Workplace contact officer network guideline

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1. Overview

The Workplace Contact Officer (WCO) Network comprises a dedicated team of trained volunteers who provide valuable support across the VCAA. The WCO Network stands ready to support employees facing various challenges, including harassment, discrimination, bullying, victimisation, and family violence. At the forefront of the VCAA’s commitment to a workplace defined by respect and equal opportunity, the WCO Network ensures that all employees are entitled to dignity and fair treatment. This guideline outlines the ways in which WCOs can aid employees by providing information, guidance, and support in resolving issues, understanding available options, and preventing escalations. Additionally, it underscores the pivotal role of WCOs in addressing concerns and facilitating access to essential support services.

1. Objectives

The objectives of this guideline are to:

* **provide a supportive environment:** provide all employees with access to a safe and supportive space to address matters related to harassment, discrimination, bullying, victimisation, and family violence
* **promote a respectful workplace culture**: foster a workplace culture that values and promotes respect, equality, and the well-being of all employees
* **prevent and address inappropriate behavior**: establish an effective system for preventing and addressing inappropriate behavior in the workplace, thereby reducing matters related to harassment, discrimination, bullying, and victimisation
* **support victims of family violence**: offer resources and assistance to employees affected by family violence, helping them access the support they need either within or outside the workplace
* **provide information and guidance:** ensure employees can access accurate information and guidance on how to contact a WCO and navigate available options for resolution
* **maintain confidentiality**: emphasise the importance of maintaining confidentiality in discussions with WCOs to create a safe space for employees to share their concerns.
1. Principles
	1. Impartiality and fairness

WCOs must maintain impartiality and treat all employees and concerns fairly. They should not take sides or show bias in their role as intermediaries. Every employee should have an equal opportunity to access the support and assistance provided by the WCO network, regardless of their position, background, or the nature of their concern.

* 1. Respect for diversity

The WCO network should respect and embrace the diversity of the VCAA workforce by understanding and acknowledging the unique cultural, social, and personal aspects that each employee brings to the workplace. WCOs should be culturally sensitive and responsive to the needs of a diverse workforce and ensure that support services are inclusive and accessible to all.

* 1. Transparency and accountability

The WCO network should operate with transparency in its processes and decision making. WCOs should be clear about the steps involved in addressing concerns and should communicate these steps to the employees seeking assistance. Furthermore, the network should maintain records of their activities, subject to privacy and confidentiality rules.

1. Support for a respectful workplace culture

Fundamental to a respectful workplace culture is an effective system to address concerns or issues of inappropriate behavior, WCOs are a vital support for employees who want to know how to address harassment, discrimination, bullying, victimization, or understand the support the VCAA can provide in these cases.

1. Ways in which a WCO can support employees

A WCO can provide support to employees through the following.

* Information and guidance: Offering information, guidance, and support to help employees understand their options for resolving issues.
* Resources for family violence: Providing information, guidance, and resources specifically tailored to address matters related to family violence.
* VCAA policies and procedures: Explaining the VCAA's policies, processes, and principles, ensuring employees are informed about the guidelines in place.
* Access to key support services: Referring employees to essential support services, both within and outside of the organisation, such as the Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
* Exploring alternatives: Assisting employees in exploring alternative solutions when they face challenges that cannot be resolved independently. This may include steps to formalise a complaint or engage in formal resolution processes.
1. Seeking assistance

Employees can contact any WCO across the network. A list of available WCOs is provided under ‘Contact and further information’ in this guideline.

1. Contact and further information

The following resources are available on the VCAA website.

* Workplace contact officers network list.
* Workplace contact officer key support services.
* Workplace contact officer poster.
* Contact Respectful and Safe Workplaces by email: respectful.workplaces@education.vic.gov.au
1. Managing this guideline
	1. Authorisation

This guideline is issued under the authority of the Chief Executive Officer.

* 1. Accountability for the guideline

The owner for this guideline is VCAA Human Resources. The owner reports to the Chief Executive Officer on the management of this guideline.

The owner is responsible for:

* development and regular review of this guideline
* development of protocols, processes and guidelines to support implementation
* monitoring compliance of applicable employees, organisational units, and/or locations.
	1. Important dates

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| Date of adoption:  | July 2024  |
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