

# Gender Equality Action Plan

2022 – 2025



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# Acknowledgements

## **Acknowledgement of Country**

The Department of Education and Training (the department) acknowledges and pays respects to Elders and all Victorian Aboriginal communities. We honour and respect Traditional Owners, past and present, and value the rich culture and history of the First Peoples of this land.

# Message from the Secretary

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I am pleased to release the department's Gender Equality Action Plan 2022 – 2025 (the plan).

The plan sets out our commitment to ensuring a gender diverse, inclusive, and respectful workplace that focuses on the equity and wellbeing of all staff. It also reflects our commitment to leading the right kind of change for our staff which in turn benefits the broader Victorian community.

This Action Plan, the first of its kind for the department, forms part of our response to the *Gender Equality Act 2020* (Vic) – a once-in-a-generation opportunity to strengthen workplace gender equality and shift attitudes, behaviours, and gender equality outcomes for all Victorians.

Everyone has a part to play in continuing to improve our culture, and this plan shows that there are many things that each of us can do every day to contribute to this. As we implement the plan we will challenge stereotypes and barriers to ensure staff can enjoy fulfilling careers in the department and in our schools.

We want all our staff, and particularly our leaders, modelling inclusion, flexible working, and equality, and this plan sets out a range of complimentary activities to support this. As one of the largest employers in the State, we have a significant opportunity to become an employer of choice, and a leader in workplace gender equality and workplace inclusion.




The development of this plan involved extensive research and consultation across the department. I thank everyone involved for sharing their experiences and ideas.

I'm excited to start implementing this Action Plan with you, to achieve gender equity for all.

**Jenny Atta**  
Secretary  
Department of Education and Training

# Introduction

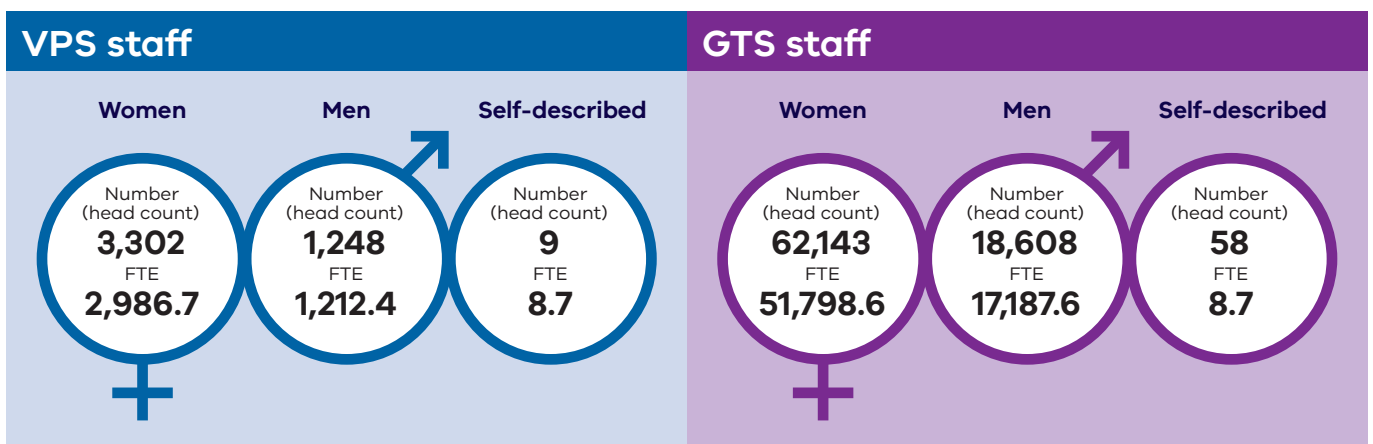
The action plan is the department’s strategic plan to promote workplace gender equality as required by the *Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic)* (the Act). It sets out the department’s commitment to ensuring a gender equitable, safe, inclusive and respectful workplace for all staff employed by the department, in our schools and our corporate workplaces, and to addressing gendered structural and government cultural inequality across all that we do. It also has a focus on intersectional gender inequality<sup>1</sup>, particularly the way in which identity characteristics such as age, sexuality and disability can exacerbate gender inequality.

The department’s services		
<b>Early childhood</b> <b>Birth to 8</b> 	<b>School education</b> <b>5 to 18</b> 	<b>Training and skills</b> <b>15 to 65+</b> 
More than 400,000 children and families	More than 1,000,000 students	More than 290,000 government-subsidised enrolments in Vocational Education and Training (VET)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early learning and development including early childhood education and care (ECEC) services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary education</li> <li>• Secondary education</li> <li>• Special education</li> <li>• Language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical and Further Education (TAFE)</li> <li>• Dual-sector universities</li> <li>• Private registered training providers</li> <li>• Learn Locals</li> </ul>

The department’s two direct workforces, the Victorian Public Service (VPS) and the Government Teaching Service (GTS), are unique and may experience both differences and similarities in workplace gender equality. The department is committed to supporting our workforce in our work locations across corporate and schools workplaces. Our work also impacts on other workforces that we do not directly employ but who deliver education services which have significant influence on learners across all our education settings.

The successful implementation of the action plan relies on the collective effort and accountability of all staff across the VPS and GTS workforce.

## Our direct workforce includes:



<sup>1</sup> Section 6(8) of the Act outlines that gender inequality may be compounded by other forms of disadvantage or discrimination that a person may experience based on Aboriginality, age, disability, ethnicity, gender identity, race, religion, sexual orientation, and other attributes. The Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector (the commission) refers to this concept as intersectional gender inequality.

The action plan incorporates data and experiences collected from VPS and GTS staff through the workforce gender equality audit and a range of workforce consultations.

Promoting equality has benefits for all staff and our organisation including:

- addressing gendered stereotypes and disrespectful and discriminatory behaviour
- contributes to staff retention, motivation and commitment and ensure that every employee has an equitable and safe workplace, free from gendered stereotypes and disrespectful and discriminatory behaviour.
- improved outcomes for all learners, their families and community members.
- benefits for all genders, including women, men and gender diverse groups.

The department recognises and embraces all gender identities and expressions. The plan focuses on gender equality broadly, including the experiences of trans and gender diverse staff. Due to the very low numbers of staff who identified their gender as self-described in our HR system, the workforce data analysis that contributed to the formation of the plan focuses on comparisons of women and men. The plan will drive economic, social, and wellbeing benefits for staff and the community, and address the structural discrimination and disadvantage that women and trans and gender diverse people may experience as a result of gendered stereotypes, gendered expectations, systemic and societal factors.

## Background

In response to the 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence, the Victorian Government released its first [Safe and Strong Gender Equality Strategy](#). Through this strategy, the Victorian Government committed to legislative action to promote gender equality.

The *Gender Equality Act 2020* (Vic) (the Act) was developed through extensive consultation and is reflective of the Victorian community's views and experiences. The Act is the first of its kind in Australia and is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to strengthen workplace gender equality. The development of the plan follows the gender equality principles as required by the Act.

The Act is necessary because women experience gender inequality in multiple areas of society. For example, women disproportionately:

- experience family violence, sexual harassment and assault
- occupy lower paid, less valued and more insecure employment
- undertake the majority of domestic work even when partnered, and unpaid volunteer work.

### The department's existing strategies and initiatives

There are a range of programs and initiatives already in place that support workplace gender equality, diversity and inclusion at the department. These include the department's VPS People Strategy 2021–24 and the Respectful Relationships initiative. Additionally, the department promotes careers in early childhood education to people of all genders, supports the system to increase the numbers of women in trades, and provides free sanitary products in every government school in Victoria.

The department delivers programs and initiatives that form part of multiple whole of Victorian government strategies such as [Free from Violence: Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence](#), [Safe and Strong: Victoria's gender equality strategy](#), [the Victorian LGBTIQ+ strategy](#), [the Victorian State Disability Plan](#), and many others.




### Legislative framework

The overarching legislation underpinning the plan is the *Gender Equality Act 2020* (Vic) including the gender equality principles as set out in section 6 of the Act. The Act is closely aligned with the [Equal Opportunity Act 2010](#) (Vic), and the [Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006](#) (Vic). Other relevant legislation can be viewed in the [Inclusive Workplaces guide](#).

# Gender Equality Action Plan

## Vision

The department is committed to establishing a gender equitable, safe, inclusive and respectful workplace for all staff, and to addressing gendered structural and cultural inequality.

Focus Area	 <p>Promote equality in the composition of our workforce</p>	 <p>Reduce the gender pay gap</p>	 <p>Ensure a safe, inclusive and respectful workplace</p>
Priorities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Improve data capture and analysis to monitor, report and drive improvement</li> <li>2 Align key policies and practices with business planning processes to promote gender equality and inclusion</li> <li>3 Embed inclusive recruitment and career development opportunities for all staff to have the same opportunities to progress</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Build a strong awareness of the importance and benefits of gender equality and drive the message of responsibility for all</li> <li>2 Promote understanding and availability of leave types and flexible working in all roles and levels and for all diverse staff</li> <li>3 Develop and promote resources to drive change in gendered occupational segregation trends</li> <li>4 Develop and implement an effective gender impact assessment and reporting process</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Empower all staff to build an inclusive and respectful workplace culture which has shared responsibility from staff and leaders to prevent and address harassment, bullying, sexual harassment and discrimination.</li> <li>2 Increase the capability of people managers and leaders to address and respond to disrespectful behaviours and complaints</li> <li>3 Embed a culture of respect and gender equality for school workforces</li> <li>4 Promote the range of safe reporting options and the supports available for staff experiencing or witnessing disrespectful or inappropriate behaviours</li> </ol>

## Annual Implementation Plan

Specific actions we will deliver on the focus areas including measures and accountabilities

## Process

### Progress Reporting

To embed a culture of accountability, the department will track progress, measure the impact and report to:

- the Culture, People and Integrity Committee every 6 months
- the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector every 2 years



# Focus Areas and Actions

## 2022 – 2025

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The department's plan provides the framework to promote workplace gender equality across our VPS and GTS workforces. Its accompanying annual implementation plan provides specific actions and measures to track progress against the [Workplace Gender Equality Indicators](#) over time. Staff located in corporate, schools and public entities can play an active role to implement the plan in everyday behaviours, culture, values and practices.

The following focus areas have been developed based on the results of the department's 2021 workplace gender audit, feedback from consultations with our staff and evidence-based research. The focus areas identify the priorities and actions that our people feel will improve gender equality for both VPS and GTS staff in the department. You can see the [Workplace Gender Audit 2021 Summary Report](#) on our [Gender Equality webpage](#) and read more about the consultation approach in Appendix 2.

### Focus Area 1:

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#### Promote equality in the composition of our workforces

##### What?

The gender composition at all levels of the workforce provides an insight into areas of imbalance when it comes to gender and diversity.

Gender bias and gender stereotypes can influence recruitment, promotion, and career progression. Gendered occupational differences are driven by societal gendered norms and stereotypes about what work is appropriate for men and women, as well as structural factors including access to flexible working arrangements and employment conditions that attract people to different roles.

##### How?

Priorities include:

- improve data capture and analysis to monitor, report and drive improvement
- align key policies and practices with business planning processes to promote gender equality and inclusion
- embed inclusive recruitment and career development opportunities for all staff to have the same opportunities to progress

Relevant workplace gender equality indicators:

- gender composition at all levels of the workforce
- gender composition of governing bodies
- gendered work segregation
- recruitment and promotion

## Focus Area 2:

### Reduce the gender pay gap

#### What?

The gender pay gap measures the difference between the average earnings of women and men in the workforce. It is *not* the difference between two people being paid differently for work of the same or comparable value on the basis of gender, which is unlawful. This is called equal pay. Closing the gender pay gap goes beyond just ensuring equal pay. It requires cultural change to remove the barriers to the full and equal participation of women in the workforce.

Societal and cultural factors mean women are far more likely than men to work flexibly, especially by working part-time, and taking longer parental leave. Ensuring equitable access to flexible work arrangements and leave options will help to reduce the gender pay gap and improve retention of women in our workforces.

The gap between women's and men's earnings reflects the historic and systemic undervaluing of women's workplace contributions and the significant barriers that lead to the under-representation of women in senior executive and management roles.

The department's 2021 Workplace Gender Audit found that gender pay gaps exist across both the VPS and GTS workforces (8.7% and 9.8% respectively). While no pay gap is acceptable, the department's results are significantly better than the Australian average gender pay gap (14.2%) and the Victorian average gender pay gap (12.2%)<sup>2</sup>. However, a pay gap does exist and action is needed to eliminate it.

The department's gender pay gap is largely attributed to a 'progression gap': the part of the gender pay gap due to differences in the gender composition at different classification levels – which reflects differences in progression (and recruitment) rates of genders across classification levels. Women are overrepresented at lower classification levels across both the VPS and GTS workforce which is driving the gender pay gap.

The department's 2021 Workplace Gender Audit found that across both the VPS and GTS workforces, women were more likely to work part-time, to use flexible work arrangements, and access Parental Leave and Carer's Leave. Only women used family violence leave<sup>3</sup>.

#### How?

Priorities include:

- build a strong awareness of the importance and benefits of gender equality and drive the message of responsibility for all
- promote understanding and availability of leave types and flexible working in all roles and levels and for all diverse staff
- develop and promote resources to drive change in gendered occupational segregation trends
- develop and implement an effective gender impact assessment and reporting process

Relevant workplace gender equality indicators:

- gender pay equity<sup>4</sup>
- recruitment and promotion
- leave and flexibility

<sup>2</sup> Source: [Australia's Gender Pay Gap Statistics | WGEA](#).

<sup>3</sup> Between 1 July 2020 and 30 June 2021.

<sup>4</sup> As of 1 February 2022, proposed amendments to the *Gender Equality Regulations 2020 (Vic)* require a Gender Equality Action Plan to take into account 'gender pay equity principles'. These have been incorporated into the action plan (see appendix 1).



## Focus Area 3:

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### Ensure a safe, inclusive and respectful workplace

#### What?

A range of harmful and disrespectful behaviours occur in the workplace including bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment. Women, people with a disability, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender diverse, and intersex people are more likely to experience these behaviours at work than others.

The department's 2021 Workplace Gender Audit showed that women with specific intersecting identities, such as women with disability, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women, and LGBTIQ+ women were significantly more likely to have experienced sexual harassment, bullying and discrimination within the last 12 months compared to other women. Consequently, all priorities must include an intersectional approach.

Addressing these behaviours and promoting a culture of inclusion and respect will not only ensure compliance with legislation but will provide all employees with a safe and constructive work environment. This will support increased diversity of staff across all roles and levels and improve the outcomes for learners, families and the community.

#### How?

Priorities include:

- empower all staff to build an inclusive and respectful workplace culture which has shared responsibility from staff and leaders to prevent and address harassment, bullying, sexual harassment and discrimination.
- increase the capability of people managers and leaders to address and respond to disrespectful behaviours and complaints
- embed a culture of respect and gender equality for the school workforce
- promote the range of safe reporting options and the supports available for staff experiencing or witnessing disrespectful or inappropriate behaviours

Relevant workplace gender equality indicators:

- workplace sexual harassment
- gendered work segregation

# Resourcing and Measuring Progress

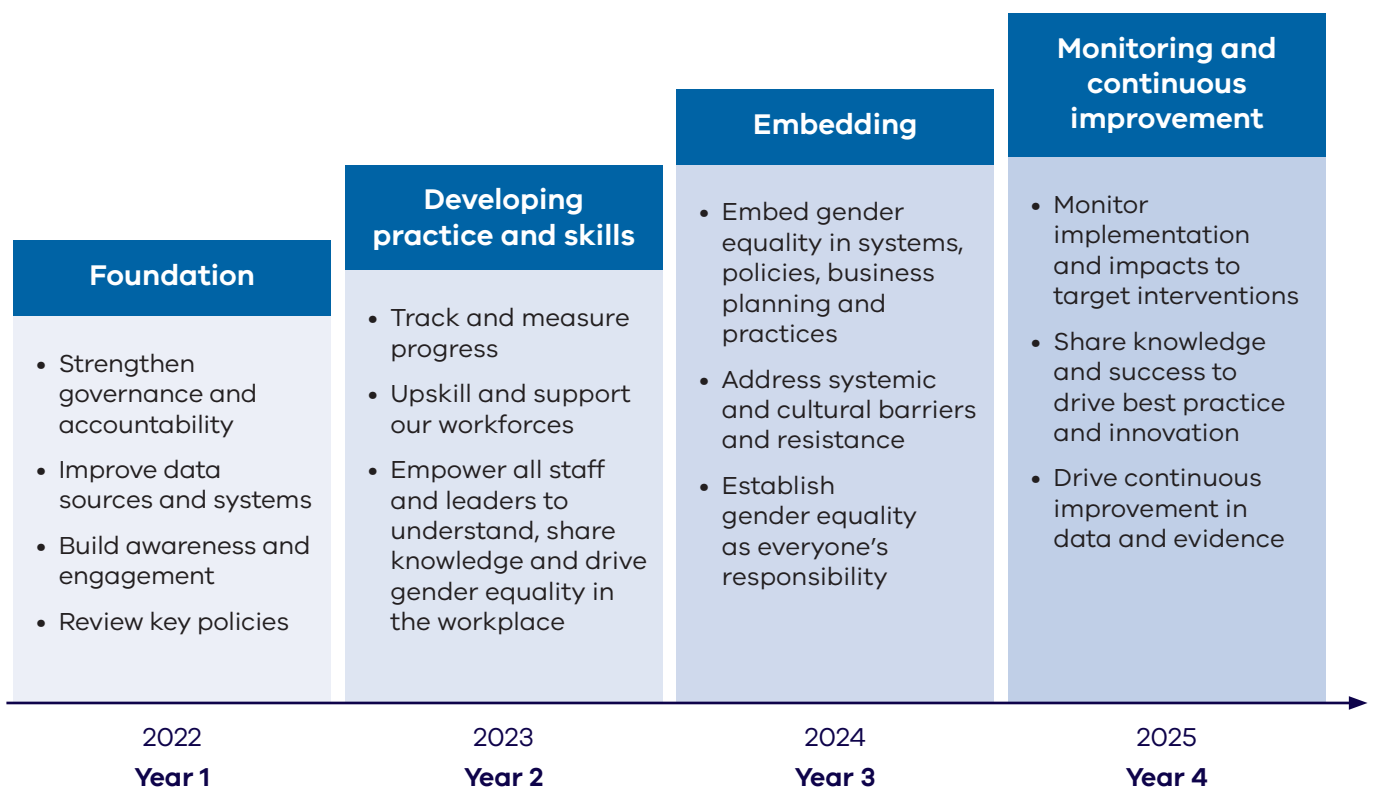
This 4-year plan is supported by the department's leadership and requires them and each and every staff member to take action to achieve its vision.

An annual implementation plan including measures, timelines and accountabilities will enable the department to report our progress against the Workplace Gender Equality Indicators.

The department will resource and report on progress against the plan, including:

- seeking approval by the executive team, with ongoing monitoring and reviews by the Culture, People and Integrity Committee

- training, development and awareness building activities will continue to be offered to staff as an effective way to build a shared understanding and capabilities in the areas of gender equality, diversity and inclusion and to create a culturally safe organisation
- reporting to the commission every two years on the results of our regular workforce gender audits, and progress on the actions
- managing the development of an annual implementation plan (with a full-time FTE in people division)



We can all make a contribution to bring about change. Everyone has a role to play in improving gender equality in the department and this requires commitment at all levels to be successful.



# Glossary

**Carer** – An individual who provides personal care, support and assistance to another individual who needs it because that other individual has a disability, a medical condition (including a terminal or chronic illness), a mental illness, or is frail and aged.

**Disability** – Persons with disabilities include those who have physical, mental health, intellectual, neurological or sensory impairments which may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

**Gender** – Part of how you understand who you are and how you interact with other people. Many people understand their gender as being a man or woman. Some people understand their gender as a mix of these or neither. A person's gender and their expression of their gender can be shown in different ways, such as through behaviour or physical appearance.

**Gender equality** – Gender equality is when people of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities.

**Gender diverse** – An umbrella term for a range of genders expressed in different ways. Gender diverse people use many terms to describe themselves. Language in this area is dynamic, particularly among young people, who are more likely to describe themselves as non-binary.

**Gendered stereotypes** – Gendered stereotypes are a generalised view or preconception about gender attributes, characteristics and roles.

**Gendered work segregation** – Workplace gender segregation is the unequal distribution of genders across certain occupations, industries and hierarchies. Segregation tends to follow traditional gender lines, with women disproportionately represented in caring and administrative roles, and men disproportionately represented in building and construction trades, engineering and technical occupations as well as in leadership roles across all industries.

**Inclusion** – Empowering access to opportunities, dealing with structural inequalities, tackling unconscious bias to have equal access to all parts of society.

**Intersectionality** – This is an approach to understanding how social meanings related to the way we categorise and identify can overlap and interconnect. This creates different layers and types of discrimination or disadvantage for either an individual or group. Categories include gender, sexual orientation, sex characteristics, ethnicity, language, faith, class, socioeconomic status, ability and age.

**Trans (transgender) person** – Someone whose gender does not only align with the one assigned at birth. Not all trans people will use this term to describe themselves.

**Self-described gender** – An individual with a self-described gender may identify as non-binary, trans, gender diverse, agender, genderqueer, genderfluid or using any other term.

**Stereotypes** – Making assumptions about an entire group of people and generalising all people in a group to be the same, without considering individual differences. We often base our stereotypes on misconceptions or incomplete information.

# Appendix 1

## Gender Pay Equity Principles

The below gender pay equity principles have been taken into consideration in the development of the plan:

- a. equal pay for work of equal or comparable value, which refers to work valued as equal or comparable in terms of skill, effort, responsibility and working conditions, including different types of work;
- b. employment and pay practices are free from bias and discrimination, including the effects of unconscious bias and assumptions based on gender;
- c. employment and pay practices, pay rates and systems are transparent and information about these matters is readily accessible and understandable;
- d. employment and pay practices recognise and account for different patterns of labour force participation by employees who undertake unpaid or caring work;
- e. interventions and solutions are collectively developed and agreed to, sustainable and enduring; and
- f. employees, employee representatives and employers work collaboratively to achieve mutually agreed outcomes.

# Appendix 2

## Gender Equality Action Plan Development Process

The plan was developed through extensive consultation<sup>5</sup> with VPS and GTS employees and key stakeholders including the governing bodies, employee representatives, and staff-led networks, with a strong focus on intersectionality to ensure the plan considered diverse perspectives and voices. Over 15,000 DET staff contributed to the consultation process, which involved:



5 Women's Health in the North and RMIT University assisted with facilitation of consultation sessions and provision of expert advice. Orima Research assisted with consultations with GTS staff through a staff experience survey.

6 These included the Department of Education and Training (DET) African Australian Network, DET Enablers Network, DET Koorie Staff Network, DET Pride Network and the DET Women of Colour Network.



## What we heard: Key feedback from consultation

The feedback across VPS and GTS workforces was similar. Responses to a range of questions from staff across both workforces broadly supported that their workplaces are respectful, safe and inclusive. Generally, VPS and GTS staff agreed that:

- gender is not a barrier to success at the department (77% of VPS staff and 85% of GTS staff)
- their workplace encourages respectful behaviours (86% of VPS staff and 88% of GTS staff)
- their workplace takes steps to eliminate bullying, harassment and discrimination (69% of VPS staff and 81% of GTS staff)
- they feel culturally safe at work (81% of VPS staff and 89% of GTS staff).

### What is going well?



The department takes part in the promotion of **preventing violence against women** by participating in campaigns such as 16 Days of Activism



Staff discussed the need and benefits of having long term **equal paid parental leave** and this was noted as something the department does well, notably since the release of the Victorian Public Service Enterprise Agreement 2020



Overall GTS staff felt that the **Respectful Relationships initiative** was highly effective



Staff felt that **gender equality** is openly discussed in the workplace



**Strong recruitment, flexible work and leave policies** were noted



The majority of staff were aware of the **Family Violence Leave Policy** and how it could apply to them



The **Safe Schools program** was mentioned as a good initiative

## What are some areas for improvement?



More is needed to **support women in their careers, and into leadership roles**, particularly for women with specific intersectional identities<sup>7</sup>



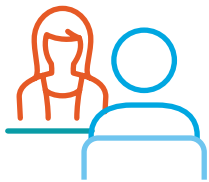
Women are **disproportionately represented in 'traditionally female' positions** which are also lower paying roles



**Sharing gender balance** and pay gap data across the workforce to increase transparency and empower action



Specific action is needed to address that **women with specific intersectional identities** reported experiencing more disrespectful behaviours from colleagues



**More support is needed for staff experiencing discrimination and harassment** including ensuring all staff are aware of the available reporting options, workplace supports, restorative practices and resources



**More transparency** around recruitment, secondment and higher duties processes and progression opportunities



**Unconscious bias** is an identified issue, particularly in relation to promotion and recruitment practices



Up-skilling hiring managers on **recruitment, induction and ongoing support** to staff



**Flexible work is not consistently encouraged** and supported for all genders and parental leave is not encouraged for men and non-binary staff



Need for **greater awareness around gender equality** and the impact of gender stereotypes on decisions around role type and level



More is needed to promote **understanding of factors influencing gender inequity**, including those that impact on career choices, gendered occupations, and safely raising issues in the workplace



**More visibility of flexibility at executive** and all levels across VPS and GTS workforces

<sup>7</sup> Women representing intersectional gender identities include women with disability, LGBTIQ+, culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women.





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