

14 May 2026

Dear Chair of the Admissions Committee

Re: Consultation Paper – Review of Practical Legal Training

Women's Legal Service Victoria (Women's Legal) thanks the Legal Services Council for the opportunity to provide input into the Review of Practical Legal Training.

About Women's Legal

Women's Legal is a specialist, trauma-informed, state-wide for-purpose organisation that has been providing free specialist legal services to women since 1982. We work with, and for, women and non-binary people to address legal issues arising from family violence and sexual violence.

Women's Legal's vision is that women and non-binary people live free from violence and discrimination in a gender-equitable society. Our unique contribution to this vision – as lawyers, social workers, financial counsellors, advocates and educators – is to work alongside women and non-binary people experiencing disadvantage to promote their rights to live free from violence and make informed choices about their relationships.

Our submission draws on our extensive experience training and building the capability of lawyers to provide high quality services to victim-survivors of family and sexual violence. In 2024-25, we

- provided training to 299 legal assistance sector lawyers across family violence, family law, child protection, migration, and victims of crime.
- designed and piloted the Emerging Lawyers Program, an 18-month program for 14 early career lawyers that provides intensive on-the-job learning and specialist training and professional development support.
- delivered a learning and development program comprising training sessions, a community of practice, casework strategy sessions, reverse shadowing and secondary consultations to build the capability of lawyers across 5 community legal centres to deliver end-to-end family law services.

"The Emerging Lawyers Program is a passport to being a lawyer in the CLC space. The soft skills, practical skills, the legal skills, all combined into an effective supportive program to help [Emerging Lawyers] come out the other side."

- Emerging Lawyer, Pilot Program

Our training and capacity building team is a multidisciplinary team of 20 staff with expertise in instructional design, adult education, training design and delivery, capacity building, project management and legal service delivery.

Our concerns

Women's Legal agrees with the consultation paper's starting point: that "high quality legal education and training is essential for the effective operation of the justice system and to protect consumers of legal services".

Women's Legal is very concerned with the suggested changes to practical legal training (PLT) outlined in the consultation paper, and query whether proposed changes achieve the stated goals of high-quality education, quality of services, and access to justice.

Our feedback focuses on:

- the suggested introduction of post admission legal training (PALT)
- implementation risks
- inclusion and accessibility principles
- updates to core competencies.

Post Admission Legal Training

In our experience, 30 hours of PALT following a significantly reduced PLT coursework program would be inadequate for supporting and training junior lawyers to provide high quality services to clients.

In contrast, our Emerging Lawyers Program provides a centralised learning and development program – including training, shadowing and reverse shadowing, moot courts, client simulations, and a community of practice – for graduate lawyers (that have completed their PLT). For the current intake of Emerging Lawyers, we will deliver **approximately 200 hours of training** over an 18-month period.

The Emerging Lawyers Program pilot successfully built the capability of Emerging Lawyers to effectively deliver family violence and family law legal services.

Across seven competencies, overall Emerging Lawyers reported a positive change in their knowledge and skills from the baseline survey completed at the commencement to the final survey administered at the end of the program. This included a:

- 83% increase ability to provide family violence duty lawyer services and advise clients on intersecting legal problems.
- 75% increase in knowledge of family law legislation and ability to undertake family law casework.

While one driver to establish the Emerging Lawyer Program was the finding that graduate lawyers are not job ready to provide services to community legal centre (CLC) clients, we strongly recommend the focus should be on reviewing and updating PLT coursework not significantly pairing it back.

We encourage further consultation with the sector to explore and identify options to improve coursework. We note the paper identifies examples of good practice that could be the basis for a strengthened PLT coursework offering.

Further, we caution against the conclusion that PLT coursework should be shortened because of survey feedback on poor experiences of PLT. The focus should be on quality, with the duration of PLT coursework determined by the duration required to deliver a reviewed, updated and improved curriculum.

Progressing with the suggested changes to PLT will likely negatively impact:

- the quality of legal services provided to clients,
- access to justice,
- the wellbeing and career opportunities of junior lawyers.

Feasibility and likely implementation challenges

We identify the following challenges with the proposal to introduce PALT:

- the significant additional supervision and training impost on employers, and
- inaccessibility of high quality continuing professional development due to cost.

In the CLC sector there are already a limited number of graduate lawyer roles due to the resourcing required to adequately support and train junior lawyers. We understand that in the private sector – particularly in small to medium size law firms that make up the majority of employers in the legal sector – there are also fewer graduate roles available for similar reasons.

We are concerned that the introduction of PALT, requiring additional training and support of graduate lawyers by employers, will result in perverse consequences including:

- a further reduction in the number of available graduate positions,
- a reduction in career pathways for law graduates,
- skills shortages in the legal assistance sector, and
- reduced access to justice because legal assistance sector organisations cannot recruit adequately skilled lawyers.

In our experience – both delivering a legal service and providing training to graduate lawyers – high-quality supervision is essential to building the knowledge and skills of junior lawyers while supporting lawyer wellbeing (avoiding burn out and vicarious trauma).

In the Emerging Lawyers Program, many participating CLCs reflected they did not have the resourcing or capacity to provide the level of support – both training and supervision – to a graduate lawyer without the support of the Program’s centralised learning and development activities. The proposed approach to PALT creates even greater responsibilities on supervisors, with the risk that this is not resourced; and therefore, not provided.

We acknowledge the initiatives of the Victorian Legal Services Board + Commission focused on improving supervision in the sector, and support further initiatives that build on work undertaken to date.

Inclusion

While the demographics of the legal profession are changing, there continues to be under-representation of First Nations people, people with disabilities, culturally and racially marginalised people, trans and gender diverse people and people from the broader LGBTQIA+ community. There is also under representation of people from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Any changes to PLT need to be assessed against the impact on accessibility and inclusion, this includes changes that:

- impact access to fee support help for PLT students
- require graduate lawyers to incur additional CPD costs
- impact ability to engage in PLT coursework and PALT.

We are also concerned that the paper suggests introducing all changes from 2028. Given the scope of reforms proposed, we suggest additional time would be required to implement the changes. Further, we suggest transitional arrangements be included as part of implementation to not unfairly impact graduate law students commencing PLT in 2028. They will have not received more practical focused training in their law degree but then are required to complete the significantly reduced PLT coursework offering. This does not set this cohort of graduate lawyers up for success and risks impacting their employment opportunities.

Core competencies

We strongly support updates to the PLT Competency Standards to reflect the knowledge and skills required to work with clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. We recommend that this is expanded to include working with First Nations clients. We suggest this is guided by the [First Nations Cultural Capability Framework](#), developed the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service.

The ability to identify and respond (including trauma-informed practice) to family violence when working with clients should also be included as a core competency given the prevalence of family violence as a legal issue across a range of practice areas.

We further agree on the inclusion of a focus on practice skills including negotiation, mediation and drafting documents.

We note the suggestion to exclude content in PLT coursework on preventing and addressing sexual harassment. The legal sector has one of the highest rates of sexual harassment and the Victorian Equality Opportunity and Human Rights Commission has [found](#) that 63% of reported incidents of sexual harassment occurred within the first 12 months of employment. Further the Victorian Legal Services Board + Commission has [found](#) that reports of harmful behaviour are highest amongst law graduates. It is essential that PLT students are equipped with the knowledge and skills in the event they experience sexual harassment or discrimination once entering the workforce. Training also is essential to shifting attitudes and culture in the profession.

Women's Legal is available to discuss this submission if that would be of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Claudia Fatone
Chief Executive Officer