

Transcript: response to the Report from the Review of Sexual Harassment in Victorian Courts and VCAT

My name is Anne Ferguson, and I am the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Victoria.

In July 2020, the Attorney-General of Victoria and I initiated a review of sexual harassment across the Victorian Courts and VCAT.

I did this with the support of the heads of all Victorian Courts and VCAT because all workplaces, including courts and tribunals, should be safe and respectful.

Sexual harassment is harmful, unlawful and wrong. It goes against everything our justice system is built on.

I want to make it clear we will not put up with any form of wrongful conduct in our courts or VCAT. There will be zero tolerance for sexual harassment.

I want to acknowledge the harm that has occurred in our workplaces – the Courts and VCAT. It is clear that our responses to date have not been good enough and we must – and we will – do more.

The harm experienced by victims and survivors of sexual harassment is real and it is profound. That harm is exacerbated if those affected find themselves in an environment that fails to adequately support them and respond to the issue.

We will not tolerate victimisation of anyone who makes a complaint.

A number of people came forward to tell their stories as part of this Review. That can't have been easy. But it was powerful. We heard you, and we are determined to act. The Review is now complete and I thank Dr Helen Szoke for her report.

The Courts and VCAT, the Judicial College and the Judicial Commission support all of the recommendations that have been made to us. More importantly, we have already begun the work to implement them and this will continue as a matter of priority.

Some will be completed in the short term; others will take longer. We will track and report our progress over time.

Our aim is clear. We will do all that we can:

- to stop sexual harassment happening
- and, if it does occur,
 - to minimise the harm on those affected
 - to improve reporting systems and support the wellbeing of those affected
 - and provide a robust system of accountability.

I would like to thank Dr Szoke for leading the Review with rigour, understanding and sensitivity. Thank you also to the many people and organisations who shared their experiences and insights, from inside and outside the Courts and VCAT.

Preventing and addressing sexual harassment is complex. But that won't deter us from the task ahead.

We will build workplace cultures of respect, fairness and inclusion. Cultures that are safe and where people can trust their colleagues. Cultures which are free from sexual harassment, other wrongful conduct and the barriers they create to workplace participation.

We will build cultures where equal opportunity flourishes.

Cultures where all our people can thrive.

Chief Justice of Victoria, Anne Ferguson
April 2021