

DISCUSSION PAPER

LEVEL ONE ADVOCATE TRAINING

Purpose of this paper

The purpose of this paper is to provide background information that will inform discussions during the upcoming consultation regarding Level One Advocate training.

Purpose of the upcoming consultation

The purpose of the upcoming consultation is to:

- Test a set of contentions regarding Level One Advocate training to determine their veracity for all participating Ex Service Organisations (ESOs).
- Identify if there are any other concerns regarding the current training strategy for Level One Advocates.
- Determine if there is a need to provide a refreshed strategy for Level One Advocate training.
- Present for discussion, options for a refreshed strategy for Level One Advocate training if required. These are:
 - amalgamating the current Wellbeing Level 1 and Compensation Level 1 curriculums, removing duplication but with minimal changes to delivery/assessment methods and no changes to the units of competency.
 - revising both the current Wellbeing Level 1 and Compensation Level 1 curriculums, as well as the current delivery/assessment methods, but with minimal changes to the units of competency.
 - develop a new Level 1 Advocacy unit of competency and develop a new curriculum and a new training and assessment strategy.

These options are described in more detail and analysed below.

Scope of consultation

The scope of the consultation is limited to discussions regarding Level One Advocate training as provided through the Advocacy Training and Development Program (ATDP).

Contentions to be tested during the consultation

Through numerous channels available to ESOs and interested groups and parties, ATDP has received feedback regarding the effectiveness and efficiency of the current strategy. The main points of that feedback are noted below.

- The requirement for all Advocate trainees to have a workplace mentor places an unacceptable burden on ESOs. This burden takes the form of both:
 - ESOs not being able to find sufficient numbers of mentors, and
 - those people who are mentoring not having enough time to both mentor trainees and meet their own advocacy responsibilities.
- The time taken to complete training and assessment is too long. Since the commencement of ATDP, trainees have been taking anywhere between 3 months and 18 months to achieve Level 1 competency, with the majority towards the upper end of that range. This is for a variety of reasons, including:

- Trainees/mentors do not have ready access to the full range of workplace experiences to meet the requirements of competency as detailed in their Workplace Experience Log (WEL) because of the size and location of the ESO and the demographic of clients. This means they cannot meet the requirements for assessment of competency at all and/or they experience significant delays in meeting the requirement because they need to wait until a person with particular entitlements under particular Acts presents for assistance at the ESO.
- Trainees (particularly for volunteers) cannot dedicate sufficient time to training to complete it in a time frame acceptable to themselves and their ESO.*
- Because the current training strategy addresses compensation advocacy and wellbeing advocacy training as separate 'streams', it does not meet ESO needs to have Level One Advocates that can provide 'whole of person' advocacy.

Background

Within the ESO community there is a growing sense that the current approach to the provision of advocacy services could be improved by moving to a more broad-based model. Specifically, the current approach which stove-pipes Wellbeing and Compensation advocacy services could be improved by the provision of an integrated service model that considers the needs of clients more holistically. This approach has been proposed as "Wellbeing-led Advocacy"

To achieve this vision, ESOs would benefit from having staff who could conduct an advocacy triage service when they have initial contact with potential clients. This service would determine the client's 'whole of person' advocacy needs, formulate a plan to meet those needs and then take action to provide the required services themselves or as part of a team.

Program Aim

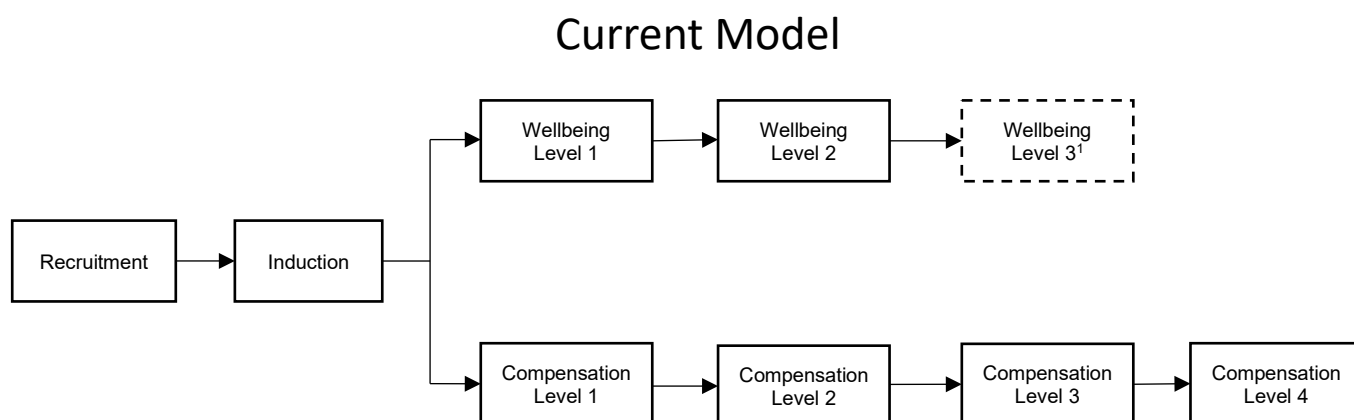
To support ESOs in meeting 'whole of person' client needs by providing a training and development program that equips Advocates with the skills and knowledge to provide both Wellbeing and Compensation advocacy services under supervision.

Target Audience

The target audience for this program of training and development are volunteer or paid staff of ESOs who provide Wellbeing and Compensation advocacy services to clients.

Pathway

The graphic below portrays the current pathways for participants in advocacy training. Wellbeing and Compensation Advocate training pathways are separate, although some Advocates choose to follow both pathways, either simultaneously or consecutively.



1. Proposed future program

Considerations

Current Training and Assessment Process

The current process for training both Wellbeing and Compensation Advocates involves:

- The ESO recruiting or selecting an individual and assessing their suitability for Advocacy training.
- The ESO nominating the individual for training and providing them with a workplace mentor.
- The individual, under the direction of their mentor, undergoing workplace training and workplace experiences and recording their progress in their Workplace Experience Logbook (WEL).
- The individual completing a number of eLearning packages and recording their completion in their WEL.
- Once all WEL milestones have been completed, the individual attending a Consolidation and Assessment (C&A) Program where their workplace learning is consolidated, and their competency assessed.

Time Taken to Achieve Competency

The time taken by an individual to complete Wellbeing Advocate Level 1 or Compensation Advocate Level 1 training can vary considerably, depending on:

- the amount of time available to them to commit to training.
- the availability of mentors.
- the workplace training strategy utilised by their ESO (some ESOs provide a structured 'in house' program to develop their trainee Advocates, while others leave it to the individual mentors).
- the opportunities to undertake the variety of workplace experiences in either Wellbeing or Compensation required in their WEL, because of the nature of the ESO's demographic.

Since the commencement of ATDP, Advocates have been taking anywhere between 3 months and 18 months to achieve Level 1 competency, with the majority towards the upper end of that range.

eLearning Packages

Wellbeing Advocate Level 1 training required includes three eLearning packages, completed online via the DVATrain portal. The average time to complete these packages is 14 hours, consisting of:

- Communications and Interview Techniques – 5 hours
- Non-Liability Health Care – 2 hours.
- Wellbeing Level 1 – 7 hours.

Compensation Level 1 includes five eLearning packages. The average time required to complete these packages is 28 hours, consisting of:

- Communications and Interview Techniques – 5 hours
- Non-Liability Health Care – 2 hours

- MRCA Basic – 7 hours
- DRCA Basic – 7 hours
- VEA Basic – 7 hours

The average time required to complete eLearning in its current format in a combined Wellbeing/Compensation Level 1 program would therefore be around 35 hours.

Assessment

Assessment in both streams is conducted during the Consolidation and Assessment (C&A) Program. The C&A is currently being conducted online via the Zoom meeting application. Evidence is gathered through in-class assessment activities (skills), completion of an Assessment Book (knowledge) and a review of the candidate's Workplace Experience Log and Portfolio of Evidence (application of skills and knowledge in the workplace). The C&A for each stream is currently conducted over 3 days (20 hours).

Assessment requirements for Compensation Level 1 and Compensation Level 2 are shown at Annex A.

Other Considerations

ESOs have expressed concern at the burden placed on them by having to provide workplace mentors. Mentors are, by definition, experienced Advocates and the time taken by them to provide workplace training and supervision to trainee Advocates is taken away from their primary role of providing Advocacy services to veterans and their dependants.

Some ESOs, due to their geographic location and the veteran demographic in that location, have difficulty providing trainee Advocates with the full spectrum of workplace experiences required by their WEL. For example, Legacy's focus is on providing services to dependants following the death of a veteran, so has difficulty providing experience with veteran's primary claims. ESOs in some regional locations assist mostly elderly veterans with service under the VEA and/or DRCA, so have difficulty providing experiences with MRCA clients.

Another concern for ESOs is the time taken for a trainee to achieve competence through the training pathway. As mentioned, many Advocates take between 12 and 18 months to complete their Level 1 C&A (the time taken is normally considerably shorter for full-time employed Advocates due to the additional time they can allocate to training and the higher volume of clients they assist). Many volunteer Advocates drop out of the training pathway before completion because they become disheartened at their slow progress.

Options

Three options for combining training for Level 1 Advocates into a single stream have been identified. These are:

- amalgamating the current Wellbeing Level 1 and Compensation Level 1 curriculums, removing duplication but with minimal changes to delivery/assessment methods and no changes to the units of competency.
- revising both the current Wellbeing Level 1 and Compensation Level 1 curriculums, as well as the current delivery/assessment methods, but with minimal changes to the units of competency.
- develop a new Level 1 Advocacy unit of competency and develop a new curriculum and a new training and assessment strategy.

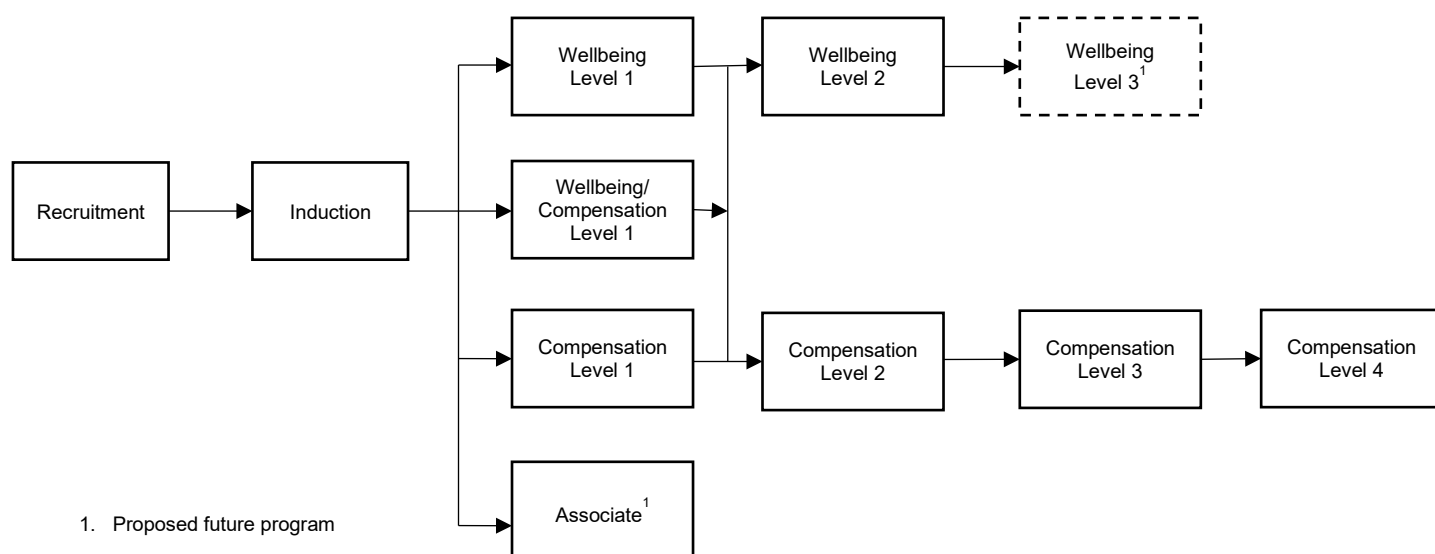
These options are described in more detail and analysed below.

Option 1 – Amalgamate with Minimal Changes

Under this option, the current curriculum, method of training and assessment processes would remain unchanged. Essentially, Advocates would complete both the Wellbeing Level 1 and Compensation Level 1 pathways as they currently exist. The only changes would be to remove duplication where elements currently reside in both pathways (such as eLearning packages). The existing separate Wellbeing Level 1 and Compensation Level 1 pathways would be retained to meet the needs of ESOs that wish to keep the two streams separate.

The model would look like this:

Option 1



For the Wellbeing/Compensation Level 1 trainees, eLearning would consist of:

- Communications and Interview Techniques
- Non-Liability Health Care
- Wellbeing Level 1
- VEA Basic
- DRCA Basic
- MRCA Basic

Trainee Advocates would complete both Wellbeing and Compensation Workplace Experience Logbooks, although these would be revised to remove duplication of experiences.

Pros

- Will deliver a Level 1 Advocate that can provide the full scope of comprehensive client-focused advocacy services under supervision.
- Requires minimal reworking of the current approach to training and assessment.
- Requires minimal changes to current C&A training and assessment materials.
- Retains the current separate Wellbeing and Compensation Level 1 pathways to cater for ESOs and individuals who do not wish to adopt the combined approach.

Cons

- Increases the overall time taken to complete Level 1 training and assessment.
- Does not reduce the workload on ESOs and mentors.
- Would complicate the delivery of Advocacy training by introducing a new pathway. An ESO and their mentors are likely to have trainee Advocates on all three pathways simultaneously.

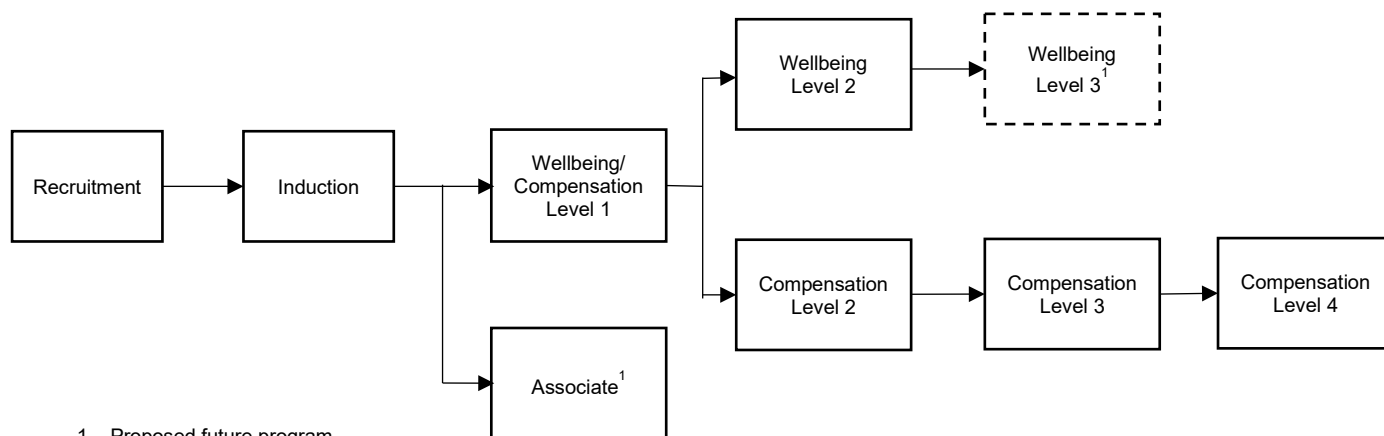
Option Two – Combine with Revised Delivery/Assessment Method

Under this option, the current curriculum, method of training and assessment processes would be revised to remove duplication, simplify the process and remove the burden on ESOs and mentors. ESOs would remain responsible for recruitment and induction of new Advocates, after which they would be nominated for Wellbeing/Compensation Level 1 training. Training would be conducted by ATDP trainers face-to-face, either electronically or in classrooms. Training and assessment would be by simulation and case studies. While the separate Level 1 units of competency would remain, amendments to the assessment requirements for the units of competency would be required. Successful completion of this program would result in the award of both units of competency.

Once assessed as competent, Level 1 Advocates would choose the Wellbeing or Compensation stream, be allocated a mentor and WEL and commence their Level 2 training as for the current methodology.

The model would look like this:

Option 2



Pros

- Will deliver a Level 1 Advocate that can provide the full scope of comprehensive client-focused advocacy services under supervision.
- Reduces the workload on ESOs and mentors by removing the requirement to conduct Level 1 workplace training and workplace experience.
- Will reduce the time take to achieve Level 1 Advocate units of competency.
- Ensures national consistency of Level 1 Advocate skills and knowledge.

Cons

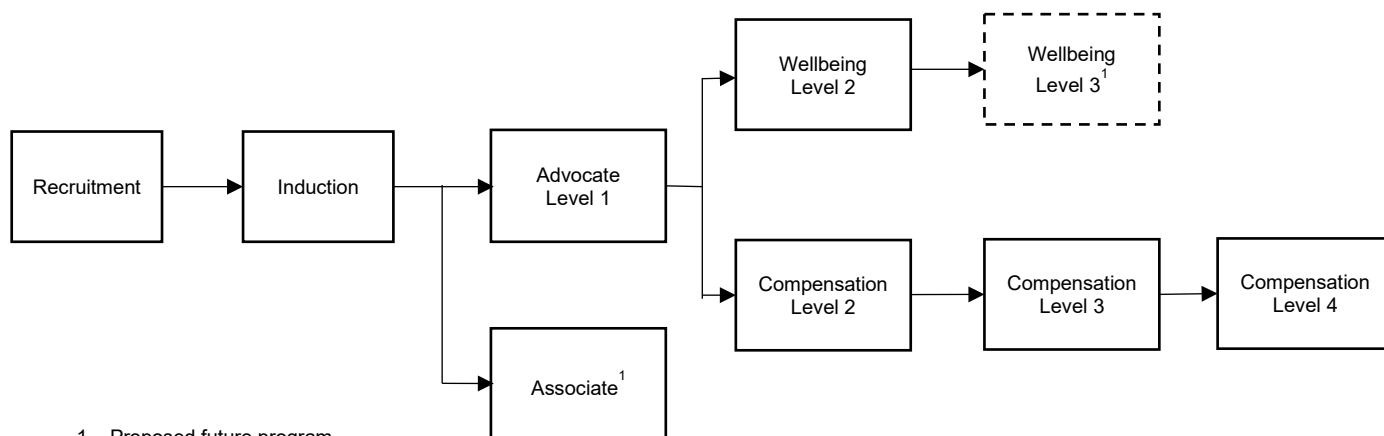
- Will require amendments to the Assessment Requirements for the Level 1 units of competency. This will require 'industry' consultation and concurrence and Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) approval.
- Current C&A training and assessment materials will need to be substantially revised.
- Several of the eLearning packages will need to be revised to align with the new training and assessment process (with time and cost implications).
- Removes the option to complete only the Wellbeing or Compensation Level 1 training, which may not suit some ESOs.

Option Three – Develop New Level 1 Advocate Unit of Competency

Under this option, the separate units of competency for Level 1 Wellbeing and Level 1 Compensation Advocates would be archived, and a single unit of competency reflecting the skills and knowledge required of a Level 1 Advocate spanning both streams would be devised. A revised Training and Assessment Strategy would be produced, reflecting the methodology outlined in Option 2 (training conducted by ATDP trainers and assessors).

The model would look like this:

Option 3



Pros

- Will deliver a Level 1 Advocate that can provide the full scope of comprehensive client-focused advocacy services under supervision.
- Provides the opportunity to focus the unit of competency on the skills and knowledge required of a Level 1 Advocate working in a holistic advocacy environment as envisaged in the proposed Wellbeing-led Advocacy model.
- Provides the best option to remove duplication in both training and assessment.
- Reduces the workload on ESOs and mentors by removing the requirement to conduct Level 1 workplace training and workplace experience.
- Will reduce the time take to achieve Level 1 Advocate competency.
- Ensures national consistency of Level 1 Advocate skills and knowledge.

Cons

- Will require development of a new Level 1 unit of competency and its corresponding assessment requirements. Level 2 units of competency in both streams will also need to be amended as the current Level 1 units are listed as pre-requisites. This process

will require 'industry' consultation and concurrence and Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) approval.

- Current C&A training and assessment materials will need to be substantially revised.
- Several of the eLearning packages will need to be revised to align with the new unit of competency and training and assessment process (with time and cost implications).
- Removes the option to complete only the separate Wellbeing or Compensation Level 1 training, which may not suit some ESOs.

Conclusion

Given the analysis above, it is concluded that Option 3 provides the best outcome for both ESOs and trainee Advocates. The existing Course in Military Advocacy was developed in 2016 and does not reflect the changes in the ESO and Advocacy environments that have occurred since then. The development of a combined Wellbeing and Compensation Advocate at Level 1 has been proposed for a number of years and was generally supported by ESO representatives during industry consultation conducted for the reaccreditation of the Course in Military Advocacy in 2021.

It is recommended that a pilot of this concept be conducted with a small group of Level 1 trainee Advocates. To make the pilot more useful, it is recommended that these be selected (on a volunteer basis) from:

- a variety of ESOs
- various States/Territories
- both urban and rural/remote ESOs

Annex:

A. Assessment Requirements for Level 1 Units of Competency

ASSESSMENT REQUIREMENTS
COMPENSATION LEVEL 1 (NAT11019001)

Performance Evidence

The candidate must show evidence of the ability to complete tasks outlined in elements and performance criteria of this unit, including:

- Planning and conducting under supervision at least two interviews where the client is making a primary claim.
- Completing under supervision, with full supporting documentation, two primary claims each for the Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986, the Safety Rehabilitation and Compensation (Defence-related Claims) Act 1988 and the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004 (a total of six claims). One claim under each Act may be completed in a simulated workplace environment.
- Maintaining records in accordance with organisational requirements.

Knowledge Evidence

The candidate must be able to demonstrate essential knowledge to effectively complete the task outlined in the elements and performance criteria of this unit. This includes knowledge of:

- Relevant legislation and policy required for lodgement of a rehabilitation or compensation claim for a service-related condition or injury
- Claims processes under the relevant legislation
- Factors involved in conducting a successful interview
- Self-care and dealing with personal stress and burnout
- Acceptable behaviour in the advocate/client relationship
- Need to include others where clients display behavioural issues
- Relevant IT based record keeping systems

Assessment Conditions

Assessment may be in the form of:

- interviews performed with actual clients,
- completion of post interview action plans for actual clients,
- completion and submission of claims for actual clients,
- simulations and scenarios, and
- theoretical knowledge examinations.

Both practical skills and knowledge must be assessed. Assessments conducted in actual working environments require access to all the relevant equipment and resources of that working environment. Simulated assessment environments must simulate the real-life working environment including access to all the relevant equipment and resources of a real-life working environment.

All assessment must be completed in accordance with work health and safety standards, policies and procedures.

Evidence may also be gathered from Workplace Experience Logs and formative assessments to demonstrate consistent performance in the workplace or simulated workplace.

WELLBEING LEVEL 1 (NAT11019005)

Performance Evidence

The candidate must show evidence of the ability to complete tasks outlined in elements and performance criteria of this unit, including:

- Planning and conducting at least two interviews. One interview may be completed in a simulated environment.
- Preparing at least two post-interview action plans for clients with different wellbeing needs. One action plan may be completed in a simulated environment.
- Implementing at least two different action pathways as agreed with client. One action pathway may be completed in a simulated environment.
- Maintaining records in accordance with organisational requirements.

Knowledge Evidence

The candidate must be able to demonstrate essential knowledge to effectively complete the task outlined in the elements and performance criteria of this unit. This includes knowledge of:

- Legislation and policy relevant to wellbeing support to the service and ex-service communities and their dependants and families
- Wellbeing support available from government- and community-based service providers and agencies
- Entitlements and benefits available from DVA as well as government- and community-based service providers and agencies
- Factors involved in conducting a successful interview
- Self-care and dealing with personal stress and burnout
- Acceptable behaviour in the advocate/client relationship
- Best practice for working with clients with behaviour issues
- Relevant IT based record keeping systems.

Assessment Conditions

Assessment will be in the form of:

- interviews performed with actual and simulated clients
- completion of post interview action plans for actual and simulated clients
- simulations and scenarios
- theoretical knowledge examinations.

Both practical skills and knowledge must be assessed. Assessments conducted in actual working environments require access to all the relevant equipment and resources of that working environment. Simulated assessment environments must simulate the real-life working environment including access to all the relevant equipment and resources of a real-life working environment.

All assessment must be completed in accordance with work health and safety standards, policies and procedures.

Evidence may also be gathered from Workplace Experience Logs and formative assessments to demonstrate consistent performance in the workplace or simulated workplace.