

## **Improving legal services**

In addition to investigating and disciplining lawyers, the Legal Services Commissioner is committed to raising the standard of legal services provided by lawyers across Victoria. This is evident through the Legal Services Commissioner's process for handling disciplinary complaints regarding lawyers.

The Legal Services Commissioner receives approximately 1,500 complaints per year about the conduct of lawyers. While the majority of these complaints result in no disciplinary findings against lawyers, the complaints nonetheless have an impact on lawyers. For example, when the Legal Services Commissioner receives a complaint about a lawyer, a copy is sent to the lawyer to bring the conduct issue to the attention of the lawyer for consideration and explanation.

Even where the Commissioner does not undertake a formal investigation, this process highlights to lawyers what clients and third parties expect of legal services.

Where the Legal Services Commissioner proceeds to investigate the conduct of a lawyer, the lawyer is required to explain his or her conduct in relation to the issues raised in a complaint. This often achieves a satisfactory response resulting in the client withdrawing their complaint. For example, in 2007-08, 20% of complaints were withdrawn as the complainant was satisfied with the lawyer's explanation.

In one-third of disciplinary complaints received in 07-08, the Legal Services Commissioner made recommendations to the lawyer for improved practices and/or resulted in the lawyer apologising to the complainant.

The above figures indicate that while not all complaints lead to disciplinary consequences, complaints can often have an effect on a lawyer. They can result in the lawyer improving their practices and highlight issues which clients regard as unsatisfactory service.