



11 October 2019



Thank you for your email of 16 August 2019 to the Ministry of Education requesting the following information:

*Each of your organisations will have responded to historic abuse claims involving serious sexual, physical and psychological trauma.*

*Some survivors (not all) report the process they are put through to receive recognition and/or compensation for their experiences is as bad or sometimes worse than the original abuse itself. Can each of your organisations therefore please advise:*

- For dealing with people who have experienced trauma, what training have your legal section and historic claim decision makers received?*
- If training was provided, when did it occur, who provided it and what did the course materials include?*
- What counselling/support is or has been provided to staff who have to work in the area of historic abuse resolution?*
- How many staff members have accessed this counselling/support?*

Your request has been considered under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act).

**For dealing with people who have experienced trauma, what training have your legal section and historic claim decision makers received? If training was provided, when did it occur, who provided it and what did the course materials include?**

Historic abuse claims are managed by our Sensitive Claims team. This team is responsible for processing claims and is the liaison point between the Ministry and our claimants or their representatives. This team works closely with our Legal team, and its role includes ensuring claimants understand our claims process and know what's involved.

Advisors in Sensitive Claims team do not investigate or assess claims. Assessments are undertaken by claims assessors appointed by the Ministry. We offer our claimants a meeting with an assessor, where they can discuss their experiences and concerns with someone in person. Our assessors are external to the Ministry and have considerable experience working in senior roles in the public sector, including experience working with a diverse range of people. One is a retired psychologist. If a claimant is unable to manage a meeting with an assessor or prefers not to have one, the claim can be assessed using the papers provided by a legal representative and/or assembled for the claimant.

We receive a variety of claims and understand that making a claim can be a very difficult and challenging experience for our claimants. Our process is flexible and we can accommodate a claimant's needs, particularly around how they would like to engage with us.

To date, staff in the Sensitive Claims team who process claims have not had formal training about working with people who have experienced trauma. During recruitment for the Sensitive Claims team we look for candidates who demonstrate empathy and the ability to sensitively work with claimants. The team is small and our people have learned on the job. The team has recently grown and we are currently considering what training is appropriate for our staff in this area. The senior manager with oversight of the Sensitive Claims area has a post-graduate qualification in psychology.

The Legal team has not undertaken any specific or formal training on working with people who have experienced trauma. This team does not generally have contact with our claimants.

**What counselling/support is or has been provided to staff who have to work in the area of historic abuse resolution?**

All employees of Ministry are entitled to access Employee Assistance Programmes (EAP). EAP Services Ltd is an independent private agency contracted to Education to provide employee assistance counselling.

Any employee may self-refer to the programme if they are experiencing a personal or work-related difficulty and wish to seek assistance in resolving it. They may access up to three one-hour counselling sessions at no cost. The counselling is confidential and management does not receive information about which employees access it. Approval for extra sessions may be granted in certain circumstances. We do not require the employee's identity for this approval.

Counselling takes place off-site, in a safe and confidential environment.

EAP Services also offers e-Counselling (AsKEAP), which can be used in two ways:

- live chat which occurs in real time and is conversational in style
- web journal which is similar to an email but performed completely within the EAP Services website.

AsKEAP can be accessed by any employee at any time in a secure and confidential format (at no cost to them and with no limit to access) via the EAP Services website (<https://www.eapservices.co.nz/services/employee-assistance-programme/>).

**How many staff members have accessed this counselling/support?**

As outlined above, staff members who access counselling/support through EAP do so confidentially. For this reason this part of your request has been refused under 18(e) of the Act as the requested information does not exist.

Thank you again for your email. You have the right to ask an Ombudsman to review this decision. You can do this by writing to [info@ombudsman.parliament.nz](mailto:info@ombudsman.parliament.nz) or Office of the Ombudsman, PO Box 10152, Wellington 6143.

Yours sincerely



Katrina Casey  
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Sector Enablement and Support