

Advocacy, Entitlements and Support (AES) Spot¹

Introduction

In my last article I introduced the Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP). In the last quarter an extraordinary volume of work has been done to ensure the Program will meet its objectives. How ATDP will help ESOs accept, train and develop their claims and welfare practitioners has been defined. The initial training and development pathways are ready for roll-out.

As the Program commences operations on 01 July 2016, a reasonably detailed overview of its key features is therefore timely and possible.

Of course, much further work is to be done before ATDP covers the complete range and level of advocacy services RAAFA and other ESOs provide. Some of the information below may change as further work is done. However, the broad framework is not likely to change significantly.

This article outlines (as at mid-May 2016) the pathways being developed. It focuses on the key features that will affect RAAFA (and other ESOs) at the Branch (or Sub-Branch) level.

Background

You'll remember that ATDP is the end result of a number of reviews undertaken by the late Brigadier Bill Rolfe, AO, (Retd) and other technical consultants over almost a decade. These reviews fed into a working group of ESO Representatives which developed the ATDP Blueprint in mid-2015. RAAFA was represented on that working group.

To remind, a copy of the Blueprint and, importantly, up-to-date FAQs are available on: <http://www.dva.gov.au/consultation-and-grants/reviews> (left click on your choice of the blue hyperlinks at the bottom of the ATDP summary).

Implementation began in October 2015 when the ESO Round Table (comprising ESO National Presidents and including the RAAFA National President) accepted the Blueprint. In September 2015 the (then) Minister for Veterans' Affairs endorsed the Blueprint and nominated the ESO Representatives that will drive implementation.

Historical Situation

The ATDP's predecessor, the Training and Information Program (TIP), was funded by DVA. TIP training was conducted by ex-ADF, experienced Pension and Welfare Officers and VRB and AAT-qualified Advocates. When TIP training started in 1992, the information and communications technology (ICT) that is now accessed routinely was simply not available. Classroom training was the only way of imparting information in a limited timeframe.

TIP Presenters tackled the complexity of the VEA, SRCA and MRCA needed by Pension Officers (claims practitioners),

and range of Acts and number of service providers accessed by Welfare Officers (welfare practitioners) with skill and enthusiasm. Their dedication ensured that the knowledge practitioners required was communicated effectively. Key learnings were reinforced by quizzes and exercises. Learning was greatly facilitated around five years ago by a major innovation – the adoption of e-Learning.

TIP's charter did not, however, extend to ensuring trainees were competent to practice on completion of a TIP course. ESOs were expected to help trainees apply the knowledge conferred by TIP until they were competent to practice. However, very few ESOs were able to provide the mentoring and on-the-job training (OJT) required to build competency. As a result, many (sub)-branches authorised their Pension or Welfare officers before they were competent.

Far too many claims and far too much welfare support was therefore inadequate. As a result, the claims determination and welfare support processes were clogged up and slow to respond. All too often, veterans and their families did not receive the entitlements and services that were legislated or available. Practitioners who had volunteered to help their 'mates' were frustrated by being unable to do so.

Too many felt let down. Too many blamed others. Something had to change.

Key Differences

The first and major difference between TIP and ATDP is the creation of partnerships throughout the ATDP community. Whereas TIP, ESOs and DVA existed in siloes at the national-organisation level, the partnership will bridge and, in time, close the gaps between them. Also, to ensure the needs of separating servicemen and women are attended to, the Department of Defence has joined the partnership. At the state level, the Training Consultative Groups that linked state-level ESO representatives with state-level TIP representatives will transition into multi-State Regional Administration Bodies to ensure ATDP is nationally-consistent. Regular interaction will enable practitioners in small, rural or remote ESO (sub)-branches to access mentoring and OJT, help practitioners consolidate and expand their understanding of veterans' and welfare legislation and policy, and assist them with difficult or complex cases.

The second (and third) difference involves formal integration of the various forms of learning into a single training pathway for each type of practice (eg. Claims and Appeals, and Welfare). The following diagram illustrates the division of a learning process into its three components.

Note that the formal learning component is only 10% of the total learning process. Note also that this 10% includes online as well as face-to-face courses. The other 90% of the learning process is conducted by the RAAFA Branch, either individually if the Branch has the capability, or as a member of a Community of Practice (CoP). For many practitioners, CoP will be a new term, even though many already exist by another name. Pension and Welfare Officer Networks (PWON), Veterans Centres, RSL District Councils, and informal grouping of practitioners – many online – are, in many respects, Communities of Practice.

¹ This article was prepared by R.N. (Dick) Kelloway, National VP AES, Member of the ATDP Strategic Governance Board, and practicing Advocate for RAAFA, APPVA and VCMNC.

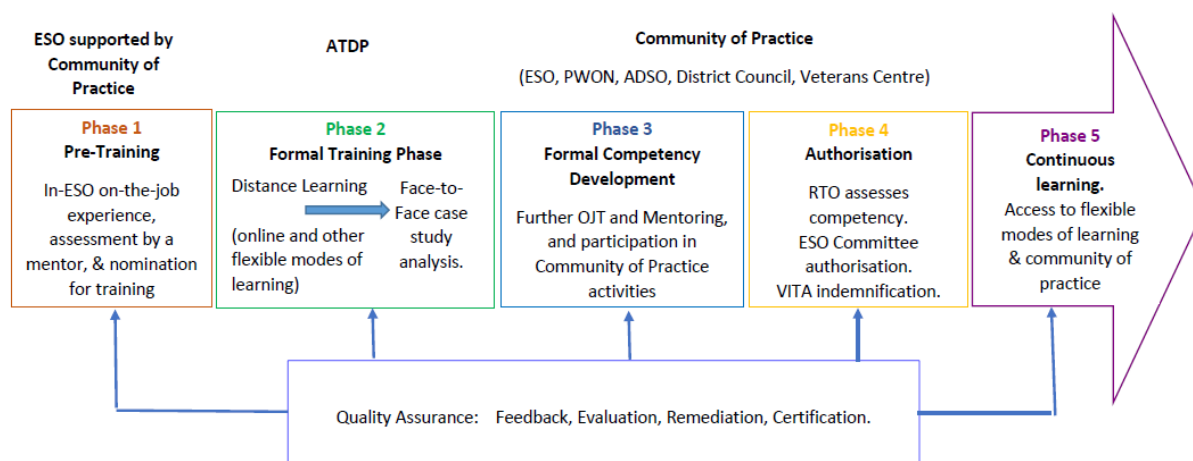
ELEMENTS OF SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION (LEARNING)



Third, is the single training and development pathway that links the elements of learning in a sequence of learning activities. The sequence maximises the likelihood that a trainee develop the required competencies. Each single training pathway identifies entry and exit points, and allows for recognition of prior learning (RPL). The following diagram indicates the general sequence of learning activities in each training pathway. The sequence is applicable to all entry points from candidacy and novice trainee to exit points at either claims/welfare officer (Level 1), claims/welfare advocate (Level 2), or appeals advocate (VRB) or (AAT).

and refine information-search techniques through case study analysis. Analysing case studies and locating the right information electronically make dealing with 'real world' clients and complex legislation and policy much easier.

The sixth key difference remedies ESOs' historical inability to provide mentoring and OJT for trainees. After 01 July, ATDP will identify and then train experienced claims and welfare officers and advocates to mentor and provide OJT. This promises a major improvement in practitioner competency. Much higher quality claims, welfare support and appeals will



The fourth difference utilises the power of modern ICT. Although not yet universally adopted by ESOs and although not all areas of Australia are serviced by NBN, modern ICT enables siloes to be broken down and a network to be formed. Formation of a network will facilitate open and simultaneous exchange of information. This, in turn, is the fuel and lubricant of the partnership. For far too long the relationship between ESOs, veterans, practitioners and DVA has been marred by misunderstandings, antipathy or animosity. In time, frank information exchange will develop understanding and foster acceptance by all partners they are engaged in a shared endeavour. Not that this is new. As a former senior DVA legal officer said many years ago: *We all want the same outcome - every client receiving his/her full entitlements. Not one bit more. But not one bit less.*

result. It will also remedy another historical failing. Mentors will be trained to assess when trainees are ready to practice autonomously. When they are, a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) will certify the trainee, triggering ESO authorisation to practice and indemnification under VITA.

Seventh is the way in which pension or welfare candidates enter the relevant training and development pathway. Ensuring that the 'right' candidates enter a pathway is a critical pre-requisite to competent practitioners. Once trained, mentors – who may be in-house or within a Community of Practice – will facilitate pre-training evaluation of candidates. ESOs can be confident, therefore, that their nominees are committed to 'helping their mates' and have the capacity to complete a training and development pathway. This will improve the quality of support, and also enhance the efficiency of the training and development system.

The fifth also is also a benefit of modern ICT. ICT allows the full adoption of adult learning principles. Adults learn best by applying their knowledge and experience. ICT allows adult trainees to access on-line information when and where they need it. It also allows transition from trying to know everything, to knowing the essentials and being able to find the remainder on the web. Testing can ensure that essential knowledge is known. Face-to-face courses can apply essential knowledge

The eighth difference is accreditation of ATDP courses and certification of practitioners within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) system. This was first raised in the 2010 Review of DVA-funded ESO Welfare and Advocacy Services and led to TIP's adopting competency-based training. Adult learning, and accreditation and certification by an RTO are

the natural next steps. As VET certification provides for recognition of prior learning (RPL), the RTO will review current practitioners' competency and grant the appropriate RPL. If the RTO identifies a competency shortfall, it will develop 'gap training' for that practitioner. Clearly, this process will take time. In the interim, current practitioners will practice under the existing arrangement. For the future, ADF personnel train under VET and certification is not a challenge for younger veterans.

The ninth is another outcome of adult learning principles and VET certification. ATDP is critically aware of the complexity and volume of, and ongoing changes in, veterans' and welfare-related legislation and policy. Single training and development pathways therefore include continuous learning. Mentors and Communities of Practice will support practitioners' continuous learning. Electronic access to information already greatly facilitates it. However, continuous learning requires self-discipline. Without a personal commitment to continuous learning, competency and currency will not be possible.

Key Outcomes

It is important to note that ATDP does not replace TIP. Nothing was 'wrong' with TIP. It was right for its time and achieved the best knowledge transfer then possible. But veterans and dependant's needs, deeper understanding of how adults learn and learning technologies have all changed over the ensuing 23 years. ATDP is a contemporary response to these changes. But, it is also being shaped by anticipated trends and future challenges.

ATDP is therefore a natural evolution of TIP. It builds on TIP. It takes the means of training into the next stage of competency-based training. Formal training will now initiate competency. On-line learning is being supported by case studies and training in mentoring and OJT. Active involvement of ESOs will consolidate trainees' learning and bed down competency. ATDP will facilitate ESOs' engagement by creating communities of practice.

Also important: ATDP builds on – does not change – formal training content.

As has always been the case for TIP, the core knowledge in the claims pathway is dictated by the legislation and policy that practitioners apply to progress clients' claims and appeals. ATDP will use the same on-line courses for SRCA and MRCA. Shortly, an online VEA course will be available. The only significant change from TIP is the combination of VEA, SRCA and MRCA into a single pathway in the face-to-face courses. The so-called Tri-Legislation Course results. It will be available at two levels, laying foundations for practice as claims officer and claims advocate.

Similarly, aged care remains a key element of welfare practice. The client base and legislation have, however, changed enormously since the TIP course was created. ATDP therefore adds the wide range of services needed by younger veterans and their dependants. Colloquially, ATDP now includes services specifically needed by women and a 'cradle-to-grave' knowledge base. ATDP also recognises that the veteran's conditions affect the whole family (and often close friends). All have a role to play. The ATDP welfare training pathway includes these additional areas of knowledge. Welfare's

training pathway will also include two levels, establishing the foundations for practice as welfare officer and welfare advocate.

The final, and most fundamental outcome, is the adoption of single training and development pathway for each stream and across all levels. All activities from pre-training evaluation to post-authorisation and on to continuous learning are being amalgamated. Each pathway also adds feedback loops, integrating the performance of the learning pathway and the competency of practitioners into a quality assurance system. Continuous improvement of the pathways will result. This is crucial to ensuring the best possible claims, appeals and welfare support into the future.

Conclusions

Almost 100 years ago, ex-servicemen were appalled by the circumstances many of their mates and their mates' families were enduring. Their concern led to creation of what are now the traditional ESOs. These organisations shared a simple objective: *'Mates helping Mates'*. The creation of TIP in 1992 and, now, its transition into ATDP, continues that traditional support.

The change to ATDP is well and truly necessary. Despite best endeavours, too many veterans and their families, for too long had not received the quality of support justified by their service to their country, and its consequences for their health and well-being. This situation could not continue. Training and development was reviewed. Training pathways have been identified. Competent practice is the essential outcome.

The need was exacerbated by the increasing range and complexity of legislation and policy, veterans and dependants' needs, and support services available. Refocused training of those committed to helping their mates was the result. ATDP is the logical next stage towards ensuring veterans and dependants receive the best support possible, to the limit legislation and policy.

Change is, however, seldom comfortable for those whose practices must change. The ATDP partners are committed to ensuring that the change that begins on 01 July is as comfortable as possible. Siloes will be connected, networked ICT will ensure information flow, ESOs will be helped to identify candidates and mentor trainees, on-line courses will empower adult learning, face-to-face case studies will apply knowledge, and an RTO will certify competency.

However, the most crucial element in change lies with those engaged in change. Those of us who want to continue helping our mates must commit to improving the quality of our help. To do so, we must commit to continuous learning, to collaborate rather than condemn, and to accept external review of our competency. Inevitably, we will experience discomfort.

Our level of discomfort is, however, within our own control. Our acceptance that change is necessary is the essential start point. Crucially, the key to our acceptance lies in our reason for being. ATDP brings a 100 year-old tradition into the 21st century. ATDP's outcome paraphrases that tradition.

ATDP's outcome is nothing more – but nothing less – than: *'Mates helping Mates – **Better**'*.