This helps the team understand more when future applications are received by young people who had previously been shortlisted but unsuccessful in being selected as a final YAC member. This does not remove the possibility they are shortlisted again as each application is reviewed on its merits.

For the first time, this year's event program included a one-hour workshop where applicants completed a 15-minute survey which identified their top five strengths. They were then individually coached by the My Strengths team. The Advocate was committed to providing applicants with a meaningful experience that they could take forward and use, regardless of the outcome of their application.

b. How do these changes aim to enhance the council's inclusivity and ensure that a broad spectrum of young people are empowered to meaningfully influence decision-making?

Ensuring a broad spectrum of young people are empowered to meaningfully influence decision-making is central to our Recruitment process. Both the shortlisting and final selection process is informed by data on the demographic composition of the potential candidates in comparison to YAC Alumni and representation across the State. Consideration is given to ensure representation from:

- locations, for e.g., each region in NSW where possible noting this is informed by the number of YAC alumni from each region, Western Sydney given the high proportion of children and young people who live there and other Local Government Areas which have not been represented to date

- certain demographics, for e.g., ACYP also seeks to ensure there is representation from children and young people who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, LGBTQIA+, non-binary or transgender, living with disability, speaking a language other than English at home etc.
- Young people are invited to advise us if they have certain experiences of complexities or disadvantage including experience with Police and/or the court system, are a young parent, have been in the Out-of-Home-Care system. This is to ensure that the opportunity to be a YAC member is also being provided to young people who may not easily access services, support or encouragement. It helps ensure they to are able to meaningfully inform government decision-making and helps ACYP to target recruitment if applications from these cohorts are under-represented.
- In 2024, ACYP broadened the demographic data to capture international students and young people who have arrived in Australia in the last five years as a refugee or migrant.

### **Providing other opportunities to inform decision making**

ACYP receives hundreds of YAC applications every year and seeks to provide as many children and young people as possible with the opportunity to influence decision making. To do this, applicants are invited to select which opportunities they would like to be assessed for. This year that included:

- Applying for the YAC understanding it will serve a one-year term from October 2024 – October 2025
- Being considered for any other Advisory Committee that the Advocate may have
- Being contacted by ACYP about other opportunities to consult or engage in work across NSW Government.

Any applicant who opts in are added to our EDM distribution list so they can receive notification about upcoming opportunities across ACYP and the NSW Government. While applicants wait to hear if they have been shortlisted, they are also offered a number of other opportunities. This year, they were invited to:

- Complete the Have your say on the future of Youth Policy in NSW survey established by the Minister for Youth, the Hon. Rose Jackson, MLC
- Register to be part of the current YAC's consultations to inform their project to reduce the stigma of mental health which will inform a brief for the NSW Mental Health Commissioner, Minister for Youth and Minister for Education, the Hon. Prue Car, MP
- Register to share their experience if they identify as a young person from a refugee or migrant background to inform ACYP's priority project and report
- Participate in a survey to tell us what would help make the online world safer, a partnership with the NSW Department of Education.

Every child and young person who participates in our face-to-face consultations throughout the year are also asked to provide their email address if they would like to receive communications from ACYP about additional opportunities to participate in our work.

## NSW Budget

2. How much did the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) receive in the NSW Budget 2023-24?

Due to the way ACYP was established and size, the Advocate is unable to approach Treasury directly to negotiate a budget. Instead, the Advocate relies on an internal process with the Secretary of the Department of Communities and Justice where their budget is allocated each year as part of the Department's annual budget and incorporated into their financial statements.

In the 2023-24 financial year, the Advocate was allocated \$4.17 million.

3. How much of the funding in the 2023-24 Budget was recurrent?

Outside of annual increases for CPI and any additional new funding received, the remainder of the Advocate's budget is recurrent.

a. What is the dollar figure breakdown of this funding?

In the 2023-2024 financial year this funding was broken down into \$3.04 million in Employment Related Expenditure (ERE) and \$1.13 million in Operational (OPEX) Budget.

4. How much of the funding in the 2023-24 Budget was new?

In the 2023-24 Budget, the Advocate received new funding of \$0.56 million.

a. What is the dollar figure breakdown of this funding?

In the 2023-24 Budget the Advocate received \$0.2 million in new ERE funding.

In the 2023-2024 Budget, the Advocate received \$0.36 million in new OPEX funding.

5. In relation to the Budget cycle for 2023-24, did the ACYP make any requests for additional funding?

Yes

a. If so, how much and for what purpose?

The Advocate requested additional ERE Budget of \$0.2 million for two existing full-time equivalent roles.

While not requested, the additional OPEX budget was received for the ACYP office lease allocated by the DCJ Finance team in May 2024. It is understood this was part of the Department's effort to decentralise funding to business units to manage their own administrative costs.

b. Did the ACYP receive this funding?

Yes

6. How much did the ACYP receive in the NSW Budget 2024-25?

The Advocate's budget for financial year 2024-2025 is \$4.21 million.

7. How much of the funding in the 2024-25 Budget was recurrent?

Outside of annual increases for CPI and any additional new funding received, the remainder of the Advocate's budget is recurrent.

- a. What is the dollar figure breakdown of this funding?

In the 2024-2025 financial year this funding was broken down into \$3.06 million in Employment Related Expenditure (ERE) and \$1.15 million in Operational (OPEX) Budget.

8. How much of the funding in the 2024-25 Budget was new?

There is no new funding provided in the 2024-25 Budget. ERE and OPEX escalation of 3% has been built into the financial Year 2024-2025 budget to align with CPI increases.

- a. What is the dollar figure breakdown of this funding?

ERE escalation is \$32k and OPEX escalation is \$23k.

9. In relation to the Budget cycle for 2024-25, did the ACYP make any requests for additional funding?

Yes

- a. If so, how much and for what purpose?

As part of the 2024-25 Budget, the Advocate made a request of the Secretary for an additional ERE budget of \$284,571.

The purpose of this additional funding was to ensure a sustained and manageable organisational structure for ACYP moving forward. Currently ACYP operates under a single Director role who manages all HR, Finance and Strategy planning.

The funding request sought to create a new Executive Director role and an additional Director role to ensure the Office can match an increasing number of requests from Government, business and community and redistribute these functions more appropriately.

- b. Did the ACYP receive this funding?

No.