

# Sexual Harassment Contact Officer

## Role description

### Purpose of the role

The Sexual Harassment Contact Officer (SHCO) role provides a first point of contact for workers who may have witnessed or experienced workplace sexual harassment. The SHCO provides information on the options available to workers, and how to access support.

### Responsibilities of the role

The role of the SHCO is to:

- listen to workers who may have witnessed or experienced workplace sexual harassment or other inappropriate behaviour.
- provide information on the options available to workers, including internal and external pathways for addressing sexual harassment; formal and informal grievance processes and resolution mechanisms; and how to access support.
- raise awareness of the role of a SHCO and the policies and procedures that are in place to manage and prevent workplace sexual harassment.

It is important to understand what the role does not do. The SHCO does not:

- advocate on behalf of a worker
- attempt to resolve or investigate complaints
- provide counselling or ongoing support
- confront or engage with the alleged harasser about their behaviour
- keep written records of SHCO discussions (unless the worker reports an incident of potential corrupt conduct / criminal offence).

The SHCO role is voluntary in nature. The role is in addition to an employee's normal duties, but is managed as part of the person's normal position.

## Skills required:

SHCOs should:

- be a positive role model of workplace behaviour
- possess good communication skills to engage with workers on sensitive issues
- demonstrate a commitment to, and understanding of sexual harassment in the workplace and the principles of gender-informed and trauma-informed practice
- maintain privacy and confidentiality.

Selection of SHCOs will be based on an employee's skills, abilities, knowledge and commitment to maintaining a safe and respectful workplace free of sexual harassment.

SHCOs are required to undertake training to understand their role, the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace, and the workplace policies and procedures for managing and preventing workplace sexual harassment. SHCOs will be required to undertake refresher training every two years.

## Confidentiality requirements:

SHCOs must advise workers of any confidentiality limitations at the outset of any discussion. Information disclosed by a worker in relation to workplace sexual harassment must be kept confidential.

It is important for SHCOs to maintain confidentiality for a number of reasons:

- to maintain worker trust and the effectiveness of your role
- to ensure you comply with privacy legislation
- any allegations haven't been investigated and need to comply with procedural fairness
- it is a complainant's right to request not to take action.

As a SHCO you are not required to take action and should maintain confidentiality unless:

- you are made aware of conduct that may constitute corrupt conduct under the *Crime and Corruption Act 2001*
- you believe there is a significant health and safety risk for anyone involved, other workers or the public
- you are made aware of behaviour that may amount to a criminal offence
- the worker gives consent to disclose information to a third party.

Whenever safe, possible and practical, a worker's informed consent should be obtained before sharing their information. In these instances, the SHCO must explain to the worker that they have a duty to escalate the issue to the appropriate authorities within the organisation or, if necessary, external bodies. It is important to assure the worker you will only give enough information to enable the organisation to take action. In you are unsure about the action you need to take; you should talk to your HR contact first without giving identifying details.

### Remember:

- Always act impartially and avoid making judgements.
- Encourage workers to come forward with any concerns without fear of reprisal or victimisation.
- Provide follow-up support (where necessary) and check in with those involved to ensure they have accessed appropriate help and that their work environment remains safe.
- Keep in mind that this role description and tips serve as a general framework. It is important to consult specific organisational and public sector policies and legislation for detailed guidance.

### SHCO interview tips

The role includes	The role does not include
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• listening and empathising</li><li>• providing information on policy, complaints procedures and law</li><li>• informing of internal and external options</li><li>• helping them choose the best option for them</li><li>• providing information on other services or external agencies</li><li>• acting as a role model</li><li>• promoting workplace policies</li><li>• maintaining confidentiality and impartiality</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• advising what course of action to take</li><li>• advocating, judging, representing</li><li>• people</li><li>• counselling</li><li>• investigating, resolving complaints</li><li>• reporting on specifics of cases</li><li>• acting as the 'conscience' at work</li></ul>
Options for complainant	When meeting with someone
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• do nothing</li><li>• talk to the alleged harasser</li><li>• request assistance from the organisation, HR or other, e.g. EAS, union rep, external helpline</li><li>• lodge a complaint with the organisation</li><li>• lodge a complaint outside the organisation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• find a private place</li><li>• set aside enough time</li><li>• use an interpreter if needed</li><li>• explain your role clearly at the start</li><li>• listen actively and carefully</li><li>• ask questions to clarify</li><li>• provide information on policies, the law, appropriate services &amp; other agencies, if asked</li><li>• go through options (pros and cons)</li><li>• ask what the person thinks might resolve the issue</li><li>• let them decide on a suitable option</li><li>• follow up (only if necessary)</li></ul>

Reference: Queensland Human Rights Commission Contact Officer training booklet; 2024