

VETERANS' VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SCHEME (VVRS) DISCUSSION PAPER

1.0 PURPOSE

This paper presents the findings of the VVRS Working Party. Recommendations have been included to address many of the issues that have emerged from the VVRS Working Party, the Exit Satisfaction Survey, Focus Group meetings and other forums.

2.0 THE VVRS

- The VVRS originated as a 1994–95 Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) Budget initiative within a package to improve the health and quality of life of Vietnam and younger veterans.
- The VVRS began in May 1998 to assist eligible veterans to obtain and maintain paid employment.
- The Scheme is free, and participation is entirely voluntary, with no penalties for an inability to complete any program.
- Injury or an accepted disability is not a prerequisite for eligibility for the Scheme.
- The Scheme's vocational rehabilitation services, apart from retraining courses, are provided nationwide through a contracted agency: CRS Australia.
- Generous safety net provisions exist for veterans with Totally and Permanently Incapacitated (T&PI) status, to ensure they are given the opportunity to "test their capacity to return to work" and not be financially disadvantaged in the process.
- To April 2002, the VVRS had received more than 1,000 inquiries, and 630 veterans had commenced rehabilitation programs (Attachment A), with over 50 T&PI veterans achieving a return to work of greater than eight hours per week.

3.0 CLIENT PROFILE

A typical VVRS client is currently:

- a male, aged 46 plus;
- a Vietnam veteran;
- referred to the Scheme from a broad range of sources;
- seeking retraining to gain employment;
- in receipt of a Veterans Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA) pension, but not at T&PI level;
- currently unemployed; and
- located in Eastern Australia.

4.0 BACKGROUND TO THE FORMATION OF THE VVRS WORKING PARTY

In February 2002, a Working Party, chaired by the Repatriation Commissioner, with representation from ex-service organisations and the Department, was set up to review the VVRS and examine ways to improve its promotion. This followed on from a recommendation made at a Departmental Ex-service Organisations forum. The VVRS Working Party's terms of reference are to:

- consider the parameters and structure of the VVRS with a view to ensuring its attractiveness to veterans;
- identify strategies to market the VVRS effectively, for example to veterans who are newly compensated, or have jobs in jeopardy or do not have contact with the DVA or ESOs; and
- consider other rehabilitation issues in the support of veterans if required.

The Working Party has met twice and has considered the legislation and policy underpinning the VVRS. In addition, Working Party members and/or DVA staff associated with the VVRS have:

- considered the outcomes of the National VVRS Conference—Canberra, March 2002 (*Attachment B*);
- sponsored and organised VVRS Focus Group Meetings of veteran clients in Brisbane and Melbourne, March–April 2002 and considered the outcomes of an ESO/Training Information Program (TIP) Training Seminar, Adelaide June 2002 (*Attachment C*);
- assisted in the development of an Exit Satisfaction Survey (*Attachment D*); and
- provided advice and comment on a range of promotional products and activities (*Attachment E*).

5.0 THE BROADER ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH THE VVRS OPERATES

• Potential for increased numbers of veterans from various deployments, particularly higher numbers of younger veterans as TPIs

As at 30 June 2002, 31,138 veterans aged under 55 years were in receipt of a disability pension, including T&PI. Approximately 2,370 veterans, already receiving pensions, were granted T&PI status in 2001–2002 and 6,610 veterans aged under 55 years receive disability pensions at the T&PI rate. Ten new veterans, previously not receiving a disability pension, were designated as T&PI this year. Australian Defence Force (ADF) activities including East Timor and other peacekeeping exercises and the deployment of the ADF in the Middle East have the potential to increase T&PI numbers, particularly among younger veterans.

Given this possible increased number of younger T&PI veterans, the Scheme is an ideal avenue for individuals to test their capacity to return to work in a secure environment provided by the safety net provisions.

• The changing nature of work and how work can be performed

Current technological developments, continuous and flexible learning arrangements, sophisticated equipment, skills portability, tailoring of jobs to individuals and flexibility about how and where work can be performed, have changed the dynamics of many labour market practices. Such options have created opportunities for many people, regardless of capacity to work, to change job direction, work patterns or employment options in ways not considered possible in past working lives.

• Disabilities generally and community perceptions of their management

Notions about inability to work are being continually challenged, particularly since the introduction of anti-discrimination legislation, such as the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, and accompanying changes in societal attitudes. Many people with disabilities (including veterans) successfully manage in a wide range of jobs. A greater community awareness exists of assistance measures and professional management for those attempting to integrate into the workforce or return to work. There is an expectation that all workforce-age adults with disabilities can contribute and become productive members of the community in either paid or unpaid work. Still, inaccurate perceptions of people with disabilities remain and may hinder some veterans in their efforts to enter and/or remain in work.

- **Medical progress and the T&PI concept**

Medical progress, new forms of treatment and the use of new technology, aids and appliances, allow more individuals to manage or consider a return to work in some capacity. Some of these concepts challenge previous perceptions of permanent inability to work, allowing consideration of re-entry into the workforce, and a potentially more fulfilling life following injury or illness.

- **Veterans' perceptions of disability compensation benefits**

The veteran and broader Australian communities hold high expectations of veteran entitlements. The VVRS is perceived by rehabilitation professionals as a generous and flexible vocational rehabilitation scheme. However, the Repatriation scheme is a compensation scheme that tends to foster a “disability” mindset which can be a disincentive to participating in the VVRS or seeking employment. Most ESOs suggest certain veteran advocates “feel a sense of satisfaction when they get veterans on a pension”. The VVRS is therefore perceived as a backward step. This may be reinforced by TIP advocates who primarily focus on pension matters rather than welfare or rehabilitation issues.

- **Receptiveness of ESOs to the Scheme**

Many ESOs are advocates of the Scheme and actively support rehabilitation and fellow veterans' attempts to apply for the VVRS. However, some take a contrary stance and may negatively influence veterans about the VVRS, often based on inaccurate or misleading information. ESO support for programs and initiatives is crucial, particularly as many veterans do not trust “the system”.

- **Current political climate regarding mutual obligation**

The philosophy of the current government tends to favour mutual obligation and reciprocal responsibility. There may be opposition to linking mutual obligation to veterans' benefits, including opposition from members of the helping professions who may consider that mutual obligation could exacerbate pre-existing conditions, including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

- **Rehabilitation**

The current trend is to attempt to return people to work, regardless of their location, industry, gender, level of disability, education, type of employment, skill base, so they can make a positive contribution to the community and lead more fulfilling lives. The effect of rehabilitation extends beyond the workplace, affecting the families of veterans and the wider community. Inactivity may be linked to loss of identity, lower self-esteem, increased behavioural and psychological problems and increased rates of physical deterioration, substance abuse and accidents.

6.0 VETERAN RESPONSES TO THE SCHEME

The working group has elicited the information presented below:

6.1 WHAT IS WORKING?

- **Provisions of the Scheme**

The Scheme receives widespread support among veterans and ESOs. Apart from providing valued vocational and employment assistance, it is seen as fulfilling an important personal and social developmental objective for veterans. The Scheme has worked for veterans who say they want to

better utilise their skills, earn more money, retain their savings and keep their minds active. Its main provisions such as its:

- no cost nature;
- voluntary nature;
- flexibility (ie. time to complete training, provision to suspend activities if required);
- training opportunities; and
- pension safety net facilities for T&PI veterans, are seen as attractive, especially when compared with counterpart schemes in other sectors of society.

- **Service delivery, CRS Australia's involvement**

CRS Australia, the national rehabilitation service provider, has had a long association with the veteran community. CRS Australia began its operations during the post-World War II period of assisting returning veterans. CRS Australia's counsellors assess, recommend and case manage rehabilitation programs for veterans. VVRS project officers in DVA consider and approve these recommendations. CRS Australia consider that they provide a buffer for veterans who have major concerns with working directly with DVA. Anecdotal comments and responses from focus groups and exit surveys demonstrate that many veterans have received significant assistance from CRS and have a high regard for CRS's rehabilitation practitioners.

- **Vocational outcomes**

The VVRS is providing training and vocational assistance and helping many veterans to secure a wide range of jobs. Veterans report that the Scheme has opened opportunities for them to consider retraining, take up employment and re-enter mainstream life. The Scheme has helped veterans secure a range of jobs including: executive officer, warehouse manager, project manager, maintenance scheduler and cook.

Some veterans attribute their success in gaining suitable work to VVRS assistance—especially those veterans who say they were “out of touch” with applying for jobs and writing applications or daunted by technological changes.

Assistance measures cited by Scheme participants as being valuable include:

- assessing and providing help to update skills;
- devising a plan of attack to help get a suitable job;
- giving advice on relevant courses;
- helping with updating and writing a resume;
- providing counselling and advice;
- assessing abilities and clarifying work or training options (suited to health and physical condition).

- **Non-vocational, financial and social outcomes**

Veterans often attribute a boost in their self-esteem and confidence to being on the Scheme. Some VVRS participants who have not gained employment have cited a wide array of “side” benefits of the Scheme, including that it:

- facilitated their participation in a gym or swimming program;
- gave them opportunities to have physiotherapy treatment;
- assisted in the veterans' wealth creation process;
- met their social needs;
- provided referral to VVCS counselling services and lifestyle programs;

- opened up opportunities for voluntary work;
- helped them gain a much-needed focus in life;
- assisted in opening their minds;
- gave them hope for the future; and
- helped to “open doors”.

- **Marketing initiatives**

Various measures have been introduced to promote and evaluate the VVRS. A satisfaction survey was distributed to gauge participating veterans’ opinions and increased promotional work has been undertaken, including updating of material, identifying key stakeholders and better targeting information. Publicity via feature articles, advertisements, brochures, posters and the DVA website has been generated. A VVRS national conference in March 2002, provided for discussions on progress and identification and examination of future directions.

6.2 WHAT IS NOT WORKING?

- **Limits to provisions of the Scheme**

Lack of information and misinterpretation of the Scheme have led to perceptions that the Scheme limits the amount of money for cases. Some veterans have also said that the Scheme has:

- restricted them undertaking some training courses (especially Information Technology) and tertiary studies because of the “minimal level” retraining provisions of the VVRS;
- not helped them to secure a challenging job post training;
- not resulted in work for which they are trained;
- often involved time delays in the approval of claims; and
- lacked follow-up assistance (ie, the case may be kept open for 12 months past a sustained employment benchmark though no further assistance or contact was provided).

- **Perceived loss of DVA entitlements and financial disincentives**

Some veterans believe that participating and working via the VVRS results in lost DVA entitlements, particularly their DVA Gold Card and related benefits (ie. community concessions).

Intermediate or Special (T&PI) Rate pension recipients retain their DVA Gold Card entitlement regardless of their return to work activities through the VVRS. However, this is not always true for Invalidity Service Pension recipients

Despite VVRS Safety Net provisions for the Scheme’s Intermediate or Special (T&PI) Rate pension recipients, there are veterans who view VVRS participation as “a lot of effort for little material gain”.

It is vital that veterans clarify their individual circumstances and the possible net financial benefits resulting from involvement in the VVRS, with Compensation staff in local DVA State Offices, prior to committing to the Scheme.

- **Lack of understanding of the provisions of the Scheme and administrative issues and internal marketing of the Scheme**

Many DVA staff do not know of the VVRS, and at times have conveyed incorrect information on the Scheme and veteran eligibility. DVA staff highlight inadequacies with the Scheme including:

- a lack of data for national reporting on the Scheme;
- no effective internal communication strategy within DVA;
- not enough training or staff to administer the VVRS; and

- insufficient interaction between National Office VVRS policymakers, and VVRS project officers who implement the Scheme.

- **The need for further attention/development of some of the Scheme’s provisions, eg, insurance and work-trial arrangements**

VVRS participation may impact on a veteran’s superannuation entitlements or a past workers’ compensation decision. It is therefore critical that such matters are addressed with the veteran at the initial contact point by the VVRS Project Officers or at the assessment stage of the rehabilitation process. Future employers of injured veterans require confirmation of essential information that may influence their employee insurance arrangements. Adequate insurance arrangements are an essential prerequisite for a veteran’s return to the workplace. While CRS Australia provides **unemployed veterans** with appropriate insurance cover while undertaking a work trial, this cover does not extend to veterans undertaking rehabilitation through a VVRS Job-in-Jeopardy Program.

- **Veterans’ capacity to deal with the administrative aspects of the Scheme, and the Department**

Some veterans may be deterred by the paperwork required prior to VVRS participation (which may be a significant disincentive to proceed with an application).

- **General adjustment (age, disability, Return-to-work [RTW]), unrealistic expectations and labour market issues**

Many veterans over 50 years of age, particularly those with PTSD, may pose the question: “Who’s going to give me a job?” and are sceptical about their chances of securing work. Veterans are concerned about their age, chances for employment, disability issues, ability to handle stress in the workplace, issues relating to returning to work after long absences and employers’ wariness of veterans’ psychological problems. The VVRS Exit Survey has provided evidence that some veterans are unrealistic in their expectation of the Scheme, services CRS can provide and labour market conditions.

- **Variation in the quality of services offered by CRS Australia**

While many veterans are positive about CRS Australia and its services, there are criticisms of CRS including that they can be ignorant of military experience and may not always value military experience and skills; do not always answer questions correctly or point veterans “in the right direction”; and, lack experience in dealing with veterans with back conditions and PTSD.

- **Post-VVRS support, eg, securing employment**

Some VVRS veterans have noted that more support during the final phase of rehabilitation is required from CRS Australia, specifically the process of securing employment. Job preparation and seeking skills are a critical component of rehabilitation. CRS Australia cannot guarantee that any veteran will secure employment, but offers a range of services to ensure that veterans are competitive and job ready.

- **Liaison and interaction with the Department of Defence on the VVRS**

The joint Defence and DVA Links Project is helping improve discharge arrangements to assist ADF personnel transitioning to civilian employment. However, better links are needed internally between Transition Management Services (TMS), Military Compensation and Rehabilitation Service (MCRS) and the VVRS to better meet the needs of injured and non-injured veterans.

- **Scheme marketing**

Many gaps in marketing have been identified including a need to:

- promote the existence of the Scheme (ie, many veterans say they found out about it “by accident”);
- reassure veterans about the safety net aspects of the VVRS and that the Scheme is voluntary and can assist veterans whose jobs may be jeopardy;
- reassure T&PI veterans that VVRS participation does not mean loss of their Gold Card or T&PI status; and
- acknowledge health issues generally and mental health issues specifically, including PTSD, in marketing.

7.0 SUGGESTIONS CANVASSED BY THE WORKING PARTY—TO IMPROVE THE VVRS (SOME OF WHICH ARE UNDER WAY)

- **Make greater use of ESO advocates, networks and develop a TIP module or kits for ESO advocates .**

Enlisting ESO support is vital to educate veterans and the community about the VVRS, reassure veterans about the Scheme’s safety net aspects and allay the fear and anxiety that veterans may feel about going on the Scheme. VVRS Working Party and focus group members have identified TIP as a good vehicle for distribution of VVRS material.

- **Make maximum use of EXPOS and Defence seminars**

EXPOS and Defence seminars have been identified as excellent promotional avenues.

- **Increase the focus on hospital programs**

Hospitals which treat veterans are well placed to pass on the message about the VVRS, particularly during post-discharge planning periods.

- **Access veterans not attached to ESOs, through the general media**

Use of mainstream media and industry publications where veterans tend to be employed (eg. security organisations, police, ambulance services) could be productive in getting the VVRS message to a wide spectrum of veterans, particularly veterans about whom DVA has no knowledge.

- **Emphasise early intervention through general information and/or letter to all discharging veterans**

A need was identified to provide VVRS information to serving ADF members, particularly in the transition period from the ADF. Various options were discussed, including

- at time of discharge;
- when determined T&PI status and entitlements;

- when veterans have had the chance to “settle down” and consider their options (after being granted T&PI status); and
- six months’ after the determination of T&PI.

The last two options were the most favoured by the Working Party.

- **Provide more intensive training/information to VVCS staff**

VVCS counsellors have credibility with many veterans and are well placed to promote the VVRS to veterans.

- **Market the Scheme to veterans who want to legitimise their paid employment**

Some veterans on the VVRS, are less insecure about being “dobbled in” and feel better about working without being “caught”.

- **Provide incentives for employers to accept veterans as employees**

The idea of providing incentives for organisations which employ or retain veteran employees, similar to those offered by MCRS for their clients (Attachment F), has been raised. Acknowledging employer involvement in publicity material has also been noted.

- **CRS Australia to provide assistance to veterans partners**

The matter of training for veterans’ spouses is often raised, and CRS Australia professionals emphasise the importance of involving veterans’ wives in the entire rehabilitation process because of the positive and worthwhile contribution they make. Many spouses and partners have:

- been unpaid carers for veterans;
- given up a significant portion of their lives (and often paid employment) to look after an incapacitated veteran; and
- often found it very hard to get back into the workforce.

Yet, veterans spouses are not able to access training from DVA, the VVRS or CRS Australia.

- **Rename the Scheme, ie, remove “Rehabilitation”**

The term “Rehabilitation” in the Scheme’s name may have negative connotations for healthy veterans. Some veterans may perceive that the Scheme does not cater for those without a disability, and are seeking an opportunity to retrain or require assistance to enter the civilian workforce. There is also potential for the VVRS to be confused with the VVCS.

- **Make parts of the Scheme compulsory**

Suggestions have been made that the VVRS could be compulsory, at least for younger veterans who tend to have a different mindset to older veterans. This is particularly relevant given that in various quarters concerns are expressed about the young age of some T&PIs and the potential “waste of a life”.

8.0 CONCLUSION

This paper has presented various aspects of the VVRS, in particular, perceptions from key participants and practitioners, about the Scheme's effectiveness (or otherwise).

The Working Party has exposed barriers that exist for many veterans attempting to return to, or maintain, work—irrespective of their age or T&PI status. Certainly, evidence from the Working Party has demonstrated that there is a need to provide vocational assistance to veterans. Given that employment options have been extended in contemporary society because of medical progress, technological developments and the ever-changing nature of work, the VVRS has the potential to provide assistance to veterans, particularly younger T&PIs.

It is reasonable to expect that the VVRS (or some suitable rehabilitation scheme), should be available to provide realistic vocational opportunities for younger veterans. DVA has a special responsibility to veterans with severe disabilities (T&PI), a group which requires significant support to achieve a sustainable and safe return to the workforce. Younger T&PI veterans experience injury at a time when their contemporaries in wider society are developing many transferable work skills, experiences and career paths, and are in control of their lives. An attractive and effective rehabilitation scheme for younger T&PI veterans is essential to help provide them with equitable situations so that they can compete for employment opportunities, and get on with rebuilding their lives and wealth creation.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 PART 1: RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING VVRS PARAMETERS AND STRUCTURE

- **Limits of the Scheme's provisions**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. DVA and CRS Australia investigate options to assist Job-in-Jeopardy veterans wanting to undertake work trials or similar job training activities with insurance cover.
2. CRS Australia is encouraged to adopt, in the final phase of a rehabilitation program, post-rehabilitation links between the veteran and local employment agencies.
3. CRS and DVA investigate opportunities for veterans in businesses to employ VVRS participants (and market such ideas to suitable prospective employers).
4. DVA consider amending the scheme so that it offers employment incentives similar to those offered by Centrelink and MCRS. (Attachment F)
5. DVA explore options to involve veterans' spouses in VVRS rehabilitation processes, including attending sessions with spouses and investigate ways to assist veterans' spouses via programs conducted by CRS Australia (or other means).
6. DVA amend the scheme to place greater emphasis on graduated return-to-work options; work placements; part-time, contract or voluntary work; and positive discrimination for veterans in the public service, by using Australian Public Service workplace diversity arrangements.
7. DVA and CRS investigate changes that would assist veterans establish themselves in self-employment.
8. CRS take account of options (such as labour pooling and job-sharing) to allow for employer and employee requirements.
9. DVA consider amending the provisions relating to the minimum level of retraining provided to veterans to achieve a comparable level of skills or the optimum level of skill relative to their disability.

- **Variation in the quality of rehabilitation services offered**

RECOMMENDATION:

DVA and CRS ensure that rehabilitation case managers are matching veterans with appropriate training, advice and job opportunities. DVA and CRS examine the support that could be provided to veterans who fail to find employment after 12 months.

- **Veterans' capacity to deal with the administrative aspects of the Scheme and the Department**

RECOMMENDATION:

DVA provide assistance to veterans to complete paperwork.

- **Liaison/interaction with Department of Defence on the VVRS**

RECOMMENDATION:

Defence/DVA Links are further developed with regard to:

1. Preparation of material that incorporates what DVA has to offer in the transition management area, including the VVRS, for serving members, and;
2. VVRS project staff to participate in joint Defence and DVA Links discussion on the possibility of improved services for serving members in transition management.

- **Rename the Scheme, ie, remove "Rehabilitation".**

RECOMMENDATION:

DVA consider renaming the Scheme.

9.2 PART 2: RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING IMPROVED MARKETING

- **Disabilities generally and community perceptions of their management.**

RECOMMENDATION:

That negative connotations about veterans with a disability be addressed in VVRS marketing activities.

- **Veterans' perceptions of entitlements.**

RECOMMENDATION:

Highlight VVRS benefits, in particular the worth of paid and unpaid work, which might help to offset any negative perceptions or fears about participating in the VVRS.

- **Receptiveness of ESOs to the Scheme.**

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That ESOs be fully briefed about the Scheme and requested to act as VVRS advocates.
2. Utilise the services of a successful VVRS participant as an advocate, to attend meetings and seminars, field questions and explain the Scheme to other veterans; utilise ESO journals.
3. Investigate ways with TIP welfare officers, to promote VVRS on a state-by-state basis, possibly using a model recently developed through the South Australian State Office. This model is at present being considered for implementation in other States (ie Tasmania and Queensland).

- **Marketing initiatives.**

RECOMMENDATION:

Continue marketing initiatives which are proving to be successful. Orient marketing to address perceptions as well as attracting participants.

- **Perceived loss of DVA entitlements and financial disincentives.**

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That reassurances about the retention of T&PI status and veteran compensation benefits are placed in all VVRS publicity material.
2. That information about insurance and workers' compensation issues is sought from veterans as part of DVA or CRS Australia introductory process.
3. That veterans are made fully aware of financial implications prior to any decision to participate in the Scheme.

- **Lack of understanding of the provisions of the Scheme and problems with administration and internal marketing.**

RECOMMENDATION:

That increased staff resources and training for VVRS and VAN staff be provided to ensure better implementation and administration.

- **General adjustment (age, disability, RTW) and labour market issues.**

RECOMMENDATION:

That DVA educate employers about the episodic nature of veterans' PTSD conditions, especially given that veterans with PTSD are often able to match the limitations of PTSD with portability of skills, flexible work patterns and options such as self employment or job-sharing arrangements.

- **Access veterans not attached to ESOs through general media.**

RECOMMENDATION:

That initiatives for targeted mainstream media advertising (already being investigated), be continued.

- **Emphasise early intervention through general information.**

RECOMMENDATION:

1. That various pivotal points in ADF establishments be targeted, to impart information to veterans at an early stage. ADF discharge clerks and education officers are relevant contacts.
2. Instigate VVRS marketing at Defence EXPOS and seminars. A calendar of events can be used to identify such opportunities.
3. Instigate marketing of VVRS via hospitals and ADF medical centres, with a focus on the wellbeing and improved quality of life aspects of the VVRS. Details on the VVRS should be given in PTSD courses.

- **Distribute information packages to discharging veterans, ie, general letter to all discharging veterans with information for them to consider.**

RECOMMENDATION:

Examine options regarding timing, and who to send to (ie, those on a lower pension). The most beneficial time may be when a veteran is at the 50–70 per cent disability pension level. Consider options for providing VVRS information in the DVA pensions book, *You and Your Pension*.

- **Provide more intensive training/information to VVCS staff.**

RECOMMENDATION:

Instigate marketing of VVRS via VVCS counsellors, with a focus on PTSD courses and ability to work (with details on the VVRS given in any courses on PTSD). Because many psychiatrists/psychologists are out-sourced, there is a need to ensure they are aware of the VVRS prior to their commencement.

- **Market the Scheme to veterans who want to ‘test the waters’ regarding a return to paid employment.**

RECOMMENDATION:

Emphasise in marketing material, that veterans can use the Scheme as a means of testing their capacity to return to paid work, without jeopardising their T&PI status.

9.3 ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A	VVRS Extract from CRS Australia Report, April 2002
Attachment B	Record of National VVRS Conference Outcomes March 2002
Attachment C	Feedback From VVRS Focus Groups (Qld and Vic)
Attachment D	VVRS Exit Satisfaction Survey
Attachment E	VVRS Marketing Strategies
Attachment F	MCRS Employment Incentives

Veterans Vocational Rehabilitation Scheme

Extract from CRS Australia Report

(as of 12 April 2002)

During the period of the Scheme to date (12 May 1998 to 12 April 2002) the following service levels have been achieved:

Referrals

Nine-hundred and ninety-six (996) veterans have contacted CRS and had discussions about use of the Scheme (as of December 2001 it was 924 veterans).

Commencements

Six hundred and seventy (670) or 67 per cent of those who made contact with CRS Australia were accepted onto a vocational program.

Jobs

Two hundred and eighty one (281) of those accepted onto program have succeeded in obtaining or retaining a job. This represents 41% of all programs started to date and is consistent with performance over previous quarters.

Jobs sustained

One hundred and ninety eight (198) of veterans who have obtained a job to date under the Scheme have remained in employment in excess of 6 months (29 per cent of all program commencements).

Of particular relevance to the performance of the Scheme, is that of the two hundred and eighty one (281) programs resulting in a job, the proportion of veterans who have achieved sustained employment is 70%.

Jobs in Jeopardy and Safety Net

Only seventy six (76) of the six hundred and seventy (670) programs commenced to date have been for veterans in a Job in Jeopardy or Safety Net situation. This is comprised of fifty nine (59) for Job in Jeopardy, and seventeen (17) Safety Net cases. The percentage of veterans accessing the scheme under these categories remains low. However, increased marketing of this aspect of the Scheme may increase participation.

Active cases

As at 12 April 2002, two hundred and twenty seven (227) cases are active. Of these 227 open cases, fifty one (51) are in employment being monitored to the six month benchmark.

The 51 being monitored in employment by State are:

NSW – 11
VIC – 7
QLD – 19
SA/NT – 7
WA – 4
TAS – 3

The remaining 176 active cases are distributed by State as follows:

NSW – 47
VIC – 22
QLD – 57
SA/NT – 31
WA – 9
TAS – 10

Information on veteran's job situation after 12 months and 24 months

CRS Australia ceases to monitor a veteran 12 months after attaining employment. However, veterans are welcomed and encouraged to contact CRS Australia if they need further assistance.

Additional information provided by CRS Australia:

Medical condition(s) VVRS clients experience as identified by CRS Australia:

- Primarily psychological/PTSD and/or
- Musculo-skeletal injuries/degradation

Barriers CRS Australia case providers have identified in our clients progressing to a return to the work situation:

- length of time unemployed
 - lack of familiarity with/lack of experience in job seeking and job targeting
 - outdated work skills
 - attitude to, and experience in a multiskilled work environment
 - difficulties managing work and life stressors
-

Satisfaction Survey

Satisfaction surveys have been recently sent to veterans who have applied to the Scheme as of January 2001. Responses are beginning to be received by National Office.

RECORD OF VVRS CONFERENCE

20–21 MARCH 2002

GENERAL COMMENTS

- MCRS are enjoying working with a Scheme to which people come because they WANT a job.
- CRS consider that that have been able to be a buffer for veterans who hate DVA.
- Many veterans feel very hesitant when they received the paperwork about the VVRS—it may take them some time before they even look at it. They may make initial inquiries and then return later.
- Certain ESOs are not supportive.
- The first step is the most difficult for many veterans to take. They are concerned about losing their pension.
- Many veterans do not want to disclose to anyone that they have PTSD.
- All attendees at the Conference felt that the Scheme has not achieved everything that it could. There is room for improvement.
- Some veterans are in their comfort zones and do not want to explore work options.
- The Scheme has been an “add-on”, not given enough resources.
- Not enough training given to DVA staff—some are just given the manual.
- Some veterans focus on certain issues like pensions, then a light goes on and they accept the Scheme.
- Marketing at the right time is important to encourage veterans, blanket marketing is not going to be as effective as targeted marketing
- Marketing plants the seed.
- Quality of referrals are improving, applicants are more likely to move to a program.
- Labour market issues need to be considered, ie poor job opportunities in certain areas, industries, etc
- Have to ensure that the role of the family in the veteran’s rehabilitation is adequately support by the VVRS.
- VEA is all geared to the veteran, not the family. Even though family issues are raised in the assessment it is left behind.
- Is it undermining the value of the service to say that veteran satisfaction is the most important outcome.
- We should be careful about the range of jobs that are realistic for veterans to obtain—we have tended to “beef up” stories which might unrealistically raise expectations.
- If a veteran informs DVA they want to participate in volunteer work they may be informed that their eligibility will be reassessed. We need to determine if this a good or bad thing for the veteran.
- Voluntary work develops confidence and hence the confidence to apply to the Scheme.
- Does the name of the Scheme give veterans the correct perception?

- ***What are the vocational outcomes we are trying to achieve?***
 - get veterans a job
 - ensure that the job is sustainable—6 and 12 months
 - full-time/part-time/casual
 - self employment
 - voluntary work—valuable outcome (in the context of getting a paid job?)
 - course of study—as progression to employment
 - retaining a job

- ***Where vocational outcomes are unlikely, what are the non-vocational outcomes we hope to achieve?***
 - assist the veteran to understand that there will not be an employment outcome
 - encourage voluntary work—eg highlight the social benefits
 - identify a problem and encourage the veteran to pursue treatment
 - inform veterans of pathways to claim for a pension, etc if warranted
 - assist with life decisions which affect family and quality of life issues
 - help facilitate veteran satisfaction

ACTION ITEMS

- Need to train of staff when there is a change to the Scheme (to ensure consistency).
- Require more training for various aspects such as, legislation and difficult cases.
- Need to examine data consistency—ie is a veteran returning to the Scheme a second or third time considered a new applicant. In some instances statistics are slipping, eg Albury/Wodonga as they overlap two States.
- Check that the documentation on line is up to date. Liaise with CRS to check, eg Perry Phillips is progressing a change to s115 of the VEA.
- Review current guidelines in consultation with CRS and State Offices. (Include core policy advice and commentary, not only on difficult cases, but more common examples eg, short but expensive computer courses).
- Need to ensure that all DVA staff have the same guidelines.
- Need to market the VVRS as not enough veterans know about the Scheme.
- Early intervention required.
- Provide National Reporting System.
- Application form in the process of being reviewed. States have comments on this. Eg. How did you hear about the Scheme?
- Need to define “veteran”. Who should be making decisions about veteran status? (Let States know who their contact should be).
- Address resourcing needs in some States.
- Obtain feedback from States for issues where they would like some guidance.
- Need to know the situation with insurance ie, work trials or training schemes.
- Need to consider from a policy and legal stance, the situation for veterans who have no injuries.

PROBLEMS

- Concerns over Work Training Scheme (WTS). Two issues: workers compensation and VVRS not being able to access WTS.
(Ian McInnes, CRS Australia, said that there is no straight forward answer, as it is not something that has been tested with Comcare. WTS is for income recipients for Centrelink not VVRS. The WTS allowance is paid through Centrelink and CRS cannot use those funds for VVRS. Ultimately it is a decision for the insurer, (Comcare.)
- Family support—without it, there is a barrier.
- What steps should we have for veterans who have been sent the paperwork but have not responded. (The veteran representative said that the reason for no response would be predominantly fear. He acknowledge that it is great to know about the safety net, etc but they are still concerned that they may lose their pension.)
- Rehabilitation can be difficult, a feature of the client group is that sometimes it is one step forward and one back.
- Approximately 2,500 TPI applications accepted last year (note the relatively small application numbers for VVRS compared to those who received TPI).
- Difficult cases—a veteran who was going to do some work on the weekend, whilst in full-time employment, was unable to.
- Mental health statistics collected by CRS are only those given by the client and may be not given as primary disability, (many times this may come out later).
- Disagreement at times, ie VVRS wants to approve a programme while CRS does not want to approve.
- Overseas veterans—where are our parameters? ie do we approve overseas applications?
- What do we do with veterans with a goal for overseas employment placement.
 - Legal did not think this is possible—basically VEA covers only Australia and Territories. Though this could be tested.
 - Pensions mentioned that the majority of work with pensions should be undertaken in Australia. There would be a budgetary issue around this, it would need a proposal.
 - The current provider, CRS Australia, operates only within Australia. Concern over capacity to help veterans overseas.
 - One State have four separate overseas inquiries: a job in jeopardy; an overseas course; wanting an overseas job; company which has overseas contracts.
- Not enough resources; some people have too many hats and the veterans are therefore suffer.
- Gaps between the ‘reality’ of people who advise and those who implement (eg Commission wanting to run the Scheme without extra resources)
- Other veterans besides Australian, can we help them?
- An increase in applicants who have heard that they can get appliances such as hearing aids through the Scheme. DVA does not want the VVRS to become a backdoor way of getting such aids. We must ensure that such assistance is tied in with an employment issue.
- Self employment—what would be considered a suitable outcome (have to be cautious not to help start business that will fail or cost lots of money. Some self employment will increase isolation and not be ideal eg share trading? DVA has a “duty of care” to ensure that we do not set veterans up for failure).
- CRS Australia can be ignorant of military experience/skills (ie, CRS may undervalue prior military experience).

IDEAS

- Introduce a system which includes a “work hardening” aspect, similar to WTS.
- Require marketing to deal with the fear and anxiety many veterans feel.
- Targeting Local Medical Officers—as all veterans see their doctors.
- Early intervention, eg, medical practitioners as they are in a position of trust and often are the first to see a veteran who is not coping.
- State Consultative Forum should be used as a vehicle for marketing the Scheme (eg use a successful participant to speak). ESOs are our best resource, if we can convince them.
- Educate ESOs and enlist their support for applicants.
- Case conferencing would be a useful tool. Need to share information, eg difficult of cases etc (however privacy is an issue).
- Consider marketing during the disability process, if appropriate, at what time in the process would it be most beneficial? (50–70 per cent disability pension suggested—perhaps they should be sent a revised pamphlet).
- Include information in the DVA pensions book “*You and Your Pension*”.
- Consider making it easier for veterans to apply eg help them to fill out forms.
- Publish more articles in magazines such as *Army News*, to target them before they leave the Defence Forces.
- One-to-one interview instead of receiving paper work may be beneficial for some veterans, however veterans need to be ready to make a change, (need to acknowledge that one-on-one consumes a lot of time and resources).
- VVRS could be run like a shop front, eg, TMS.
- Need to provide national guidelines on file creation and archiving.
- Emphasis to veterans that they will not lose their gold card.
- Produce a video with realistic talent used, ie, not a high ranking officer.
- Consider someone who could travel to promote the Scheme.
- Introduce a buddy system—could help some veterans to have contact with someone who has already been on the Scheme (have to be conscious that you cannot have someone like the Commissioner talking to a soldier, they would not be able to relate to him. Have to have “like” experience.)
- Veterans’ Affairs Canada considering if spouses should be trained rather than the veteran?
- VAC helps people transit from military by continuing to pay some of those exiting out of the military by letting them test civilian employment. Often this leads to employment.
- Identify Vietnam vets who are in business, eg CEO’s, all types of Vietnam veteran businessmen. Some may be happy to take on Vietnam veterans as employees. (Other military appreciate the culture and see veterans as highly skilled and desirable employees).
- Explore link between Department of Veterans' Affairs and Centrelink.
- MCRS intranet, setting up a place for difficult cases and others could access the answer.
- Need to focus on ADF transition and before they exit with targeted information.
- Educate Department of Veterans’ Affairs staff.
- Set up a VVRS section on the internet (could also be through ADF site—eg, Are you a veteran? Do you have a disability? Other questions that would cause them to link to VVRS.) [Note: The word ‘veteran’ has a different definition in the ADF and therefore could cause confusion]
- Banner advertising on internet sites that GP’s might use.

FEEDBACK FROM FOCUS GROUPS

1. QUEENSLAND FORUMS HELD 12 MARCH 2002 AT DVA WITH VETERANS WHO HAVE ENQUIRED OR HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THE VETERANS' VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SCHEME

Positive comments about working and VVRS

- Several commented that social interaction improves and isolation decreases.
- It was mentioned that not working creates stress within home life: and that working helped ease this stress.
- Working “gets you out of the house”
- The majority of attendees were happy with the Scheme and found it positive.
- One mentioned that it improved self-esteem.
- Scheme can protect TPI pensions
- Increased safety net
- Opens up doors
- Improved use of mind
- Social life improved
- Hope for the future
- Increased skills
- Lots of TPI's—a lot of them have been TPI for 15 years—no meaning in life, drinking too much, low self-esteem needed a focus. Getting in the Scheme gives them a focus.
- TPI's with psychological issues can do physical job.
- Financial need to work (young children)
- One saw his Pension and Welfare Officer work as being ‘self employed’ ie. Being paid by DVA. (Other commented that other vets might object to it being seen as a “work for TPI”, won't get anyone on the program if marketed that way.
- Scheme helps feelings of insecurity re: others dobbing them in
- A couple commented that CRS officer was very good but too busy to help them properly
- Some suggested an intermediary group between CRS and DVA—increased support, i e. Field officers going to vets homes and explaining VVRS
- Some had very high praise for their CRS officers help with them gaining employment.

Areas for improvement/barriers to employment/negative comments

- Many commented that there was a great fear among the veteran population of losing the gold card. People think the Scheme is a good idea but very suspicious. If their condition flares up they are worried about being unable to access medical treatment.
- Dubious, fear of being photographed at home lifting objects over 15kgs.
- Some concerned that a ‘specialist’ spends 7 minutes deciding future work time for a veteran.
- One vet commented that he found work but only got paid travel allowance.
- One was not currently on the Scheme but was making enquiries. He found he was having a problem because of medication and employers stating that Workcover would not cover him. As a result he is finding it hard to get work.

- A few commented that the Occupational Therapist at Keith Payne Unit (GPH) was not aware of/not promoting VVRS
- One mentioned that he had not seen it in the DVA pensions book and therefore he could see that this would perpetuate people's scepticism of the Scheme, as it would not be seen as legitimate. Needs to be official DVA document, also on web site.
- One was concerned that if he gets a job and eventually loses his health cover through the gold card that it would be very expensive to get private health cover if he had to join one. Perhaps reduce payments but keep gold card for medical cover.
- A few expressed concern over finding employment over 55.
- Disability a barrier when seeking employment.
- One was concerned about his ability to manage stress in the workplace
- One mentioned that due to his condition, reliability can be difficult. Couldn't predict possible hours that could be worked. DVA State Office staff proved helpful in his case.
- Lots of TPI's have psychological problems, which makes people wary.
- PTSD prog at GPH doesn't cover enough—needs to be more positive and have a vision for employment.
- Difficult going back to work after long term hospital stay.
- Ostracism in the workplace
- Needs to be a proactive measure not a reactive process
- Some concern was expressed about loss of gold card ie. Some lost it and some didn't when work was found.
- One suggested a CPI increase for wives if vet loses gold card.
- One expressed that gold card should be income tested. Ie. If veterans were financially able then they didn't need the medical assistance that the gold card gave them.
- Negative perception of VVRS in ESO's
- Need to educate employers/managers re: Veterans' issues like PTSD. Needs to be at managerial level, needs to be a State policy (Vets as special needs groups) Not to discriminate against vets.
- VVRS info should be integrated into PTSD course
- Not enough promotion of the Scheme
- A suggestion was put forward to pass information about the Scheme through State government bodies like Ambulance, Police, Security etc in order to get information to ex-defence personnel who did not receive a pension or were in contact with ESO's.
- Some didn't feel their CRS officers were very helpful in a practical way ie. Couldn't answer questions properly, wouldn't aid them in the direction they wished.
- Some complained that their CRS wouldn't allow them to do IT courses, despite an increasing demand for IT skilled people in the workforce (CRS saying that DVA won't fund)
- Confusion about what courses could be done. They would like this clarified and feel this information would be good on DVA website.
- Lack of knowledge on what help can be given from CRS
- One had a fear of being left 'hanging' by CRS if she couldn't find a job within a year.
- Asked if courses were approved on a case by case basis.
- One commented that spouses were not included enough in the VVRS process.
- He also commented that spouses don't have access to DVA, VVRS, and CRS—training not available. He felt that these partners gave up a significant portion of their lives looking after the vet when he was incapacitated, often giving up work to do so and now found it very difficult to get back into the workforce.
- Need of more literature

- Need of more communication and clarification
- Jan to phone more often
- DVA rep at start up
- Suggestion that DVA run it's own version of CRS—involving ex-servicemen
- Comment was made to upgrade VVRS pamphlet.
- VVRS person to be there to support eg. When courses are failed/stopped.

Comments made by people who were unable to attend focus groups

- One mentioned that he found the Scheme excellent and the assistance by Page Foxtton at Chermshire CRS was outstanding.
- One mentioned that is was an excellent Scheme. He found the job himself but said that CRS were very helpful.
- Another mentioned Scheme was well worthwhile.
- One was left to his own devices as he wished to be. He believes the Scheme is great. He encourages other veterans to access the Scheme when the opportunity arises. He wanted to do consulting work in the Solomon Islands, but political instability caused him to cease this vocational goal. Now that things have improved in the Solomons he is considering this vocational option once again.
- One would like the Scheme to be marketing more actively in the veteran community.
- One felt he didn't get employment under VVRS because of PTSD.

Further comments sent in by a veteran

- Veterans still have responsibility for their own predicament to a certain extent and at the end of the day, they are the only ones that can make it happen.
- It is very easy to play victim and blame the Defence Force, society, employers, DVA, CRS etc whilst taking no responsibility themselves.
- These organisations can only do so much to help you.

Melbourne: VVRS focus group meetings

Thursday, 30 May 2002

Participants

The aim was to include a cross-section of veterans, from all three categories of the scheme (ie Jobseeker, Jobs-in Jeopardy, Safety net) as well as veterans located in regional and metropolitan areas of Victoria. Veterans were randomly chosen from a list of both open and closed cases, keeping in mind the above criteria.

Feedback from the focus groups

1. Where/how did you find out about the scheme?

- “Sheer fluke!” “By accident!”
- DVA: one client was given an “orange handbook” in which there was “one little paragraph” on the scheme
- Repatriation Hospital
- Angela Klinkatsis

- Pamphlet—One veteran “popped into VAN one day and checked out” what entitlements were—found brochure on scheme. Found “Frequently Asked Questions” sheet particularly useful
- Word of mouth
- Some veterans did not know about it until they went to CRS and were told about it; one “accidentally” stumbled upon the VVRS—he had a major illness and was referred to CRS through Caulfield Medical Centre. CRS made some inquiries via the VEA. It was fortuitous that CRS was provider of the scheme.
- Referral by Dr Cooper, psychiatrist who suggested the VVRS via CRS. Doctor did not elaborate on scheme, but “sowed the seed” in some veterans to make further inquiries
- Application through MCRS—not aware that the VEA had a RTW program—only found out about it through MCRS, who suggested that client makes a claim under the VEA
- Through the Vietnam Veterans’ Association- one veteran was offered a full-time position as an advocate: “I told them I couldn’t take the job because I was TPI. That’s when they said: ‘You can get it through VVRS’.”
- Some mentioned that the RSLs do not promote the scheme at all.

2. What prompted you to make contact in the first place?

- Ex-Vietnam veteran with PTSD wanted to change his situation (alcoholism/depression) and stay off alcohol and re-establish his life and get back to normality
- Wanted to get back into the workforce and/or needed assistance to find employment
- Ex-Vietnam veteran looking at expanding his hobby (not paid employment) and wanted assistance with doing some courses
- Some couldn’t work any longer and became TPI
- Others didn’t want to stay on a DVA pension for financial as well as self-esteem reasons: “I didn’t see myself not working, for my own self-esteem and not to eat into my own money”.
- Ex-Vietnam veteran wanted to better utilise his qualifications and improve standing in employment
- One person needed to earn more money and wanted a better quality of life. Unable to survive on the dole and also stigma attached to being on dole
- Some felt they had to do something: “my mind was going stale at home”. Also, need for “stimulus of interaction with other people”
- Need for well-being and “getting on to a healthy track” (self-preservation)
- A letter from MCRS prompted some veterans
- Dr Cooper prompted some veterans: one ex-Vietnam veteran did not want to know about the scheme and avoided “everything to do with the system” until Dr Cooper spoke to him and asked him whether he wanted to work or not. Veteran was a workaholic, and thought about it, then agreed to contact CRS and “see what they had to say”.
- Mainly because of job offer as advocate- had been doing the job voluntarily for 2–3 years and wanted to see if he was suitable. Also, he did not trust DVA and wanted to see if he could really get a job by going on the scheme.
- Prompted by fellow-veteran and knew he probably “wouldn’t continue to do the sort of work I’d been doing in the past”
- Others just “followed the system along”, like “lost sheep”.

3. What messages could be put to the veteran community to encourage vets to embark on the VVRS?

- Positive feedback from other veterans of their experiences with the VVRS
- More publicity promoting the positives of the scheme
- More emphasis on promoting the safety net provisions of the scheme ie need to emphasise that the scheme is **voluntary**, without any threats if you participate (it does not affect your entitlements) it's there if you want it and you **can quit at any stage**.
- More emphasis on targeting Vietnam Veterans
- VVRS flyers to all veterans, including "Frequently Asked Questions" sheet. One ex-Vietnam veteran remarked that before this sheet came out, the VVRS was the "best kept secret". He could not understand why this sheet was not given to every veteran
- Advertising the scheme in relevant newspapers
- Ongoing in-service programs promoting VVRS to veterans still in service
- Greater CRS promotion of the scheme to veterans
- Drop off "S" (denotes "service") from VVRS—this would have "people flocking". As soon as people see "Service", they are very mistrustful because "service" is associated with government departments and people do not have much faith in government departments!
- Advertise directly to **advocates**, rather than to veterans
- Hold various seminars on the scheme, with people like Bill Wiltshire (advocate) to "go around the country" promoting the scheme
- TIP program forum would be appropriate for promotion of scheme
- Make sure information is easily accessible and easily understood, particularly for people who are motivated to work eg make the Internet access to the scheme easier.
- Employ someone who has undertaken the program to promote VVRS (problem of funding was mentioned)
- Put VVRS on agenda for forum at which John Prinz and John Geary will be speaking
- Have VVRS info screening on the big monitors at the various RSLs—run it for 6 months/ Anzac Day/Remembrance Day etc. People will take notice of it.
- DVA to send representatives to answer questions on VVRS at RSLs and also at PTSD clinics

4. What do you think are the events and attitudes that have resulted in barriers to embarking on the scheme?

- Lack of sufficient marketing of the scheme
- Lack of awareness and confidence in the scheme
- "No one tells you what you're entitled to"
- Veterans are busy trying to obtain various benefits/entitlements that they don't look at the VVRS- they are not told that they can have both, without any strings attached.
- Restrictions on what CRS can do for/provide to veterans
- Veterans' age and the likelihood of being employed
- Veterans' conditions and the likelihood of being employed
- VEA pensions being threatened
- Fear of possible loss of VEA pensions
- Everything is aimed at a veteran getting a pension, and not returning a veteran to work
- Having the word "service" attached to the end of the scheme—majority of veterans believe government departments can't be trusted;
- Lack of trust of VVRS staff who sit on "same floor" as staff processing VEA pensions
- Feel like there is an underlying agenda when told by a government department to do something

- Time delays in processing/approving VVRS applications
- There are many people out there who do not know anything about the program, some do not care to find out—difficulty in getting to these people
- Lack of knowledge of scheme **within** DVA (eg one client asked about the scheme at the VAN counter. The staff member was not sure and advised he would make some inquiries. The client could see that the member was being “routed around” until finally, the last person to speak to him advised him that he was not entitled to the VVRS. The client put in his claim anyway, and was later advised, in writing, that his claim had been approved!)

5 & 6. What positive/negative messages are you getting/have you got from the vet community /ESOs about the scheme?

- Most veterans from Group 2 have had no dealings with RSL advocates and ESOs and therefore little or no positive messages
- Some people in Group 1 indicated that RSLs were not very supportive of the scheme. They believe the general attitude of RSLs is: “If you are TPI, why do you want to go to work?” One RSL frowned upon a participant who wanted to work. (The Vietnam veterans in Group 1 felt that the RSLs do not really accept them—there is only one ex-Vietnam veteran at the Bentleigh RSL, for instance, let alone support them or provide any positive information about the scheme to them).
- The participant who works as an advocate indicated that the centre he works for does not promote the VVRS, because no one knows about it and therefore no one asks about it.
- Advocate’s RSL in Noble Park is very supportive of the scheme, however
- Most friends and fellow-veterans of one veteran very supportive of scheme—client does not attend RSL but has made friends with people from his unit, all of whom are “keen to know what’s around the corner” and help each other .
- RSLs in general “bag everyone” including the VVRS and disseminate false information about the scheme and the effects on Veterans’ benefits, including possible loss of VEA pensions.
- Vet community skeptical/suspicious of the scheme and ask “can the government and public servants be trusted?”
- A local member of Parliament discouraged one veteran from going on scheme. He asked: “Why do you want to work if you’re TPI?”
- Secretary of RSLs determines whether information sent “goes in the bin or not”. Suspicion is that a lot of VVRS information does not get past the secretary as it is not considered important

7. How do you think ESOs could promote positive information about the VVRS?

- Publicise the scheme. Direct marketing to veterans
- ESOs get out and meet with veterans and talk about the scheme
- Promote the scheme whilst the veteran is still serving (resettlement seminar)
- Promote scheme at beginning of PTSD programs (not at end) so veterans are aware of their options

- Through RSL clubs
- Ongoing in-service programs promoting scheme to veterans still in service
- Run VVRS seminars on scheme to personnel areas

8. How do you think groups (eg service providers, medical and allied health professionals, counsellors, employer groups etc) could assist in providing information about the scheme?

- Local GPs provide “counselling” type role so they could provide VVRS information through sessions with their patients
- CRS can provide information of scheme to various medical and allied health professionals, who in turn can provide info to veterans
- Educate veterans themselves
- Give presentations and seminars
- Encourage veterans to participate in the scheme. Promote as therapy for the veterans
- All have a role in encouraging participation in the scheme
- Another avenue from which veterans can be advised about the scheme
- Alternative source of advice for veterans who may not like dealing with DVA, RSL clubs, ESOs and large crowds
- Educate the VVCS as a lot of people go there. (One veteran mentioned that in his dealings with the VVCS, not once did they mention the scheme to him). Many psychiatrists/psychologists are outsourced, so need to ensure that they are aware of and educated regarding the VVRS, prior to their commencement

9. Do you think there are barriers for vets with respect to training?

- Veterans’ age and approving expensive courses for older veterans
- Financial restraints: Under scheme, there is a limit of how much money can be spent. One veteran had reached the limit but had not yet finished what he wanted to do
- Limitation on level of education/training and the types of courses that can be approved under VVRS: Same veteran wanted to complete tertiary studies at university but was told he could not. He therefore took on a job, the skills for which he had acquired prior to joining the scheme. He did not think the job provided enough challenge for him.
- VVRS limitations on approving work trial/experiences.
- Securing a job at the end of training: Same veteran was not ensured of a job at the end of his training. Prospective employer had some concerns given veteran’s disabilities, but veteran told him he’d work for 2 weeks without pay. He believes that “this was the clinch that got me the job”.
- Updating of skills whilst in employment: Same veteran inquired re: updating skills under VVRS. He was told “No, this is the employer’s job”. His dream was to go to university and do Law under the VVRS but this did not eventuate.
- Another veteran asked why, if there were certain restrictions, were they not included in the information pamphlets on VVRS?
- Another veteran was offered a security course but did not accept as he thought it was “a waste of money” and he pointed out that if he did obtain work in this industry, he would have to incur additional costs each year (something akin to paying for renewal of a taxi licence) to maintain his job and did not think that it was fair for him to have to fork out the money himself.

- Whether CRS are experienced and equipped to deal with training needs specific to veterans, taking into account their medical conditions/restrictions
- No clear guidelines on compensation coverage for veterans who sustain injuries whilst undertaking a work trial/experience

10 & 11. What do you see as the benefits of the scheme/ Did you benefit from being on the scheme?

- Gives confidence and self-esteem to veterans
- Employment
- Scheme provides mediator for veterans. Guidance from CRS
- CRS shows interest in veteran and his/her needs. Veteran is not just a number
- More money
- Peace of mind. One veteran explained that he had his benefits reduced, he had all his medical benefits, but he knew he could go out and work without being scared that he would “get caught”.
- Mental and physical well-being by participation in gym/leisure centre program
- One veteran indicated that the VVRS had taught him that he could aim at getting a few hours work, but whether he in fact obtained this work or not was “another story”
- Most veterans in Group 1 believed that they got some benefit out of the scheme In Group 2, 4 were happy with the scheme, 1 was yes/no, and 1 had had no dealings with the scheme.
- One veteran commented that TPI veterans usually obtain work in an area where there is no superannuation “back-up”. As they start to get older and sicker, then problems arise. These are the people who need protection from the VVRS, and the VVRS manages to provide this protection.

12. What did you hope to gain from the VVRS?

- As above—self-esteem, peace of mind
- Employment
- Earn more money
- Employment in the IT field
- To maintain employment
- Believed CRS would get me a job
- Better quality of life. Ways of surviving and coping with life
- Improve standing at work
- Opportunity for employment within the Public Sector. Veterans feel they are not allowed to apply for government jobs. They asked why there could not be “something to help ex-military get back into the same department?”
- Service of a more personal nature

13. What do you see as the disadvantages of the scheme?

- Costs and limits for training and courses
- Time delays in processing/approving claims
- Loss of Gold Card
- Cases not being kept open after 12 months’ sustained employment and no further assistance unless new application submitted
- Lack of flexibility on assistance being provided

- Government and public servants fail to set example. Government should be made to employ veterans first
- Other employers should employ veterans. Veterans should be offered jobs first
- Veterans not receiving assistance from appropriate people at CRS. Lack of experience with back conditions/PTSD and not equipped to deal with veterans
- Rug is pulled out from under veteran when case is closed
- No other disadvantages if scheme is promoted properly and sped up. It's just a matter of getting it out there to the veterans
- Some jobs that CRS try to get the veterans to do are not suitable, or veteran is not suited to a particular job
- Veterans feel they are being silently discriminated against when it comes to getting a job through VVRS, because of their disabilities.

14. Were/are you happy with CRS Australia?

- Group 2: Yes 4, No dealings 1, Yes/No 1
- Group 1: Two veterans indicated that they had been “looked after quite well” by CRS. One is currently doing a few courses and is confident he will gain employment at the end of them
- Another veteran is on the scheme but “nothing’s happening”. Has not heard from CRS for a while
- One veteran disheartened because of CRS psychological profiling that he had to undergo—found it degrading. It was 6–8 weeks before anyone in CRS asked him what sort of job he wanted. He felt as if he was “coming from a different angle to where they were coming from”. He believes the psychological profiling would have continued had a job not come up.
- Another veteran did not really use CRS—he applied for VVRS then marketed himself (self-employed)
- Another veteran has been offered a few hours’ work through word of mouth, so “I have no gripes at CRS, although they put me through a physical program”
- CRS should provide veterans with more information on the scheme
- CRS should be pro-active in assisting with finding work (ie ring potential employers, get the veteran a job)

15. Were/are you satisfied with DVA’s performance with the administration of the scheme?

- Veterans have had little to no dealings with DVA staff involved with VVRS
- Critical of initial dealings with DVA when submitting claim/s
- Critical of other DVA staff and Union’s lack of awareness of scheme.
- Not happy with time delays: One veteran had lodged a VVRS claim, started the ball rolling by marketing himself (self-employment), paid all the necessary costs for licences etc, then he started getting jobs, but could not yet commence because the VVRS had not yet approved his application.
- Veterans believe there should be more interaction between sections of DVA, to avoid providing the same information many times.

- 17. If you didn't gain employment through VVRS, did you benefit in other ways from your participation?
- Learned how to prepare a resume
- Gained self-esteem
- Participated in gym program, swimming and physiotherapy for well-being
- Ex-Vietnam veteran referred to another program with CRS appropriate to his needs (quality of life)

18. Do you think the scheme meets the social and vocational needs for those on special and other rate disability pensions?

- Yes, in terms of providing gym programs etc
- Yes, "I think it does, but then I've had no experience. I just wanted the paperwork to go through because of self-employment"
- No, different scheme needed to cater for veterans who do not want job-seeking/JIJ assistance
- Veterans' needs were not met by objectives of the scheme
- Veterans have fear of losing eligibility under VEA scheme
- Veterans unable to fully take advantage of scheme due to lack of awareness of VVRS

19. Do you think improvements could be made to the scheme?

See responses to question 3 also

- Scheme needs to focus on needs specific to Vietnam veterans
- CRS can encourage prospective employers to look favourably upon veterans rather than veterans "being knocked back all the time"
- Provision of clarity and the legal implications regarding injury and ongoing coverage once a veteran is engaged in employment (one veteran does not want to be discouraged from working but does not want to be in a situation where he is injured at work and does not know who is responsible- DVA, CRS or the employer)
- More flexibility in approving expensive courses. Outcome to veteran should be to earn more money and have job satisfaction.
- Pay for relocation to areas where availability of employment is greater
- More awareness directed at training and publicity
- More publicity to eliminate suspicion of the scheme
- Veterans indicated first contact with DVA can be disappointing because:
 - a) English is not the first language of DVA staff member
 - b) No knowledge of VVRS scheme
 - c) DVA staff lack sympathy and can get a bit off-handed
 - DVA staff need to be better educated about VVRS and be more empathetic to needs of VVRS clients
 - Provision of a "package" with all relevant information, including application form, for veterans who are inquiring about VVRS for the first time
- Veterans need to be informed of the exact purpose of the VVRS as well as the connection between CRS and VVRS, so that they can make informed choices rather than feel as though the VVRS is just "another tunnel [into which] I was going down" and instead of just "going along" with and "following what other people are telling you to do and not really sure where you're going".
- Veterans need to be made aware of all the details/implications of going on the program upfront eg, They need to know that, if you are TPI and you obtain employment but you are not on the scheme, then your TPI will be affected.

- Community attitudes need to change toward older Australians seeking employment