National Advocate Database

Preamble

The Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP) provides a structure for, and formal training associated with developing suitable to become advocates for members of the ex-service community. Welfare advocates are trained to assist clients by connecting them with any manner of service to which they may have an entitlement; compensation advocates provide assistance in the preparation and lodgement of claims for compensation from the Department of Veterans’ Affairs or other agencies.

Advocates enrol in a Course in Military Advocacy and receive structured workplace training in their Ex-Service Organisation (ESO) or a Community of Practise with which their ESO may be associated. (The course has been accredited by the Australian Skills Quality Authority [ASQA].) They also receive formal training by way of eLearning units and attendance programs. At various stages throughout their training, they are assessed against a relevant Unit of Competency. This ensures quality and consistency.

ATDP has a partner Registered Training Organisation (RTO) which has the course and Units of Competency on its Scope of Registration. The RTO provides Statements of Attainment to candidates who successfully complete a Unit of Competency.

Once advocates have been trained and assessed to the standard, it becomes necessary for potential clients to be able to identify accredited advocates and not just take anyone they may find. For this reason, a searchable database, where the ESOs who have qualified and authorised advocates can be identified, contacted and have suitable advocates assigned to the client.

The ATDP Online Management System (OMS) contains the information regarding the training/qualification of all advocates who have either undertaken the training pathway or had prior skills and experience assessed and recognised by the program. It is therefore the most logical base for a proposed searchable database.

Online Management System

Data maintained by the OMS include personal details of the candidate/advocate, each Unit of Competency in which enrolled, and when a candidate has been assessed as competent against the Unit of Competency. The system also keeps a record of which ESO initially nominated a person for candidacy, details of the authorising person and the originally nominated workplace mentor.

Within the above data, there is sufficient detail to provide information to a prospective client to be able to find an advocate however there are other variable which need to be met to be able to ensure any identified advocate is current with all ATDP and ESO requirements. For this reason some changes are required to the system to accommodate these other requirements.
In a recent paper by a CFMG member, the initial reference was made to an “ATDP affiliated ESO” and some of the thinking on which the following is based is derived on this concept.

The OMS needs to have a new table added to accommodate details of the “ATDP affiliated ESO”. These would include full details of the ESO, contact person and other contact details. There would also need to be a date field indicating when details were last verified so that automated notices could be sent.

The Advocates table in the database would require an additional field which linked to the ESO table and indicated the ESO authorised the person to practise on its behalf. It may also be of benefit to have other fields which identify the advocate’s military experience, specialisations and other biographical information the advocate may wish to be seen. Another field may also allow the advocate to allow personal contact details to be displayed with the results of a search.

Coming also is a feature for Continuing Professional Development to which Advocates must adhere to maintain currency. This feature too will be linked to the results of a search.

With the above OMS modifications it would be possible to create a search interface accessible to the public, enabling a person to complete a simple form and obtain a list of where they may be able to obtain assistance. The search results would include the following details:

- ESO name and contact details. The ESO is linked to one or more advocates.
- Advocate qualifications, profile and, if allowed, contact details

The only details shown will be for advocates who are current with all requirements including CPD and ESO authorisation.

The system would also have to accommodate a feature which permitted an advocate to move from one ESO to another.

**Weaknesses**

There are issues which may affect the long-term success of the search feature. Principal among these is a requirement for ATDP affiliated ESOs to maintain their details in the database through a distinct portal available for the purpose.

ESO executive change frequently and a failure to pass on the access and contact details may result in searches containing fewer results due to out of date information. (If the ESO does not verify information annually and indicate continued authorisation for its advocates, the information will not be returned as a search result.

Another weakness lies with advocates maintaining their own details in the database.

There has been a proposal that the search feature should be available on several sites such as The Orderly Room, DVA website and the like. Such a thing would impose a
threat to the integrity of the data. The form from which the search is originated, the 
script which filters the data and the page which displays the search results should all 
reside in the same domain; ie atdp.org.au.

It would be possible to develop a mobile device page which would allow the search 
feature to be accessed. If we were to do this, we could place on other webstes, and in 
printed material, a QR code graphic which activated the page. No other diverse methods 
should be considered.