

Principles of Youth Juror selection

1. Introduction

This paper elucidates the principles and policy reasons that underpin the choice of procedures used to select 18 young people to fulfil the role of Youth Jurors for the Parramatta Youth Jury. The discussion will demonstrate how principles of demographic representativeness, fairness and policy considerations define the parameters and animate the selection process.

2. Demographic Representativeness

The legitimacy of the youth jury process and the validity of its recommendations are critically contingent upon the extent that youth jurors are representative of the broader community¹. If the youth jurors are more representative of the community, then it is more justifiable to extrapolate the particular findings of the youth jurors as being indicative of community concerns. Moreover, it is hoped that a more representative youth jury would provide greater impetus for political commitment to the final recommendations. Clearly, the principle of demographic representativeness becomes a paramount consideration.

Demographic representativeness contains a variety of demographic features. The relevant demographic features arise out of the nature of the issues that will be discussed by the youth jury. As the object of the youth jury is to discuss issues of cultural diversity from the perspective of young people, it becomes clear that in order to facilitate meaningful discussion on these issues it is necessary to obtain a sample of young people with a wide distribution of backgrounds. For our purposes, the salient demographic features are the applicants' ancestry, their educational or work background and gender. These demographic features will be discussed in turn.

2.1 Ancestry

For our purposes, the term ancestry is used to capture broader concepts of ethnicity, nationality and/or cultural diversity. It is appropriate that the term 'ancestry' is used to capture such concepts because the proportional distribution of cultural backgrounds are based on demographic data gleaned using the same terms in the 2001 Census². Ancestry is typically derived from an examination of a person's place of birth and their parents' place of birth. Discovering the parents' place of birth is useful in discovering the ancestry of first generation Australian born applicants.

2.1.2 Proportional Composition of Ancestral Groups

This stage of analysis is not necessarily subsequent to the ascription of ancestry to individual applicants as the proportions of each ancestral group are based on population data. Nonetheless, the various ancestral groups arose from the geographical regions that were used in the 2001 Census. These are:

Oceania
North East Asia
Africa/Middle East
South/Central Asia
North West Europe
South East Asia
South/East Europe
North/South America

¹ Specifically, the youth jury are deemed to represent diverse views of young people (16 and 17 year olds) living, studying or working in the Parramatta local government area.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 Census on Population and Housing

The proportions of people born in each of these regions were determined as a percentage of the whole population. This percentage was then applied to the total number of youth jurors (18) to find the proportional composition of each ancestral group.

2.2 Educational and Work background

The next significant demographic feature is educational and work background. A representative distribution of youth jurors reflecting a mix of such backgrounds is necessary to gain a range of perspectives from young people in the Parramatta region. Indeed, the overall effectiveness of the outcomes of the youth jury, at least in terms of publicity, would be enhanced by having a wide spread of young people representing a diverse range of schools or workplaces. It is also possible that educational and work background may be a slight indicator of socio-economic status, although the presence of this demographic feature arises more by incidence rather than by intent.

Educational background ascertains what type of school the 16 or 17-year-old applicant attends, if enrolled in full-time education. Educational background is based on the following census based categories: Government school; Non-government school and Catholic school.

If the applicant is not engaged in study, then the next question is whether the applicant is enrolled in full-time employment.

Applicants who did not study or work in Parramatta, but indicated that they lived in Parramatta were confined to the "Other" category, which was also accounted for in the Census. This category represented a miscellany of situations: for example, the other category could refer to unemployed young people or young people who were working in casual employment or those studying outside of Parramatta.

Similar a process as outlined for ancestry also occurred when analysing this demographic feature. That is, applicants were ascribed with one of the five educational or work categories: Government School; Non-Government School; Catholic School; Full-time employment; Other. The proportion of youth jurors in each of these categories was based on census data.

2.3 Gender

Gender is the third critical demographic feature. The aspiration is for the number of youth jurors to be equal by sex. That is, 9 female and 9 male youth jurors are selected once the representative proportions based on ancestry and educational/work background were determined.

3. Fairness: Random Selection

In terms of selection, an appropriate standard of fairness is selection based on explicit criteria. These criteria are outlined above under the rubric of demographic representativeness along the salient demographic features that animate this concept. The preceding discussion demonstrates how a demographic profile (containing the salient demographic features) is ascribed for each applicant and the theoretical proportions are ascertained based on demographic data. As the criteria are broad, the actual selection of a particular applicant to be a youth juror is based on random selection. In this way, random selection ensures that applicants are selected fairly through the operation of unbiased or objective probability.

Random selection occurs at each level of the 3 demographic features of ancestry, educational/work background and gender. For example, once the pool of applicants have been ascribed an ancestry and the demographic proportions have been established, the actual sample of youth jurors per ancestry is determined by random selection.

Conclusion

The guiding principles of youth jury selection inhere in the very nature of the youth jury; the youth jury is a legitimate democratic process insofar as it is demographically representative of broader community. Thus demographic representativeness by reference to salient demographic features of ancestry, educational/work background and gender becomes the over-arching principle. This principle is facilitated by random selection to ensure objectively fair or unbiased selection of youth jurors. Notwithstanding this, it is recognised that in exceptional cases, intervention into random selection may be necessary so as to yield appropriate equitable and policy outcomes.