

3 May 2024



Ministry for
**Ethnic
Communities**
Te Tari Mātāwaka

[REDACTED]

Ref: OIA 2324-0834

Tēnā koe [REDACTED]

Response to your Official Information Act request

Thank you for your email of 9 April 2024 to the Ministry for Ethnic Communities (the Ministry) requesting the following information under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act):

- *All correspondence, documents and advice relating to the future of the graduate programme for 2025 and beyond,*
- *Any assessments or reviews made regarding the success or failure of the graduate programme,*
- *Any decisions made about the future of the programme.*

Please note that information regarding the future of the Ministry's Ethnic Communities Graduate Programme, including the Ministry's other work programmes are currently budget sensitive, as the Budget 2024 preparation is underway. Therefore, all Budget 2024 related information is withheld under section 9(2)(f)(iv) of the Act, to protect the confidentiality of this advice tendered by Ministers and officials. This applies to parts one and three of your request.

If it would be of interest to you, further information on the Budget secrecy provision of section 9(2)(f)(iv) of the Act, can be found on page 6 of the Ombudsman's [Confidential advice to Government](#) resource. Please also note that the Treasury will be undertaking a Budget proactive release in the weeks following Budget Day once the risk of prejudicing Budget decisions has expired.

In response to part two of your request, one document has been found within scope and is released to you in full.

As is required by section 9(1) of the OIA, I have considered whether the grounds for withholding information under section 9 of the OIA are outweighed by other considerations which would make it desirable, in the public interest, to make that information available. In this instance, I do not consider that to be the case.

Under section 28 of the OIA, you have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Office of the Ombudsman of my response relating to this request. The relevant details can be found on their website at: www.ombudsman.parliament.nz

Please note, due to the public interest in our work, the Ministry may publish responses to requests for official information on our website, shortly after the response has been sent. If you have any queries about this, please feel free to contact our Ministerial Services team:
Ministerial@ethniccommunities.govt.nz.

Ngā mihi



Edward Firth
Director of Ministerial Services

Proactively Released by the Ministry for Ethnic Communities



Ministry for
**Ethnic
Communities**
Te Tari Mātāwaka



Ethnic Communities Graduate Programme Progress Review



**Te Kāwanatanga
o Aotearoa**
New Zealand Government



Table of Contents

Executive summary	3
Part One – Background	4
The Ethnic Communities Graduate Programme	4
Purpose, scope, and methodology of this review.....	6
Part Two – Analysis and findings	7
Programme objectives	7
Change outcomes.....	9
Programme processes and administration	10
Part Three – Learnings	13
Conclusions	14
Appendices	15

**Growing
leadership in the
Public Service.**





Executive summary

The Ministry for Ethnic Communities (the Ministry) launched the Ethnic Communities Graduate Programme (ECGP, or the Programme) in July 2021, as part of the response to the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Masjidain. The Programme is the first of its kind with a focus on creating a pathway for ethnic graduates into New Zealand's Public Service.

The first intake of 23 graduates has completed seven months into their 18-month placement, and this review aims at assessing the general progress of the Programme against its strategic goals and their experience of the Programme so far.

Participants' questionnaires were distributed to the graduates, their host managers, and the Ministry's Programme team, and the data collected was complemented by qualitative anecdotal data that emerged since the launch of the Programme.

The Programme is considered on track to meet its two key objectives of providing a meaningful first employment opportunity in the Public Service for skilled graduates from ethnic communities and addressing the low representation of ethnically diverse employees and the barriers they face to access employment in the Public Service. Most graduates have said they are likely to continue a career in the Public Service, and this is promising in terms of both the long-term impact of the Programme and the quality of the experience offered through the Programme.

The vast majority of the graduates (except one or two) and the host managers are overly happy about the experience and are able to frame every challenge encountered in the past months in a positive way.

Several graduates went through major life changes and, for many, this placement is their first full-time office job ever. Nonetheless, they are contributing to their teams, bringing enthusiasm and helpfulness, and embracing learning opportunities. Furthermore, host managers and the Programme team observed increased levels of confidence, resilience, and flexibility in their graduates.

The Programme team has refined the recruitment, onboarding, case-management, and information management processes along the way, and, in their administration of the Programme and provision of pastoral care to the graduates and support to host managers, is eager to maintain an agile approach that embeds learnings.

The Programme has injected ethnic employees into agencies' workforce with the aim of influencing culture change across the system, and the long-term outcomes on graduates' employment retention within New Zealand's Public Service, and agencies' recruitment trends remain to be assessed.

However, the Programme is proving successful, enjoys high levels of appreciation among participants, stakeholders, and the Ministry's staff, and most of the graduates and their host managers would recommend the Programme to their peers.

Part One – Background

The Ethnic Communities Graduate Programme

The Ethnic Communities Graduate Programme (the Programme) was developed as part of the [Government Response to the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist Attack on Christchurch Masjidain](#)'s recommendations to improve social cohesion and New Zealand's response to its increasingly diverse population. The Programme specifically responds to Recommendation 35, which encourages the Public Service Commissioner to continue focusing efforts on significantly increasing workforce diversity and cultural competency within the Public Service.

In March 2021, Cabinet agreed to the launch of the Programme (CAB-21-MIN-0049) to directly address the low representation of ethnically diverse employees and the barriers they face to access employment in the Public Service. Cabinet also acknowledged that there is more to be done to improve the diversity of leadership within the Public Service (as shown in the [Public Service Commission's Workforce data](#)) and, more generally, across the private sector.

Early internal scoping of the Programme scheduled two 15-person placements to be launched in July and January 2022, for the duration of 12 months. However, high levels of interest among ethnic graduates and Public Service agencies, as well as programme refinements, translated into a bigger intake one.


The Programme was officially launched on 12 July 2021, with a first intake of 23 graduates. These graduates were placed into one of 12 Public Service agencies and are now in the seventh month of their 18-month placement. The first intake will complete their placements in January 2023.

A second intake of 14 graduates, placed across 10 agencies, began on 14 February 2022, for the duration of 18 months. Graduates from the Programme are placed in roles focused on public policy, policy-related functions, and the delivery of high-quality public services.

The Programme, representing the first of its kind within the New Zealand Public Service with a special focus on ethnic graduates, offers graduates a targeted pathway into the Public Service, with the expected benefits of improving its representativeness and broadening its cultural competency.

In doing so, it strongly aligns with the Public Service Diversity and Inclusion Framework, the Ministry for Ethnic Communities' Former Refugees, Recent Migrants and Ethnic Communities Employment Action Plan, and the whole-of-government work programme to strengthen social cohesion in New Zealand and build a safer and more inclusive society

As part of the Programme, graduates have access to a suite of training courses and workshops to develop essential public servants' skills such as Ministerial writing, the Official Information Act, the Machinery of Government, Resilience and Wellbeing, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Excel Essentials and others.



The Ministry's Programme team (ECGP team) also provides ongoing pastoral care and support to all graduates and host managers, which include fortnightly and monthly one-one catch-ups and availability on an ad-hoc basis if required. This is an important feature of the Programme that, alongside the workplace safety of graduates, is considered paramount to its successful delivery.

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Purpose, scope, and methodology of this review

This review aims at assessing the progress of the Ethnic Communities Graduate Programme against its strategic goals and the satisfaction of intake one's participants, seven months after its launch. Given the new nature of the Programme and the recent launch of intake two, this progress review is not intended as an exhaustive evaluation of the Programme across multiple intakes of graduates.

Qualitative and quantitative data have been collected through the use of participants' questionnaires targeting participating graduates and host managers of the Programme's intake one and the Ministry's Programme team. Twenty graduates and 16 host managers have completed the questionnaire.

The graduates' questionnaire included questions related to the main Programme objectives, the preparation and support provided by host agencies, the difficulty of the overall experience, the level of pastoral care received, the likelihood of continuing a career in the Public Service, and the likelihood of recommending the programme. The complete list of questions posed to the graduates is attached as Appendix A.

Host managers' questionnaire covered the same topics and included two additional questions on the contributions graduates have made to their teams, and the challenges faced so far. Both questionnaires also asked respondents to provide any suggestions for the improvement of the Programme and any additional comments. The complete list of questions posed to the host managers is attached as Appendix B.

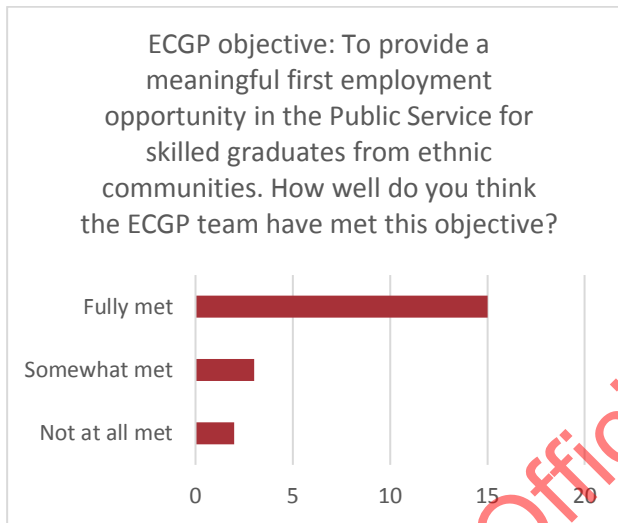
The use of a set of Likert scale survey questions allowed data triangulation across respondents, while the use of open-ended questions allowed capturing nuances of participants' experiences, and learnings for the future of the Programme.

In addition, qualitative anecdotal data that emerged from the Programme team's engagements with graduates and host managers throughout the months have been used to corroborate data trends that emerged from the analysis of the questionnaire responses. The complete list of questions posed to the two members of the Programme team is attached as Appendix C.

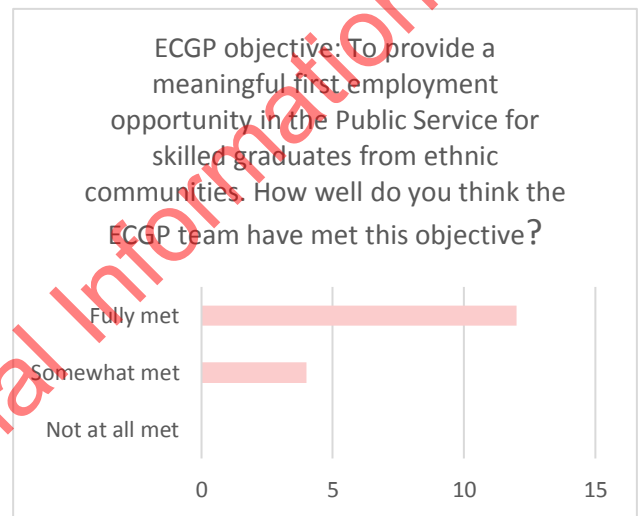
Part Two – Analysis and findings

Programme objectives

The first objective of the Programme, as set out in the Government Response to the Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Terrorist attack on Christchurch Masjidain: First Report Back Cabinet Paper (CAB-21-SUB-0049), is to provide a meaningful work experience within the Public Service to ethnic community graduates. While intake one graduates have only completed seven out of 18 months in their placement, most of them and their host managers believe this objective was fully met, as shown in the graphs below.

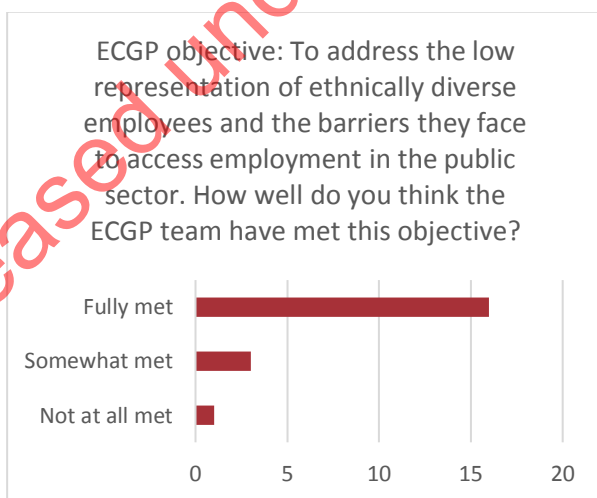


(Graduates' responses)

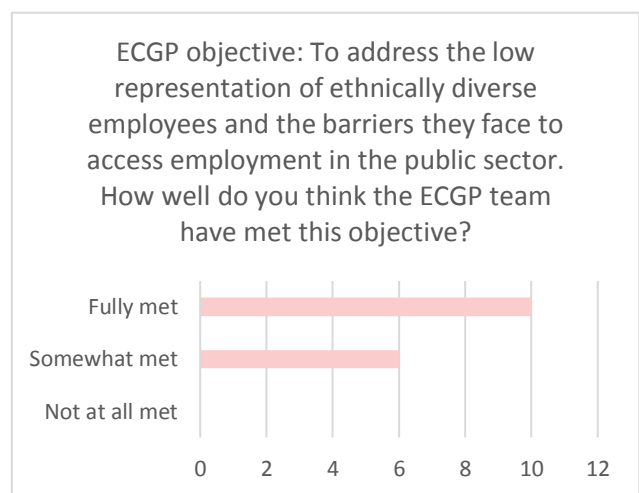


(Host managers' responses)

The Programme's second objective is to address the low representation of ethnically diverse employees and the barriers they face to access employment in the Public Service. The majority of the responding graduates thought this objective was so far met, while host managers thought it was fully met or somewhat met (as shown in the graphs below).



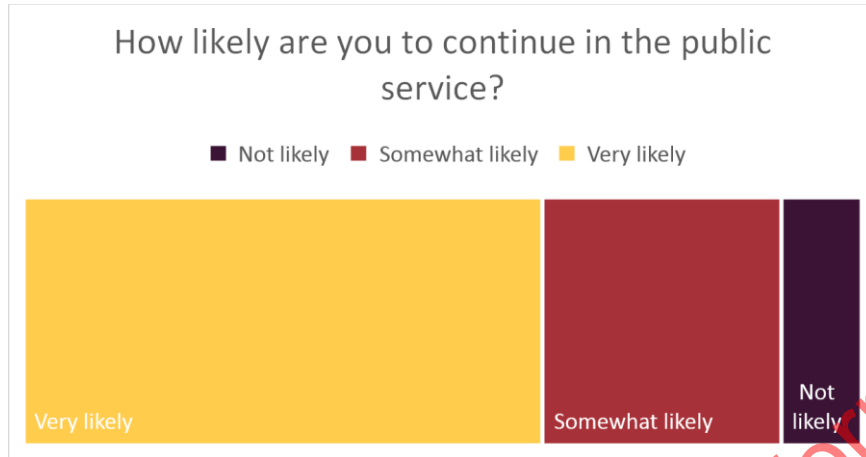
(Graduates' responses)



(Host managers' responses)

While the long-term impacts of the Programme are to be assessed in the years to come, including any final evaluation parameters such as graduates' conversion rate to employment, the Ministry's project team members also consider both objectives fully met by the Programme.

The majority of the graduates have said they are very likely or somewhat likely to continue a career in the Public Service.



Further, two host agencies have encouraged their graduates to apply for permanent internal roles, showing promising signs of employment satisfaction and retention.

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Change outcomes

General trends observed by the Ministry's Programme team highlight the positive impact the Programme is having on graduates' employment and personal growth journey, and on host agencies' teams. Most agencies have shown a willingness to ensure the graduate has a good experience and can build transferable skills that can be leveraged for any Public Service role.

Personal reflections of the graduates, as well as observed behaviours, show that most graduates are fully embracing this opportunity and the challenges that it brings, like adjusting to certain levels of ambiguity and working with limited supervision.

In this sense, the Programme team and host managers have reported that many graduates have grown resilience and flexibility in joining the Programme while dealing with major life changes, such as leaving their homes and student lives, entering a (new) work environment with office hours and different communication styles and cultures, navigating flexible working arrangements and the COVID-19 lockdown, or relocating to Wellington.

Several host managers have commented that, beyond bringing their whole self to work and sharing their cultural intelligence skills and perspectives, the graduates have brought energy, passion, enthusiasm, dedication, digital skills, and a can-do attitude and collaborative attitude to their teams. They also noted how the graduates have developed different skills, welcomed learning opportunities, and completed different projects that helped them gain confidence in their contributions to Public Service work.

On that account, several graduates reported that they would have appreciated more structure, a set work programme, and clear responsibilities in the first months of their placement, but that they have felt welcomed in their new teams and with time have been able to take on more work, participate more fully, and create learning opportunities for themselves by self-identifying tasks and projects to be involved in.

Some host managers shared some of the challenges they and their graduates have faced in the past seven months. These include operational issues (such as obtaining their security clearances or not having the graduate being part of their corporate and leave-application systems like any other employees), and some issues related to graduates' expectations about their role or the amount of support and oversight they would receive from their host managers and colleagues. Some managers noted that balancing the amount of supervision required by graduates with the graduates' own self-management was an ongoing process.

In fact, the high quality of graduate candidates participating in the Programme is reflected in the host agencies' feedback and their eagerness to engage in future intakes and promote the Programme.

Programme processes and administration

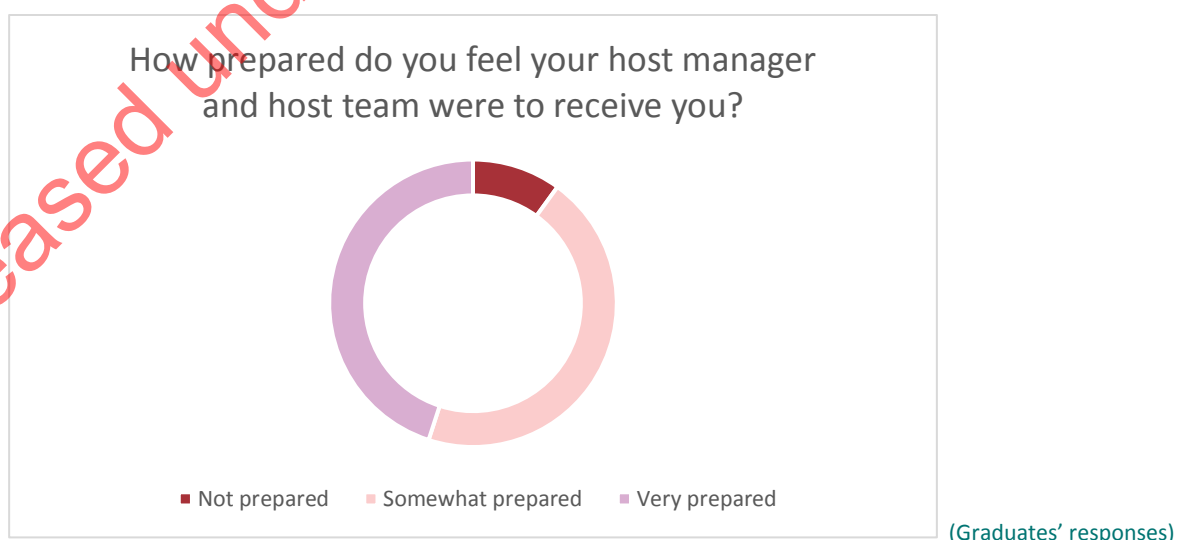
All the host managers reported having carried out some or significant preparation prior to the graduate's placement. Many of them organised induction training, formal orientation sessions, and human resource-related activities, scheduled time to get to know the graduate, and attended the ECGP induction workshops led by the Ministry's Programme team to familiarise themselves with the onboarding process.

Some have also put in place buddy mentoring systems for their graduates and prepared in advance a work programme that could match the graduate's interests with the team's needs. One manager talked about enhancing their own and their team's understanding of the graduate's faith and its related protocols.



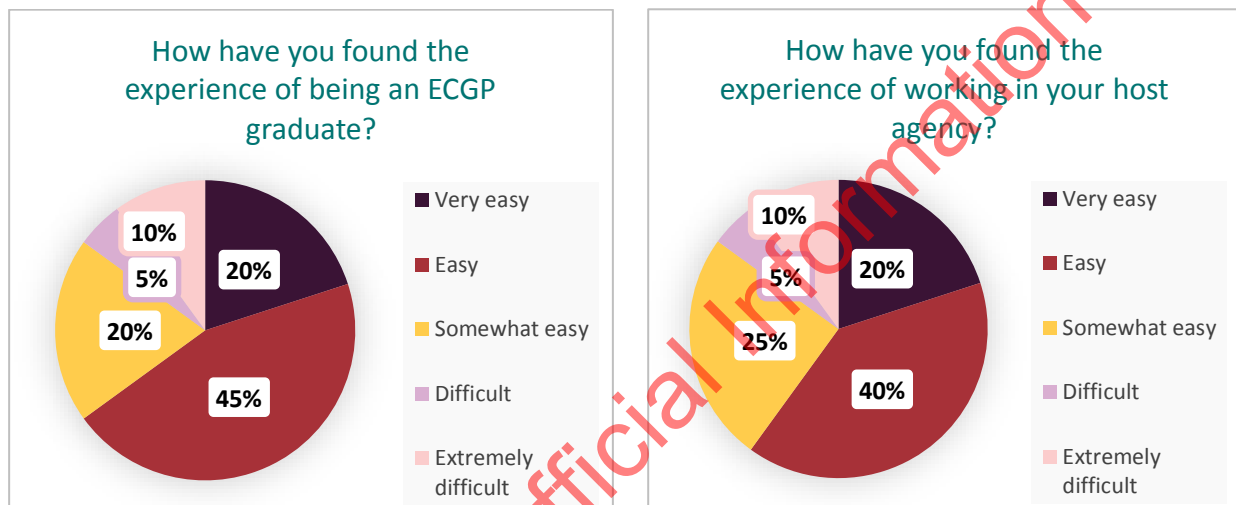
Another manager talked about this being their first experience hosting a graduate in their branch and realised they should have done more preparation.

Graduates observed different levels of preparation in their host agencies, with a few of them noting that they felt their team was not prepared to receive them, or it was not experienced enough in developing and nurturing a graduate team member.

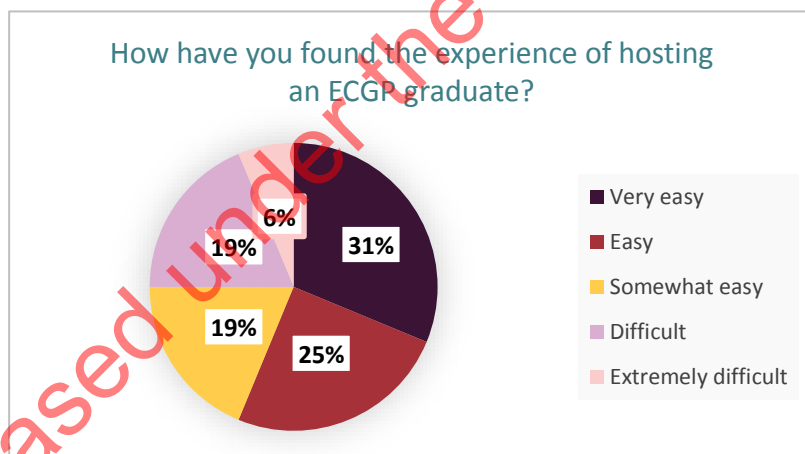


When reflecting on their own experience of the Programme, 85% of the responding graduates (or 17 respondents) said they found it very easy, easy, or somewhat easy to be an ECGP graduate and to work in their host agency, and 15% (or 3 respondents) found it difficult or very difficult. Host managers' responses showed a similar trend with 75% of respondents (or 12 people) stating they found it very easy, easy, or somewhat easy to host an ECGP graduate.

These results indicate that the recruitment and skill-matching of graduates with host agencies, as well as the support provided to graduates by host agencies and the Programme team proved to be successful. The majority of graduates also report having received the right amount of support from their host managers.



(Graduates' responses)



(Host managers' responses)

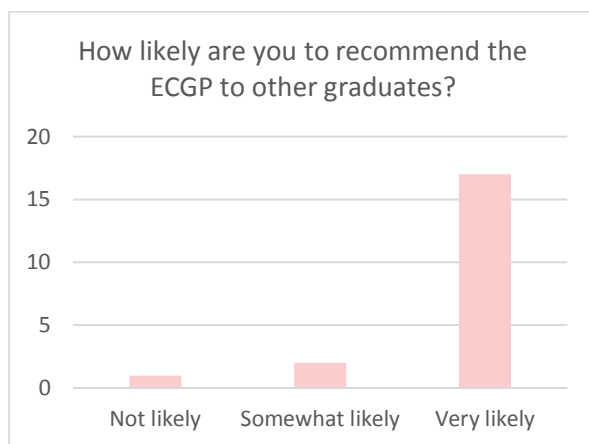
Most of the graduates and all the host managers considered the pastoral care and support received by graduates from the ECGP team to be right. Graduates have expressed high levels of satisfaction and gratitude for all the support and training and networking opportunities provided by the Programme team.

However, a few participating graduates and host managers, and members of the Programme team commented on the fact that the pastoral care and support to graduates and host

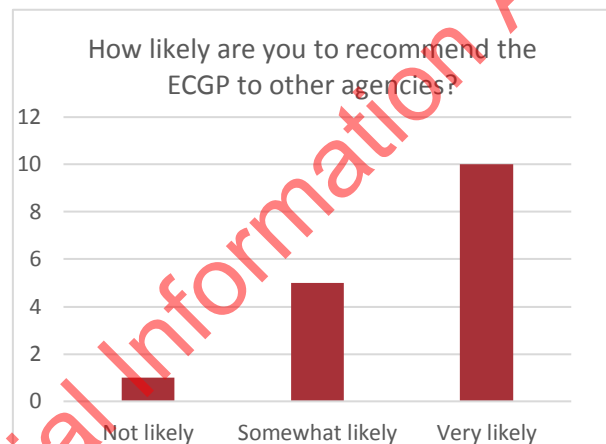
managers was at times excessive for some of them, and it could diminish over the course of the placement. The brand-new nature of the Programme, the COVID-19 lockdown and some unforeseen challenges due to participants' expectations not being met straight away made this high level of tailored support initially necessary for the first cohort.

Reflecting on the efficiency and effectiveness of the processes, the Programme team noted that processes, including recruitment, onboarding, case-management, and information management processes, were refined along the way, with waste steps being removed and other processes being developed to fill gaps.

Finally, almost all participating graduates and host managers have said they are very likely or likely to recommend the Ethnic Communities Graduate Programme to their peers.



(Graduates' responses)



(Host managers' responses)

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Part Three – Learnings

“While this programme has its unique drivers and history that should remain ‘front and centre’, it can also be simply described as an excellent Public Service graduate programme bringing in quality candidates and providing great wrap around support. This is something that many smaller agencies aspire to but can struggle to do so effectively on their own. This could also be promoted as one of its marketing points” (Host manager).

As noted in the findings, the Ministry for Ethnic Communities, as well as several participating agencies and graduates, are satisfied with the implementation of the Programme and consider it on track to deliver its objectives.

Participants’ feedback, as well as the ECGP team’s own reflections, identified ways to improve the Programme that could contribute to meeting its objectives in the future:

- Setting clear expectations of the role and on the potential isolation in a COVID-19 environment with the graduates.
- Advertising individual roles or clarifying earlier in the process the type of placements that are available to graduates, beyond policy roles.
- Clearly communicating role expectations and host agencies’ position descriptions during the interview phase.
- Assessing graduates’ maturity and resilience at the interview stage.
- Increasing the organisational understanding of the graduate’s host agency placement and its functionalities.

From an operational perspective, the following learnings and actions have been identified:

- Ensuring host managers have a work and induction plan ready for the graduate’s first weeks into the placement.
- Extending opportunities of the ECGP to other locations beyond Wellington (which has already been rolled out with intake two).
- Improving human resources interfaces (currently led by the Department of Internal Affairs, as the Ministry’s host agency).
- Increasing host agencies’ understanding of the level/type of work that agencies can expect graduates to do.
- Diminishing the frequency and level of support provided to graduates and host managers throughout the placement.

Conclusions

"A very good initiative. I just need to find a way to get our graduate a job here, so she doesn't get snatched away by some other agency!"

"Just hope that you can keep up the momentum of support with a growing number of graduates!"

(Participating host managers)

"I think that the work done in this programme is very important and has provided all the grads with valuable experiences to continue moving forward in careers in the Public Service. It has been a pleasure to go through this experience with this first intake of grads, many of whom I now consider close friends".

"I just wanted to thank you for giving me this opportunity. You guys are doing amazing work. I am proud to be a part of this graduate programme, and I can't wait to see it grow."

(Participating graduates)

This progress review finds that the Programme is considered a well-run, impactful, and meaningful initiative and the feedback received from participants is generally very positive.

The Programme has injected ethnic employees into agencies' workforce with the aim of influencing culture change across the system, and the mid and long-term outcomes on graduates' employment retention within New Zealand's Public Service, and agencies' recruitment trends remain to be assessed.

However, the ECGP is proving to be successful to the extent that the vast majority of participating graduates and host agencies consider it a very good initiative that is beneficial for their own and their organisations' growth. Many of the graduates felt welcomed and are active team members to their respective host agencies, and they do see a career for themselves in the Public Service.

Many are pleased the administration of the Programme and the support provided by the ECGP team, who have been refining processes along the way. The Ministry is proud of the Programme and continues to promote it with stakeholders and within inter-agency forums.

Appendix A – Graduates' questionnaire

1)	ECGP objective: To provide a meaningful first employment opportunity in the Public Service for skilled graduates from ethnic communities. How well do you think the ECGP team have met this objective?
2)	ECGP objective: To address the low representation of ethnically diverse employees and the barriers they face to access employment in the public sector. How well do you think the ECGP team have met this objective?
3)	How prepared do you feel your host manager and host team were to receive you?
4)	On a scale of 1-5 (1 = extremely difficult, 5 = very easy), how have you found the experience of being an ECGP graduate?
5)	On a scale of 1-5 (1 = extremely difficult, 5 = very easy), how have you found the experience of working in your host agency?
6)	How would you describe the level of pastoral care your graduate has received from the ECGP team?
7)	How would you describe the level of support you have received from the ECGP team?
8)	How would you describe the level of support you have received from your host manager?
9)	How likely are you to continue in the Public Service?
10)	How likely are you to recommend the ECGP to other graduates?
11)	What improvements do you suggest, if any, for future intakes?
12)	Do you have any additional comments? (optional)

Appendix B – Host managers' questionnaire

1)	What agency are you from?
2)	ECGP objective: To provide a meaningful first employment opportunity in the Public Service for skilled graduates from ethnic communities. How well do you think the ECGP team have met this objective?
3)	ECGP objective: To address the low representation of ethnically diverse employees and the barriers they face to access employment in the public sector. How well do you think the ECGP team have met this objective?
4)	What was the level of preparation you undertook before your graduate joined your team?
5)	Tell us about your preparation.
6)	On a scale of 1-5 (1 = extremely difficult, 5 = very easy), how have you found the experience of hosting an ECGP graduate?
7)	How would you describe the level of pastoral care your graduate has received from the ECGP team?
8)	How would you describe the level of support you have received from the ECGP team?
9)	Beyond the addition of cultural competency, what other contributions has your ECGP graduate made to your team?
10)	What challenges, if any, have you/your graduate experienced over the last 6 months?
11)	How likely are you to recommend the ECGP to other agencies?
12)	What improvements do you suggest, if any, for future intakes?
13)	Do you have any additional comments? (optional)

Appendix C – Programme team’s questionnaire

1)	ECGP objective: To provide a meaningful first employment opportunity in the Public Service for skilled graduates from ethnic communities. How well do you think the ECGP team have met this objective?
2)	ECGP objective: To address the low representation of ethnically diverse employees and the barriers they face to access employment in the public sector. How well do you think the ECGP team have met this objective?
3)	Please, rate the efficiency of ECGP processes.
4)	Please, rate the effectiveness of ECGP processes.
5)	How would you describe the level of pastoral care provided to candidates?
6)	How would you describe the level of support provided to host managers?
7)	What changes have you observed since the programme started (e.g. graduates' behaviour, agency participation, etcetera).

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