THINK PIECE NO 4: ENHANCING ADVOCACY TRAINING

INTRODUCTION

1. Created over 20 years ago to improve the quality of primary claims and appeals lodged by ESO practitioners, TIP has progressively refined the content and delivery of its training courses. Despite improvements, Reviews commissioned by DVA continue, with input from ESOs, to identify areas in which further improvements are required.

2. This ‘think piece’ discusses some of the key considerations that shape policy on advocacy training and develops a training framework that integrates the various elements of training.

BACKGROUND

Review of ESO Welfare and Advocacy Services

3. Prompted by ongoing deficiencies in the quality of primary claims it was receiving and appeals being submitted to the VRB, in 2010 DVA commissioned the Review of ESO Welfare and Advocacy Services. Subsequently, TIP National adopted competency-based learning as its training model.

4. Implementation of competency-based training continues, and is marked by National consistency and an increasing number of e-Learning courses to transfer knowledge. Currently, TIP National policy is that e-Learning and Face-to-Face knowledge transfer are alternatives.

Mid-2013 TIP NSW-ACT Training Planning

5. Following a training planning workshop in mid-2013, the NSW-ACT TCG endorsed the adoption of adult-learning principles as the methodology by which its Presenters would deliver National core content. This necessitated review of TIP NSW-ACT’s delivery process, which in turn necessitated resolution of the encompassing training policy and training framework.

Review of Veterans Advocacy Training

6. On 3 December 2014, DVA released a Summary Paper for the ESO Round Table (ESORT) on the underlying themes from the Review of Veterans’ Advocacy Training, led by Brigadier Rolfe, AO (Ret’d). As the TIP NSW-ACT policy workshop preceded
release of the Summary Paper, coincidentally, the training policy and framework below address directly almost all of the key themes from the Review.

7. The Review found that, to assure quality:
   a. the practitioner training program should be accreditation-ready and should include:
      (i) national consistency;
      (ii) clear training goals;
      (iii) adult learning principles;
      (iv) a clear training and development path from novice to senior practitioner;
      (v) on-the-job training (OJT) and mentoring by ESOs;
      (vi) training and resources for ESOs to facilitate OJT and mentoring; and
      (vii) competency assessment grounded in appropriate measures and data.
   b. trainers should:
      (i) be selected formally against strict criteria;
      (ii) undertake train-the-trainer training;
      (iii) have their training and practitioner assessment skills formally assessed;
      (iv) be formally accredited.
   c. practitioners should be:
      (i) selected formally by their ESO against strict criteria;
      (ii) assessed for competency related to their level of training;
      (iii) recorded in a register of trained practitioners.

Contemporary Expectations

8. DVA and some ESOs continue to advise that contemporary veterans expect a high level of professionalism from Practitioners. As their ADF training accords with VET legislation and routinely leads to award of certificates of competency, contemporary veterans see accreditation of training courses and certification of Practitioners as pre-requisites for professional support. Importantly, the Review of Advocacy Training sees accreditation and certification as the end-points of a transition process to improve training.

EOY-2014 TIP NSW-ACT Planning Workshop

9. Over the period 1-2 December 2014, TIP NSW-ACT Presenters reviewed their training objectives, experiences and outcomes over the preceding 18 months. The rationale for a coherent advocacy training policy and pathway emerged during the workshop, and forms the thrust of this think piece.
COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT

10. Competency development is a process, the outcome of which is possession of the knowledge and practical skills needed to perform competently. Use of the term ‘competency’ is, however, currently problematic for TIP and ESOs as it suggests implementation of the Vocational Education Training (VET) framework.

11. Within a competency-based training system, outcomes are related to successful application of knowledge and skill. At this stage, neither TIP nor ESOs are structured to develop competency in accordance with VET processes and standards (ie, ‘accreditation’ of TIP courses, ‘certification’ of Presenters at the TAE Certificate IV level and Practitioners at appropriate levels of Certification or Diploma). TIP NSW-ACT is therefore using the term ‘knowledge and skills development’.

12. Crucially, however, the knowledge and skills development framework embedded in the TIP National Single Location Storage (SLS) system and the TIP NSW-ACT training framework outlined below are being implemented in reflection of the VET system.

13. Should, in future, DVA and the ESO Round Table (ESORT) require accreditation of TIP courses and certification of TIP Presenters and ESO Practitioners, TIP training courses should transfer reasonably seamlessly to the VET framework.

ADULT LEARNING

14. Adult learning requires a different approach to that utilised traditionally in the formal classroom. Adults best acquire knowledge (ie, learn) by working through materials in their own time, at their own pace, in the place that is most convenient to them. Skills development requires that knowledge be applied. Effective application engages both experience and challenge.

15. Development of a comprehensive knowledge base and skilled performance is progressive, requiring an ongoing cycle of learning and application (ie, ‘continuous learning’). Continuous learning becomes even more important as legislation and regulations change regularly.

16. Participants and practitioners’ self-directed knowledge development is facilitated by open access to TIP’s e-Learning courses, and by their developing a habit of accessing the DVA and RMA websites to resolve queries or uncertainties. Skills development can be initiated by TIP face-to-face training, but the level of skill required for authorisation necessitates on-the-job training (OJT) and mentoring by the ESO.

TRAINING SYSTEM

POLICY REQUIREMENTS

17. By DVA policy, TIP and ESOs have a shared obligation to produce Practitioners that lodge primary claims and appeals that have the highest reasonable standard, or provide the most effective welfare services possible (see Supplementary Reading).
18. As DVA is the end-recipient of the products of TIP and ESOs’ joint training process, its feedback to ESOs and TIP on the quality of the products it receives from Practitioners is elementary. Optimally effective training therefore necessitates all partners’ active participation in a quality assurance system (see the Supplementary Reading).

Training Scheme Progression Guidelines

19. Typically, ESO Executives have little understanding of compensation and welfare practice. They are therefore ill-prepared to make judgements on when a participant is ready to progress to the next level of TIP training or when a training participant has the knowledge and skills required for authorisation. As TIP Chairs and Presenters are experienced Practitioners, TIP has a duty of care to provide quantitative and/or qualitative guidelines to help ESOs make those decisions.

ESOs’ OJT and Mentoring

20. By long-standing DVA policy (see Supplementary Reading) and ESORT’s consideration in late 2013 of an ESO Working Party report on accreditation and certification, ESOs are responsible for providing OJT and mentoring. The TIP training framework, therefore, has a clear and identifiable boundary: TIP training must impart essential knowledge (ie, core content) and initiate skills development. Additionally, this policy requirement must be – and is already being – implemented within a nationally consistent training framework.

21. The objective of ESOs’ OJT and mentoring is, therefore, also clear: it must reinforce their training participants and Practitioners’ knowledge and develop their skills. ESOs are also responsible for selecting their training participants, for their Practitioners’ currency and for quality assurance of their Practitioners’ claims and appeals.

22. The following definitions are offered to frame ESOs’ preparations:
   a. **OJT**: a close ‘hand-holding’ process by an experienced Practitioner which takes the training participant through welfare/compensation processes step by step, and repeats until satisfied the participant is ready to proceed to mentoring during future activities of similar complexity.
   b. **Mentoring**: a ‘hands-free’ process for training participants of known capabilities (through OJT), which involves preliminary discussion of a case, hands-free completion by the participant with support available on request, followed on completion by review of the key issues and lessons learned.

Authorisation

23. Broadly, an ESO should not:
   a. authorise a training participant as a Practitioner - and hence make him/her subject to the VITA insurer’s indemnification insurance policy - until it is satisfied the person has:
      (i) completed the relevant TIP training at Level 2; and
      (ii) consistently demonstrated that he/she is, with a reasonable likelihood of success, able to:
(a) research and lodge a complex primary claim, or
(b) link a welfare client with the appropriate service provider(s); and

b. reauthorise a Practitioner unless satisfied that he/she continues to demonstrate with a consistent and reasonable record of success:
   (i) lodgement of primary claims, or
   (ii) linking welfare clients with the appropriate service provider(s).

Continuous Learning

24. Professional practice is grounded in continuous learning. As TIP Presenters are all experienced practitioners who routinely engage in continuous learning to keep their knowledge current, TIP has a duty of care to provide ongoing learning support to participants and Practitioners who wish to engage in continuous learning on a voluntary basis.

25. By established practice TIP Presenters distribute their business card and invite course participants to contact them electronically when they need help. In other words, TIP has long offered an OJT and mentoring service. Such support has been of great use to isolated participants in small rural and remote ESOs.

No More ‘Silos’

26. Historically, DVA, ESOs and TIP have operated as independent ‘silos’ and the relationships between them have often been unsatisfactory. To ensure that the training process is coherent and achieves the policy outcome, its various elements, interfaces, sequences and feedback loops must be defined. In other words, coherency requires that the training process operate within a training system.

27. Inevitably, the historical situation has contributed to the ongoing sub-optimal performance of ESOs’ Practitioners. It is therefore no longer tenable that each organisation’s roles and responsibilities be regarded as an independent ‘silo’.

28. Whereas the historical situation is best described as ‘interaction’, the end result of the emerging situation is ‘co-dependence’ – acceptance of overlapping roles and responsibilities. Shared responsibilities and co-dependence are crucial elements of a ‘system’s approach’, and to an optimal training process.

Partnership

29. Recognising that the historical situation was untenable, DVA proposed in FY2012-13, and ESOs and TIP have progressively accepted, creation of a ‘partnership’. Steadily more effective engagement by the partners is resulting. This also suggests that a systems approach has been initiated. Focusing this development in the training system is an objective of this policy and framework.

30. The historical and the required relationship may be represented diagrammatically (see overleaf):
Duty of Care

31. Co-dependence acknowledges the existence of a shared ‘duty of care’. The focus of the partners’ shared duty of care is DVA’s clients (those undergoing rehabilitation and/or in receipt of compensation, and their dependents). This shared duty of care complements and builds on each party’s individual duty of care.

32. TIP’s individual duty of care is marked by the following obligations:
   a. **ESOs**: To be as responsive as its annual budgetary allocations permit to their training needs.
   b. **Course participants**: To engage them in the most effective knowledge and skills development possible.
   c. **DVA**: To provide the most effective training possible for its budget allocation to TIP.

Risk Containment

33. Each partner in the training system is subject to risk, the nature of which varies from partner to partner. Containment of the ‘risk’ each faces is an outcome of whether the partner recognises and then responds effectively to the risk factors it faces. The focus of this training policy is the boundary of TIP’s roles and responsibilities within the knowledge and skills training system. This corresponds, at least in part, to how well TIP exercises its ‘duty of care’.

TRAINING FRAMEWORK

34. Following (overleaf) is a diagrammatic representation of the training pathway that results from the preceding discussion. Participant progression along the pathway is from novice, at the top, to skilled and knowledgeable compensation and welfare Practitioners working as a team within their ESO at the bottom.
End-Product of Training System

35. In essence, the end-product of DVA policy is the lowest reasonable level of risk for each partner. To contain to an acceptable level the risk each partner faces, participants must through the training system:
   a. acquire through TIP courses the highest reasonable level of knowledge and skill;
   b. reach through ESO OJT and mentoring the level of knowledge and skill necessary to be authorised as a Practitioner and to be indemnified; and
   c. after authorisation, engage actively in continuous learning to:
      (i) maintain their currency, and
      (ii) further develop their knowledge and skill.

PRESENTERS’ TRAINING PATHWAY

Presenter Development

36. Not addressed in this think piece, but of crucial importance notwithstanding, is the need to develop a knowledge and skills development pathway for Presenters.

37. A follow-on think piece will be prepared in the lead-up to, and be finalised during, a TIP NWS-ACT Presenters workshop in early July 2015. The resulting Presenter training policy and framework will be presented for TCG consideration in July 2015.

SELLING THE TRAINING PATHWAY

38. ESOs were created with a view to ‘mates’ helping mates’ and TIP was created and funded by DVA to, in essence, ‘help mates help mates better’. In that sense, nothing has changed. Selling the requirement for a clear and coherent training pathway is therefore not a ‘game changer’.

39. If anything has changed it is, first, the expectations of a younger client base and, second, the dwindling resources at DVA in the face of increasingly complex claims. These environmental realities are, amongst others, forcing demand for a higher level of likelihood that primary claims will be successful. In other words, the pressure is on the training system to ‘help mates help mates better’. The outcome of such pressures may be termed ‘professionalism’ or application of the VET framework to the Veterans’ Advocacy system but, at root, it is ‘mates helping mates better’.

40. Looking at the issue in another way. If the subset of Australian community that comprises ESOs, DVA and TIP is unprepared or unable to respond adequately to the demands that are emerging in the veteran and ex-service community, it would be hypocritical to expect an understanding response from the wider community.

41. In other words, selling the need for active engagement in a new, clear, coherent and comprehensive training pathway to competent veterans’ advocacy should need nothing more than a reprise of the original motivation that inspired all three partners:
The sacrifices of those who have served and the families who supported mandates nothing less than the very best efforts by those involved in helping them.

NSW-ACT TIP Consultative Group

**Supplementary Reading**


Department of Veterans’ Affairs, Introductory Information Pack, ‘Help Support the Veteran Community’
