



14th May 2026

The Hon Justice François Kunc
Chair
Law Admissions Consultative Committee
Legal Services Council

By email: submissions@legalservicescouncil.org.au

Dear Justice Kunc,

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Consultation Paper on the Review of Practical Legal Training (PLT).

We consider the need to embed First Nations cultural capability (or what is being termed Indigenous Cultural Competency in the review) to be urgent and critical.

What is the problem and what is at stake?

There have been countless inquiries and reviews and high profile cases across Australia calling for the legal profession to improve its cultural capability in supporting and representing First Nations clients - from the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, to the coronial inquest into the death in custody of Ms Veronica Nelson, a proud Gunditjimara, Dja Dja Wurung, Wiradjuri and Yorta Yorta woman.

While there is a growing focus on building into the curriculum of many law schools around Australia content relating to First Nations - settler colonial history, and some focus on cultural capability skills building to prepare students for entry into professional practice, substantial knowledge and practice skills gaps persist. From one law school to the next across the country, there is radical inconsistency in standards, and a lack of adequate mechanisms nationally for enforcing such standards. To date, legal education across the country, with a couple of exceptions, is not designed in such a way as to make it mandatory for legal practitioners to learn and demonstrate First Nations cultural capability at any stage of their education and training – from progress through law school, to PLT and post admission ongoing professional development.

What is at stake here is nothing short of *lives*, First Nations people's lives. Law students are graduating and being admitted when they are singularly not fit and ready to begin working in culturally safe and appropriate ways with First Nations clients. This is profoundly consequential, with systemic injustices continuing to be perpetrated, including disproportionate child removals, over-incarceration, deaths in custody. It is simply not sufficient or acceptable that we wait until post admission to try to compensate for these capability deficiencies. What happens in law school should be designed to meet expectations in post admission practice. PALT ideally could be



focused more on First Nations cultural capability in relation to substantive law professional development, while *foundational* First Nations cultural capability should be a mandatory integral component of each prior stage of education and practice development. VALS strongly believes that the current review needs to reframe the problem as one of recognising First Nations cultural capability as a core mandatory requirement across the lifespan of legal education and professional development.

The need for a First Nations-led process of reform

VALS cannot stress enough that this urgent reform must also recognise the need for meaningful partnering with First Nations stakeholders. To date there has been inadequate consultation with First Nations scholars, First Nations community leaders and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations. We call for law schools and law accrediting bodies to ensure a First Nations self-determined approach to incorporating cultural capability in any updated accreditation/curriculum requirements.

In this context, VALS has been leading a groundbreaking project in Victoria, in partnership with the Law Institute of Victoria and Victoria Legal Aid, to address legal practitioner cultural capability building post admission. The program consists of a First Nations Cultural Capability Framework (which can be found [here](#)), together with an online knowledge-based module, face to face training, a takeaway practice guide and a series of Community of Practice sessions. We firmly believe that this First Nations-led initiative demonstrates the feasibility and necessity of a collaborative model between the legal sector and First Nations peoples to support capability building in the legal profession. We stand ready to support and enable regulators and other stakeholders to consider how this could be applied in relation to law school curriculum reform.

Consistent with our position here, VALS takes this opportunity to endorse and support the submission of the First Nations Legal Professional Standards Working Party. In particular, we strongly support the proposal for:

- a coordinated reform agenda ‘to ensure that ICC is recognised as a core competency throughout legal education, practical legal training, post admission legal training and practice’ (p.2);
- establishment of a National ICC Implementation Working Group, including representation from NATSILS; and
- that the National ICC Implementation Working Group be Indigenous-led and resourced to carry out its functions.

Finally, we commend to you the Reckoning and Reimagining Workshop Communique: https://law.unimelb.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/5446574/Reckoning-and-Reimagining-Communique.pdf, together with the full workshop report.

Yours sincerely,

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Feedback Form: Review of practical legal training

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Are you responding as (select one):

- ☐ Individual
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- ☐ National
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Your submission will be shared with the Admissions Committee and the Law Admissions Consultative Committee and may also be shared with the Legal Services Council.

Unless stakeholders advise us otherwise, submissions may be published on the Council's website.

May we publish your response on the Legal Services Council's website (select one)?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No

