Chapter 15. Quality Assurance

15.1 Introduction
This Chapter outlines the policy and procedures CFMG and RIG Members and Mentors acting under the auspices of the ATDP, in collaboration with other stakeholders, will implement to assure the quality of advocacy services.

15.2 Rationale for QA
ATDP is a publicly funded activity, receiving an annual allocation from DVA’s annual appropriation. It must therefore demonstrate to its stakeholders that the allocation is:
- advancing the Government’s veterans affairs program and DVA’s strategic and business objectives; and
- being used ethically, efficiently, effectively and in accordance with relevant legislation and standards.

Commitment to a comprehensive QA plan demonstrates to ATDP stakeholders that it is serious about meeting stakeholder expectations through transparent and robust governance.

15.3 Purpose of QA
Quality Assurance is the key to delivery of continuously improving high quality advocacy services to DVA clients. ATDP, as the means of training and developing the profession of military advocacy has a pivotal role in quality assurance.

The ATDP QA program will establish and maintain a nationally consistent model of service delivery and administration that meets stakeholders’ expectations and needs and is compliant to relevant statutory and regulatory frameworks.

15.4 Professional Standards
The quality of performance by the members of a professional body is measured by comparing outcomes achieved and benchmark standards. (See ‘Volunteer Standards’, Library 1, Part A, Vol 6, QA.)

The professional standards that Military Advocates are required to meet are an amalgam of the following measures:
- Professional Training. ASQA standards, which are administered by the RTO, are the minimum level of competency an Advocate must attain for each Unit of Learning.
- Professional Development. The CPD Coordinator and National Training Manager collaborate to establish the performance standards Advocates must attain through their continuing professional development program. CPD standards have two limbs:
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- Quantitative. Each Advocate must accrue a minimum of 15 CPD points in each year, and 45 points in each rolling three-year period to meet the VITA currency standard.
- Qualitative. The ‘lessons learned’ in an Advocate’s Reflective Journal will be the main source of qualitative evidence of performance. Entries will be discussed by the Advocate and Mentor as the means of mutually advancing professional knowledge and practice.

- Professional Indemnification. The VITA Committee negotiates with the professional indemnification insurer the risk-related performance standard that Advocates must maintain to be indemnified.
- Client Survey.
  - The Advocate’s Mentor will invite the DVA client to complete a Satisfaction Survey at appropriate times during the compensation support process.
  - Alternatively, the Advocate may invite the DVA Clients to complete a Survey on-line, in which case the Regional Mentor will forward surveys to the Advocate’s Mentor for collation.
  - The Mentor and Advocate will focus on any patterns in completed surveys, as they may indicate a shortcoming in professional knowledge or skill.
- Compensation Advocacy. In addition to Client Surveys, the way in which the Commissions, VRB or AAT respond to claims or Statements of Facts and Contentions submitted by an Advocate are the main source of evidence of these aspects of a Compensation Advocate’s professional practice.
- Wellbeing Advocacy. The way in which wellbeing or well-being service providers respond to an Advocate’s referrals are the main source of evidence of these aspects of a Wellbeing Advocate’s professional knowledge and skill.
- Self-Directed Assessment. Continuous improvement in-detail will be largely self-directed; however, stubborn patterns of comment or repeated rejections by the determining bodies should prompt the Advocate to seek mentoring support.

15.5 Stakeholders

Key stakeholders and their primary interests in the quality of advocacy services follow:
- Veterans and Families. The beneficial intent of veterans’ legislation, the Government’s focus on rehabilitation in veterans’ legislation, and DVA’s veterans-centric and veteran-specific reforms make veterans and their families the predominant stakeholders in quality assurance of advocacy services.
- DVA. As the Department funded by Government to administer veterans’ legislation and therefore the agency that must be able to substantiate to
Parliament that it administers its annual appropriation with unchallengeable probity, effectiveness and efficiency, DVA is the major stakeholder in the quality of the advocacy services delivered to their Clients.

RTO. The RTO’s commercial livelihood is at risk should an ASQA audit discover poor administration of VET legislative or regulatory requirements, and lax accreditation practices. Its risk is exacerbated by its delegation of the assessment function to ATDP Assessors. It therefore has a very strong interest in assuring the quality of the training, mentoring, on-the-job experience and assessment of Candidates.1

- Defence. As the Department from which almost all DVA Clients come, Defence, through the Defence Community Organisation, shares DVA’s interest in the quality of services delivered to ADF Members pre-, during and post-transition.
- VC/ESOs. As the organisations that authorise Advocates to practice on their behalf, VC and ESOs carry the risk of litigation, and associated financial and reputational penalties, should an Adocate fail to deliver advocacy services in a manner inconsistent with its professional indemnification insurance cover.
- VITA. VITA is the incorporated association that:
  o on behalf of Member VC/ ESOs, takes out an insurance policy against professional negligence by Advocates; and
  o through its protocols and in its negotiations with the insurer, has a vital interest in representing accurately and comprehensively the military advocacy profession’s standards and risks to the insurer.
- ATDP. As the body of volunteers that is the current ‘steward’ of the century-old tradition of ‘Mates helping Mates’, ATDP has a specific and direct interest in ensuring that:
  o the training services it provides accredit Advocates with unchallengeable compentency; and
  o the post-accreditation professional development support its Mentors provide assures delivery of high quality, continuously improving advocacy services to DVA clients.
- CFMG Members. The ATDP Blueprint, s5.2 mandates CFMG’s responsibility for the ‘implementation and application of the assessment framework for

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1 The Standards for RTOs, Standard 1, states (in part):

“...employers and industry must have confidence in the integrity, currency and value of certification documents issued by RTOs, through high quality training and assessment practices that:

- meet the requirements of training packages and VET accredited courses;
- is responsive to industry and learner needs; and
- is delivered by appropriately qualified trainers and assessors with the right support services, facilities and equipment”
As assessment is made against VET standards, this mandate is executed by the NTM. It therefore assigns responsibility for quality assurance to that appointment.

- SGB.
  - The ATDP Blueprint, s5.1 charges the CPD with responsibility for the ‘strategic direction, oversight and review of the quality and consistency of (VC and) ESO advocacy services.’ It is important to note the SGB’s mandate to focus on the Program outcome. The logic is clear: the purpose of ATDP training and development is the delivery of high quality advocacy services to DVA clients.²
  - The SGB is also responsible for two other key aspects of QA: governance of the Program and national consistency of Program outcomes.

### 15.6 QA Principles

The five principles on which the ATDP QA system is founded, and an explanation of their significance follows. These principles:

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<th>Excellence</th>
<th>Implementing processes which ensure that prescribed standards are achieved.</th>
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<td>Adopting methodologies to capture, record and evaluate key outcomes.</td>
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<td>Establishing quality assurance processes to ensure that activities are completed or delivered in a nationally consistent and timely manner.</td>
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<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Utilising a planned approach with measurable controls and processes.</th>
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<td>Ensuring a consistent institutional approach to QA/QC.</td>
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<td>Accepting that all ATDP people are responsible and accountable for implementing the assurance and improvement processes.</td>
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<th>Access</th>
<th>Ensuring ATDP activities are underpinned by current policy and procedure.</th>
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<td>Implementing appropriate professional development and scholarship to ensure teaching quality and integrity is maintained.</td>
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<td>Providing a safe, well maintained and resourced learning environment.</td>
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<th>Respect</th>
<th>Informing fully, supporting and treating all ATDP people and students equitably and with respect.</th>
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| Engagement                 | Providing opportunities for appropriate internal and external involvement in the maintenance of quality and standards. |

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² See Chapter 2 of this Library for a comparison of the objectives of veteran-centric reform (DVA Towards 2020) and ATDP implementation objectives.
15.7 QA System
The delivery of high quality, continuously improving advocacy services to DVA clients will involve multiple stakeholders in complex and highly interactive relationships. A systems approach to quality assurance is therefore elementary. Figure 1 (overleaf) illustrates the key stakeholders and their inter-relationships.

Figure 1. Military Advocacy QA System

15.8 Participants’ Responsibilities
Although each stakeholder has specific responsibilities within the QA system, the members of each stakeholder – ATDP volunteer and Government employee alike – has
a general responsibility for QA implementation. ATDP Members, therefore, have the responsibility to commit to QA. In future, as the QA system is rolled out, they will be responsible in their day-to-day activities for fostering collaborative relationships with stakeholders beyond the immediate ATDP membership.

Stakeholders bear the following specific responsibilities within the QA system:

- **RTO.** The RTO ensures that advocates’ training, development and assessment under 10620NAT Course in Military Advocacy meets ASQA Standards.

- **VITA.** VITA ensures that the professional indemnification insurer fully understands and accepts the commercial risk related to:
  - advocacy training resulting from accreditation through 10620NAT Course in Military Advocacy;
  - the continual improvement of professional standards associated with CPD; and
  - the delivery of wellbeing and compensation advocacy services to veterans and their families.

- **SGB.** The SGB is:
  - accountable to the Minister and the Secretary for the effectiveness of the QA system; and
  - responsible for negotiating the expansion of the QA system beyond the immediate ATDP partners.

- **CFMG.** The CFMG is responsible:
  - on behalf of the RTO, for ensuring advocate training and assessment meets the competency standards for 10620NAT;
  - in consultation with VITA, for setting the nationally consistent performance standards to be:
    - met by the profession of military advocacy,
    - attained through the CPD Program;
  - for developing, maintaining and operating the QA system; and
  - reporting to the SGB on these QA matters.

- **QA Coordinator.** The QA Coordinator is:
  - a permanent Member of the CFMG; and
  - responsible for all aspects of the QA program including the planning, conduct and reporting of audits, reviews and system maintenance.

- **RIGs.** As Members of the CFMG, Regional Managers are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the QA system in their Region, including:

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3 Note that failure to assure competency standards are met jeopardises the RTO’s Registration, therefore placing its business at risk.
dissemination of performance standards to Workplace Mentors and Advocates;
- RIG Members commitment to QA and ensuring VC/ESOs’ are aware of QA practices;
- Advocates’ attainment of nationally consistent professional performance standards through their CPD Program; and
- feedback to the CFMG on QA achievements and failures.

- **CoP/Workplace Mentors.** CoP Mentors are responsible for:
  - identifying CoP-wide shortfalls against the profession’s performance standards;
  - facilitating remedial CPD programs and activities for CoP Members;
  - encouraging Advocates’ continuing professional development through an individually-targeted CPD program; and
  - monitoring and providing feedback to the Regional Mentor on the quality of advocacy services delivered to DVA Clients.

- **VC/ESOs.** The Executives of VC and ESOs are responsible for:
  - pre-ATDP enrolment assessment of potential candidates’ suitability for advocacy practice;
  - authorising accredited advocates and monitoring the quality of their service delivery to DVA Clients; and
  - taking appropriate action to protect the VC/ESO against litigation from an Advocate’s professional negligence.

- **Advocates.** Each individual Advocate has a specific responsibility to ensure:
  - they are aware of, and use best endeavours to improve their knowledge and skills beyond the accreditation standard of performance;
  - use best endeavours to deliver high quality advocacy services to DVA Clients;
  - work closely with their Mentor to identify and remedy through CPD shortcomings in practice; and
  - commit to a program of self-directed professional reading to increase their understanding of the legislation, policy and programs relevant to their practice.

- **DVA Clients.** Mentors and/or Advocates will encourage DVA Clients to complete a Satisfaction Survey at appropriate times during the support process (Annexes A and B).

### 15.9 Survey Instruments

See Library 4, Chapter 8 for the survey instruments.