OPERATIONALISATION OF WORKPLACE ASSESSMENT AND MENTORING

Introduction
1. **Strategic Intent.** The strategic intent of operationalisation is mandated conjointly by the ATDP Blueprint and the DVA Strategic Plan, ‘DVA Towards 2020’:
   ‘The delivery of high quality advocacy services to DVA clients’.

2. **Strategic Policy.** With specific respect to ATDP operationalisation, the SGB-CFMG and Secretariat have agreed that:
   a. the RTO will train selected, experienced and appropriately qualified Advocates and certify those competent by Certificate of Attainment in Mentoring and Workplace Assessment; and
   b. Communities of Practice (CoP) will begin formal operation as soon as Mentors\(^1\) have been certified and Regional Management Group (RMG) Members have been appointed.

3. **Assumption.** Mentor training and certification is assumed to include facilitation and supervision of OJT, mentoring, and workplace assessment.

4. **Setting.** This paper:
   a. discusses the policy boundaries for, and the management and administrative arrangements by which CoP will be operationalised;
   b. must be read in conjunction with:
      ‘Operationalisation of RMG’,
      ‘Beyond Blueprint – Conceptual Foundations for Operationalisation’, and
      ‘Operationalisation of CoP’.

Aim
5. The aim is to stimulate discussion of how Mentoring may be operationalised.

Rationale
6. **Workplace Assessment.**
   a. ATDP Workplace Assessors will:
      (i) be located within the CFMG or an RMG or a CoP,
      (ii) hold either a TAE40110 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment or TAESS00001 Assessor Skill Set,
      (iii) be trained in mentoring (which includes facilitation and supervision of OJT, coaching, and providing feedback),

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\(^1\) The rationale for entitling RMG and CoP-level Learning Facilitators as Mentors is discussed in ‘Beyond Blueprint – Conceptual Foundations for Operationalisation’.
(iv) assess Advocates’ competency by conducting workplace assessments on behalf of the RTO, pursuant to its contract with DVA,
(v) validate certified advocates’ continuous performance improvement,
(vi) identify competent and experienced:
(a) CoP advocates to train and certify as CoP Learning Facilitators, and
(b) CoP mentors to train and certify as Workplace assessors or Formal-Course Learning Facilitators;

7. **Mentoring.** Achievement of the strategic intent will depend on competent, client-focused advocacy. OJT and mentoring are the means by which advocates’ performance will be improved. CoP Mentors will provide that OJT and mentoring.

8. **Mentors.** Inclusion of Mentors in the advocacy system is a fundamental advance. It introduces initially supported and eventually self-directed ‘reflection on experience’ into advocates’ learning and competency development. In so doing it:
   a. lifts learning facilitation and quality assurance from function to praxis\(^2\); and
   b. moves advocacy services towards professionalism.

9. **Outcome.** The outcome that mentoring might reasonably achieve must be identified.
   a. The current reality is that:
      (i) in some States:
         (c) RSL and Legacy employ Advocates,
         (d) have very effective in-house training programs,
         (e) have very high levels of claims throughput,
         (f) have chosen to have their advocates undertake TIP training, and
         (g) do not indemnify through VITA; and
      (ii) more generally, the competency demonstrated by volunteer advocates varies significantly between expert and inadequate, some of the determinants being:
         (a) the TIP courses attended and the time since attendance,
         (b) ability to transform knowledge into advocacy practice,
         (c) personal commitment and availability,
         (d) level of demand for claims and welfare support, and
         (e) availability of support through local face-to-face mentoring or online support.

b. Variability in current competency and circumstances represents a limit on what mentoring might reasonably achieve:
   (i) The Certificate of Attainment defines the minimum competency required at each stage along a learning pathway.
   (ii) Post-certification mentoring will, over time, ensure that advocates:
        (a) maintain at least that minimum level of competency, and
        (b) improve their performance through continuous learning and development.

c. In other words:
   (i) In the short term, completion of an ATDP learning pathway will assure a minimum level of competency.
   (ii) In the medium to long term, post-certification mentoring should assure competency above the minimum.

10. **Limits.** Mentoring is intended to facilitate learning and assure quality; however, while necessary, mentoring is not of itself sufficient.
   a. All that a mentor can offer is an opportunity for self-improvement.
   b. A mentor may encourage improvement, but it is each advocate’s honest, self-directed, reflection on personal performance that is essential before practice is transformed into praxis.
   c. For mentoring to reach its full potential, every advocate must commit willingly to critical self-improvement.

11. **Unfulfilled Need.** Preparation of this discussion paper underscored the unfulfilled needs of the cohort of younger veterans.
   a. **Triage.** A Young Veterans Workshop in mid-2015 identified the need for ‘triage’ or ‘first response’ support. Participants advised that:
      (i) social media gave a voice to veterans in crisis;
      (ii) as ‘mates’, they wanted to:
           (a) provide triage support, then
           (b) refer their ‘mate’ to an ‘expert’, and
           (c) needed to know how to locate high quality advocacy support.
   b. **Mis-Information.** Monitoring of Facebook sites accessed by young veterans and their dependants not only validates the preceding need but also evidences a wider need – the correction of on-line misinformation.
   c. **Focus.** A Younger Veterans and Advocates Workshop in July 2016 confirmed the cohort’s:
      (i) ongoing concern about the adverse attitude of, and inadequate advocacy provided by, too many older advocates; and
      (ii) desire to support their generation and frustration at the limitations presented by geography and accessibility.
d. **On-Line Mentoring.** The preceding needs are the rationale for a formal on-line mentoring presence under the auspices of the new advocacy system. The nature of the presence is discussed in ‘*Operationalisation of CoP*’.

**Quality Assurance (QA)**

12. The QA system will be driven by Learning Facilitators at the National, RMG and CoP-levels. The requisite attributes and tasks follows:

b. **Consolidation Course Facilitators.** A National training resource and certified at Certificate IV level in TAE40110, Consolidation Course Facilitators will be appointed and tasked by the NTM to:

   (i) facilitate ATDP face-to-face Consolidation courses;

   (ii) provide on-line mentoring for trainee-advocates undertaking distance-learning courses; and

   (iii) on request, support RMG and CoP Mentors.

c. **RMG Mentors.** Experienced Welfare Level 2 and Compensation Level 3 or 4 Advocates who have been certified in Mentoring and Workplace Assessment, and selected competitively by EOI submitted for RMG Membership, RMG Mentors’ tasks are to:

   (i) engender CoP Mentors’ respect for their leadership qualities;

   (ii) provide day-to-day guidance and support for CoP Mentors; and

   (iii) recommend suitable CoP Mentors for training and certification as Formal Course Learning Facilitators.

d. **CoP Mentors.** The practical key to quality assured advocacy services, CoP Mentors will be in day-to-day contact with the Veteran Centre (VC) and Ex-Service Organisation (ESO) advocates that are delivering advocacy services. They will be experienced Welfare Level 2 or Compensation Level 3 or 4 Advocates that are selected competitively by EOI for training and certification in Mentoring and Workplace Assessment. Selection will depend on:

   (i) their possession of robust self-awareness and an understanding of others’ outlook and motivations.

   (ii) demonstrated ability to:

      (a) provide high quality advocacy services;

      (b) project and develop professionalism;

      (c) respond collegially to guidance and support; and

      (d) develop the trust and respect of peers.

**Mentoring as Partnership**

13. **Foundations.** ‘*Beyond Blueprint*’ summarises a paper on mentoring prepared by the National Training Manager and theoretically validates FAQ 6.05 (dated 30 June 2016). Suffice it to say here that:

   a. Mentoring engages a partnership between:
a more experienced, trained and certified practitioner (a Mentor) and a
more junior, less knowledgeable, and

(ii) a less experienced practitioner, who may be a trainee-advocate or a
post-certification advocate on a continuous learning pathway.

b. The mentor motivates, supports and guides learning and development of the
advocate being mentored, progressively evaluating competency and providing
feedback on performance.

c. Mentoring will:

(i) include RMG Mentors’ support of their CoP peers;
(ii) ensure advocates acquire and maintain at least a minimum level of
competency; and
(iii) embody a tri-partite learning and development partnership.

14. **Nature of Partnership.** The terms of a mentoring partnership must be clear from the
outset. The following matters should be addressed to obviate problems later:

a. **Guidelines.** When and how the mentor and advocate will work together needs to
be negotiated.

b. **Mutual Goals.** As mentoring engages mutual learning and development, each
partner’s goals must be identified.

c. **Confidentiality.** The confidentiality agreement between the DVA client and
advocate will need to include the CoP (and, perhaps, RMG) Mentors.

d. **Term.** As the nature of the partnership will change as competency and support
needs evolve, agreement should include the following issues should be agreed:

(i) how long the Mentor and Advocate will work together (be it a period of
time or until a goal is achieved);
(ii) flexibility, so that the partnership remains vibrant as its nature changes; and
(iii) when and how the partnership may be dissolved if it breaks down.

e. **Arrangements.** Practical arrangements will include:

(i) if face-to-face contact is feasible, how often to meet;
(ii) how and when to make electronic contact;
(iii) if meeting face-to-face, where to meet;
(iv) whether cancelling a meeting or electronic contact is acceptable; and
(v) if so, under what circumstances.

f. **Supporting Documentation.** The following documents, which the CFMG has
developed, are critical to the mentor-advocate partnership:

(i) **Selection.** Mentors will support VC/ESOs’ use of Selection Guidelines
during pre-training evaluation of candidates.

(ii) **Workbook.** Mentors will sign off trainee-advocates’ Workbooks unit-by-
unit as the record of competency attainment.
(iii) **Certification.** Mentors will award, or recommend the RTO award, a Certificate of Attainment when advocates demonstrate competency.

(iv) **Praxis.** Mentoring will continue until an advocate’s retirement, and will engage a continuing improvement plan which the mentor will use to monitor the advocate’s praxis and validate ongoing competency.

g. **Review.** Mentoring engages reflective learning. Therefore:

(i) Each advocacy session will end with consolidation of the learning, and discussion of the effectiveness of the session’s mentoring.

(ii) Progress towards mutual goals will need to be reviewed regularly:

(a) as competency and needs evolve; and

(b) the power of post-certification advocate’s self-directed reflective learning increases.

**Levels of Mentoring**

15. Mentors will be appointed at both the RMG and CoP levels. In some circumstances, mentors may also be appointed at the ESO Branch/Sub-Branch level.

**Leadership**

16. Mentors are, first and foremost, leaders. Mentoring will be led by teams of two Mentors - one from each of the Welfare and Compensation streams:

   a. the Membership of each RMG will include one team; and

   b. every CoP (and some ESO) will be led by another team.

**RMG Mentors**

17. **Role.** RMG Mentors’ role is to assure the quality of mentoring, OJT and workplace assessment provided by CoP Mentors to VC and ESO Advocates.

18. **Responsibility.** RMG Mentors will be responsible for:

   a. understanding in detail the veterans’ advocacy system’s strategic objectives and the learning pathway programmes and processes relevant to their practice;

   b. ensuring VC and ESO Executives and Advocates understand these matters;

   c. facilitating close, collegial working relationships with their fellow team member, and Formal Course Learning Facilitators and CoP Mentors; and

   d. with their fellow Mentors, driving the advocacy services’ quality assurance system.

19. **Selection.** The accompanying paper ‘Operationalisation of RMG’ addresses the selection of RMG Mentors in the context of RMG Membership. (The remainder of this paper focuses on CoP Mentors.)

**CoP Mentors**

20. **Role.** CoP Mentors’ role is to assure delivery of high quality continuously improving advocacy services to DVA clients by developing Advocates’ competency.
21. **Responsibility.** They will be responsible for:
   a. sustaining a close, collegial working relationship with the Formal Course Learning Facilitators and RMG Mentors;
   b. with them, driving the advocacy services quality assurance system at the VC/ESO-level;
   c. assuring the day-by-day quality of advocacy services delivered by Veteran Centre and Ex-Service Organisation (VC/ESO) Advocates; and
   d. with their fellow CoP Mentor.

22. **Tasks.** Advocates’ competency development will engage CoP mentors in the following:
   a. providing trainee-advocates’ OJT, mentoring and competency assessment;
   b. supporting VC/ESO in-house mentors in large CoPs;
   c. monitoring advocates’ post-certification self-directed continuous learning, and
   d. supporting certified advocates’ continuous performance improvement;
   e. identifying competent and experienced VC/ESO advocates to train and certify as CoP Learning Facilitators; and
   f. encouraging interested personnel to seek appointment in volunteer or employed advocacy.

23. **Skill Sets.** CoP Mentors will need the following mandatory skills sets:
   a. **Personal Attributes.** Demonstrated:
      (i) exemplary integrity; and
      (ii) fine judgement in ambiguous situations.
   b. **Interpersonal Skills.** Demonstrated leadership skills including the ability to:
      (i) motivate possibly sceptical personnel;
      (ii) engender the trust of possibly recalcitrant VC/ESO Executives and advocates;
      (iii) communicate sometimes unwelcome policies and advice;
      (iv) mobilise fundamental culture change at the VC, ESO and advocate levels;
      (v) negotiate and resolve conflict in ambiguous situations; and
      (vi) participate actively in development of a system-wide ethos focused on exceptional client-based advocacy services.
   c. **Professional.** Demonstrated attributes are to include:
      (i) ability to apply knowledge of veterans’ legislation, legislative instruments, and RC and MRCC policy
      (ii) trained and certified as a Mentor and Workplace Assessor;
      (iii) ability to:
         (a) support VC/ESO’s selection of candidates;
(b) support trainees progress along advocacy learning and development pathways;
(c) assure quality;
(d) mentor and provide OJT support for trainees and advocates with a wide range of varying capabilities, motivations and interests;
(e) plan and implement individual learning and development programs;
(f) monitor and assess trainees and certified advocates’ performance;
(g) identify key weaknesses and negotiate remedial activities;
(e) objectively, review and continuously improve personal performance; and
(f) work collegially and effectively with the RMG Mentor.

d. VC/ESO Resourcing. Acting as the local contact for the RMG Manager, CoP Mentors will:
   (i) advise resourcing guidelines in the context of required policy outcomes;
   (ii) request, collate, assess and make recommendations on (possibly competing) VC/ESO demands for resources; and
   (iii) represent and report objectively on sometimes sensitive issues.

e. Management and Administration. Demonstrated ability to self-manage and self-administer:
   (i) mentoring and associated activities;
   (ii) record keeping; and
   (iii) report writing and submission within external timeframes.

Operationalisation Considerations
24. This section outlines the considerations that will need to influence decisions during operationalisation of mentoring.
25. Mutuality. First and foremost, mentoring requires mutual commitment. Within the commitments identified in ‘Operationalisation of CoP’:
   a. CoP mentors will need to commit to leadership and professional support of the advocacy pool, and objectivity and integrity in performing their duties;
   b. trainee-advocates will need to commit fully to active engagement in their learning pathway and participation in OJT and mentoring;
   c. certified advocates’ will need to commit to self-directed continuous competency improvement and active engagement in planning, implementing and validating their performance improvement; and
   c. VC/ESOs will need to commit to providing the access, resources and support necessary for effective mentoring.
26. Structure. The concept paper ‘Beyond Blueprint’ found that VC and ESOs’ geographic dispersion, disparate interests and diverse culture necessitate an organic structure
and extensive networking.\(^3\) Self-organising CoP, encouragement of advocates to self-direct their performance improvement, and a collegial approach to mentoring will create a demanding professional setting for mentors.

27. **Policy Boundaries.** In the absence of centralised control, ‘Operationalisation of CoP’ outlines policy boundaries within which CoP will be required to self-organise.\(^4\) CoP mentors will monitor VC/ESOs’ respect for these boundaries. They will need to adapt quickly to a professional setting that is probably very different from their experience.

28. **National Consistency.** Delivery of nationally consistent advocacy services that are client-focused and of high quality will depend almost entirely on the effectiveness of CoP. Effectiveness, in turn, will depend largely on mentors’ personal and professional attributes. These will be tested by the demanding setting in which they will work.

29. **Workbook.** All CoP members must maintain a workbook in which they record the facts/matter(s) they discuss with their mentor and the relevant lessons they have learned. Their mentor will use entries to monitor learning and development, and to validate competency and performance improvement.

30. **Span of Contact.** Note that the following numbers may need to be reduced if mentors are also practicing as advocates. Effectiveness, travel distances, time, and burn-out avoidance indicate that a mentor will need to limit support to:
   - a. 5 trainee-advocates depending on their stage along a learning pathway, or
   - b. 15 certified advocates, or
   - c. a combination of around 8 certified and trainee advocates.

**Selection**

31. **Process.** Selection by Expression of Interest is envisaged. Once mentor certification has been trialled, roll-out of the following selection process is proposed for the second, third and fourth quarters of FY2016-17:
   - a. **Criteria.** Suggested Selection Criteria, VET Job Description and Duty Statements for CoP Mentors are attached to this discussion paper.
   - b. **EOI.** To guard against inadequate candidates, existing Level 2 Welfare and Level 2/3/4 Compensation Advocates will be invited to submit EOI against selection criteria. Para 32 below discusses how suitable candidates may be identified.
   - c. **Submission.** Submission will be required by pdf attachment to an email. Hard copy EOI responses will not be acceptable as mentoring will inevitably engage on-line contact.\(^5\)
   - d. **Shortlisting.** To ensure consistency, EOI will be shortlisted against a quantitative assessment matrix, by a selection panel comprising:
     - (i) the six RMG Mentors (if already selected); or

\(^3\) See ‘Beyond Blueprint– Conceptual Foundations for Operationalisation’ paras 27-32.

\(^4\) See ‘Operationalisation of Communities of Practice’ para 22.

\(^5\) Indeed, VC/ESOs have now had seventeen BEST rounds to equip their advocates with laptops, tablets or computers.
(ii) up to six CFMG Panel Members, augmented by TIP trainers to ensure an equal number of welfare and compensation advocates;
(iii) the SGB Chair or the Chair’s delegate.

e. **Final Selection.** Shortlisted EOI will be assessed on merit against the selection criteria by a selection panel comprising:
   (i) the six RMG Mentors; and
   (ii) the NTM as Chair.

32. **Selection Timeline.** Response to nation-wide invitations to submit EOI is expected to take time. Ideally, selection of CoP Mentors should be completed not later than mid-November to enable settling in before mentoring begins from 01 January 2017. The following timeline is proposed:

   a. **Advertisement:** determined by time the Secretariat needs to obtain approval of expenditure. But not before one month after RMG Manager and Members are invited to submit EOI.

   b. **Closure of EOI:** 4-6 weeks after invitations to submit EOI are promulgated.

   c. **Shortlist EOI:** determined by time the Secretariat needs to collate and distribute electronic EOI to shortlisting committee, but in any case within 2 weeks after EOI close.

   d. **Selection from Short-Listed Candidates:** determined by time the Secretariat needs to collate and distribute shortlisted EOI, but in any case not less than 2 weeks after the RMG Mentors have been appointed.

   e. **Appointment of Mentors:** undertaken after concurrent consideration by the CFMG and SGB of the selected candidates.

**Alerting Suitable Candidates**

33. Existing structures through which suitable candidates may be invited to submit an EOI:

   a. **National:**
      (i) ESORT, and the State Offices of each Ex-Service Organisation;
      (ii) DVA Deputy Commissioner’s Consultative Forums in each State;
      (iii) TIP State Training Managers in each State;
      (iv) virtual Advocate advisory groups such as Australian Veterans Law Advocacy Network (AVLAN) and the Association of Ex-Service Advocates Australia;
      (vi) on-line Groups with the potential to become nation-wide information distribution points such as (the multi-ESO) Alliance of Defence Service Organisations (ADSO), and the (the multi-Service) Women Veterans Network Australia and Australian Defence Force and Veterans Alliance Forum;
      (vii) other on-line media that attract informed interventions by practising advocates such as: Young Diggers, Soldier On, Mates4Mates, Aussie Vets PTSD Group; DVA Claims, Cards & Payments Veterans Information Group;
DVA Gold Card Benefits; Australian Military Toxic Exposure; Peer2Peer; Invisible Wounds Australia; Wounded Heroes; Children of Vietnam Vets; and


b. **New South Wales- Australian Capital Territory:**
   
   (i) the virtual, but formal RSL Welfare and Pensions Forum;
   
   (ii) the state-wide network established by Legacy NSW;
   
   (iii) suburban Veterans Centre such as those established in East Sydney and Sydney Northern Beaches; and
   
   (iv) sub-Regional hub-and-spoke Veterans Centres such as the Veterans Centre Central Coast (Ourimbah), Northern Rivers (Lismore), Wagga, Veterans Centre Mid North Coast (Coffs Harbour), the Port Stephens Veterans Network (sponsored by Newcastle Legacy), the Veterans Support Centre Belconnen (sponsored by the VVFA) and the Veterans Support Centre Woden (sponsored by the RSL).

c. **Queensland:**
   
   (i) regional Veteran Centre such as those established in Townsville and Bundaberg under the auspices of RSL Queensland; and
   
   (ii) Armed Services Assistance Centre Inc. auspiced by RSL Queensland.

d. **South Australia-Northern Territory:**
   
   (i) Veterans Advisory Council; and
   
   (ii) Repatriation General Hospital Daw Park.

e. **Tasmania:**
   
   (i) Welfare Officers and Veteran Support Centres established under the auspices of RSL Tasmania.

f. **Victoria:**
   
   (i) Regional Veterans Centres established in Victoria predominantly under a state-wide MOU;
   
   (ii) the Peninsula Young Veterans Well-Being Centre;
   
   (iii) the DFWA-RAAFA mutual support arrangement; and
   
   (v) Austin/Repatriation Heidelberg Campus.

g. **Western Australia:**
   
   (i) consolidated advocacy access such as the RAAFA Centre at Bulls Creek; and
   
   (ii) Invisible Wounds Australia.

**Risks**

34. Accepting that other risks may emerge during operationalisation, four significant risks are envisaged:

a. insufficient high calibre candidates submit an EOI;
b. the advocacy system coming under pressure to accept less than adequate candidates;
c. personnel selected who prove subsequently to be unsuitable; and
d. ESOs being unprepared to enter into Mentor-sharing arrangements.

Risk Management

35. Given the complexity of and diversity of participants engaged in operationalisation, risk identification and development of risk management strategies will remain a key ongoing governance, management and administration task at all levels. These will be a shared responsibility for all engaged in operation of the advocacy system. The following risk management strategies are envisaged to manage the risks identified to date:

a. **Candidature.** Two dimensions of risk may need to be remediated:
   (i) **Qualitative/Quantitative Shortfalls.** Should there be qualitative or quantitative shortfalls, the Selection Committee should appoint only those candidates that clearly meet the selection criteria.
   (ii) **Re-advertisement.** Should either qualitative or quantitative shortfalls occur, the Selection Committee should recommend that further rounds of invitations be promulgated.
   (iii) **Interim Operation.** Should either qualitative or quantitative shortfalls occur and a further rounds of invitation and selection be necessary, CoPs should start operating with the initial appointments. If the shortfalls are such as to limit interim operation severely, personnel should be co-opted from those who completed one of the pilot activities (if they are not already engaged in a CoP).

b. **Inappropriate Pressure.** Misunderstanding is expected to be the main reason that VC/ESOs would pressure the advocacy system to train and certify mentors that do not possess essential experience, commitment, knowledge or skills. Wide dissemination of the rationale for CoP and Mentors, their critical role, and the assurance of high quality advocacy outcomes is proposed. This information process should begin at the earliest feasible time.

c. **Unsuitable Selections.** To minimise the short-term risk that personnel may be appointed that are unable to perform at the necessary standard, appointments should have a six month probationary period. Medium-term risk should be minimised by succession planning and set terms in office (with eligibility for reappointment of high-performing mentors).

d. **Mentor-Sharing Rejected.** From early experience, if this challenge occurs, it appears most likely to arise from VC/ESOs who employ advocates. Management of the risk in two domains is proposed.
   (i) **Information.** As outlined above, the first domain entails early, widespread and iterative releases of information on the rationale for and structures of CoP and mentoring.
(ii) **SLA.** The second risk management domain is to transition BEST Grant Funding Agreements into Service Level Agreements (SLA). These will stipulate that release of BEST funds is contingent on:

(a) CoP Mentors providing multi-ESO service;
(b) ideally, CoP membership comprising advocates from multiple ESOs;
(c) adherence to national standards of advocacy service delivery; and
(d) acceptance of monitoring and evaluation by independent RMG Mentors.

**Recommendations**

34. The recommendations are that:

a. The SGB, CFMG and Secretariat propose amendments to finalise this paper.

b. Once finalised, the paper be the policy that guides operationalisation.

c. The policy be formally reviewed quarterly and amended to account for issues during operationalisation.