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Management Commitment

A Foreword from Sandra Ragg, Assistant Secretary Vetting

The Australian Government Security Vetting Agency is committed to delivering high quality security vetting products and services on behalf of the Australian Government.

To ensure that our quality management system delivers continuous improvement of operations and performance, our management team has committed to:

- understanding and meeting the expectations of our customers, clients and stakeholders
- responding to complaints, suggestions, inquiries and compliments in a professional and courteous manner
- measuring our progress and making the improvements necessary to meet the commitments made in our quality policy and objectives
- reviewing our performance and communicating our results
- protecting our documents and records
- maintaining a supportive, injury and illness free workplace
- providing the resources required to meet customer expectations
- preparing our people so that they can do the job.

Our product, the security clearance, is a foundation for national security and a key enabler for the important work carried out in the Australian Government. A strong culture focussed on delivering quality is critical to our success and the success of our customers, clients and stakeholders.

This manual provides a high-level view of our organisation, our key processes and our quality management system. I trust that it conveys the message that quality is important to everything we do and that we won’t compromise on quality.
Introduction

Purpose

This manual describes the systems and processes that enable the Australian Government Security Vetting Agency (AGSVA) to satisfy its customers, clients and stakeholders.

The purpose of the manual is to provide a high-level description of the AGSVA quality management system, to enable employees, customers, clients, stakeholders and suppliers to understand the structure of the system, its processes and objectives.

The controlled version of this manual is held electronically within the AGSVA Documentation Framework.

Scope

This manual addresses the eight key processes involved in the development and ongoing management of a security clearance. They are:

- Clearance Requests and Actions
- Clearance Pre-Assessment Coordination
- Vetting Checks
- Psychological Assessment
- Vetting Assessment: Analysis
- Vetting Decision: Delegation
- Complex Vetting
- Ongoing Clearance Management.
Exclusions

The AGSVA has two permissible exclusions from the AS/NZS ISO 9001:2008 – Quality Management Systems – Requirements standard:

- **Section 7.3 – Design and Development**
  The AGSVA does not design any of its products. The Protective Security Policy Framework, issued by the Attorney-General’s Department provides the design requirements (i.e., core security policies, protocols, and guidelines) for a security clearance.

- **Section 7.6 – Control of Monitoring and Measuring Equipment**
  No measurement equipment is used by the AGSVA. Process capability is assessed through the AGSVA Quality Control and Assurance Framework.

These exclusions do not affect our ability to meet customer and regulatory requirements, nor do they affect our ability to provide conforming products and services.

Organisation

Overview

The AGSVA, a part of the Defence Security Authority (DSA) within the Department of Defence, delivers security clearance products and services on behalf of the Australian Government. With the exception of specified exempt agencies, the AGSVA is the only agency authorised to conduct security vetting and issue security clearances for the Australian Government.

We have offices in most Australian capital cities and some of our vetting work is outsourced to Industry Vetting Panel (IVP) companies around Australia, who assist in the processing of security clearances.

We have a vision of achieving trust through people and a mission to deliver high quality security vetting services on behalf of the Australian Government, efficiently and ethically.

AGSVA Products and Services

Our *product* is the security clearance, which consists of four different product lines: Baseline, Negative Vetting Level 1 (NV1), Negative Vetting Level 2 (NV2) and Positive Vetting (PV). The final product is the security clearance determination, which is the decision to grant the clearance or otherwise.

Our *services* involve the consultation with customers, clients, and stakeholders on matters relevant to the security clearance.
AGSVA Quality Policy

The AGSVA is committed to delivering high quality security vetting products and services on behalf of the Australian Government. In pursuit of this, we are dedicated to the following points:

- Adhering to legislative requirements, the Protective Security Policy Framework, and our own policies and procedures.
- Meeting our customers’ expectations for accuracy, completeness and timeliness in accordance with the standards set out in the Service Level Charter.
- Achieving continual improvement of our operations and performance.

Quality is important to everything we do and we won’t compromise on quality.

AGSVA Quality Objectives

The measurable goals supporting our commitment to quality are:

- 95% or better on time delivery of vetting products as measured by the percentage of security clearance decisions processed within benchmark timeframes.
- 95% or better accuracy and completeness of cases submitted for delegation as measured by the percentage of cases accepted by the delegate as accurate and complete.
- Demonstrable improvement in the efficiency and effectiveness of AGSVA operations as measured by the outcome of quarterly management reviews.

AGSVA Quality Criteria

The criteria for product quality, based on customer expectations, are defined as:

- **Accuracy** – information supplied by or on behalf of the clearance subject is accurately recorded in AGSVA systems.
- **Completeness** – compliance with all mandatory policies, procedures or requirements and sufficient checking and analysis to support the vetting decision.
- **Timeliness** – the clearance is completed within benchmark timeframes.

A quality AGSVA product is one that conforms to all of the above characteristics. Products that fail to meet any of the above criteria are managed in accordance with our procedure for non-conforming product.
AGSVA Quality Management Principles

There are eight quality management principles guiding our achievement of business objectives and targets. These are:

- **Customer focus** – we are committed to understanding the current and future needs of our customers, and to meeting their requirements and expectations.

- **Leadership** – our leaders create the environment in which everyone can become fully involved in achieving our quality objectives.

- **Involvement of people** – we communicate with all staff, ensuring a common understanding of roles, and how everyone contributes to our success.

- **Process approach** – we recognise that optimal results are achieved more efficiently when activities and related resources are managed as a process.

- **System approach to management** – our success relies on the efficiency and effectiveness of a system of inter-related processes. We don’t operate in silos.

- **Continual improvement** – continual improvement is a permanent quality objective of the AGSVA, and is actively fostered.

- **Factual approach to decision making** – our decisions are based on the analysis of data and information complemented by professional experience and judgement.

- **Mutually beneficial supplier relationships** – we actively develop mutually beneficial relationships with our suppliers, enhancing the ability to create value to the benefit of all parties.
### Key Business Processes

The scope of our quality management system is limited to the eight key processes involved in the development and ongoing management of a security clearance.

The sequence of processes required to achieve the security clearance outcome are:

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#### 1. Clearance Requests and Actions

A sponsoring agency submits a request to the AGSVA when it identifies a new security clearance-related requirement, or when its requirements in relation to an individual clearance holder change. Clearance request actions include the initial checks required to accept the request for further processing.

#### 2. Clearance Pre-Assessment Coordination

Coordination officers check if a submitted security clearance pack is complete and ready to be sent for assessment. This includes confirmation that all information and documentation for the assessing officer to conduct their analysis has been received.
3. Vetting Checks

Checks and inquiries are conducted to determine the identity, eligibility and suitability of an individual to hold or maintain a security clearance. Depending on the clearance level, information from external agencies, referee reports or interviews may be requested. In addition to the mandatory checks, supplementary checks to obtain additional or clarifying information may also be requested.

4. Psychological Assessment

A Psychological Assessment of the clearance subject is mandatory for PV clearances and re-evaluations, and discretionary for clearances up to and including NV2. Our Psychological Administration team schedules and coordinates the psychometric test and psychological interview with the clearance subject, which is conducted by a qualified psychologist.

The psychologist uses the test results and interview to create a Psychological Assessment Report, which is reviewed by the assessing officer and assists in determining the clearance subject’s suitability to hold or maintain a security clearance.

5. Vetting Assessment: Analysis

Assessing officers undertake analysis of a clearance subject’s background, character and suitability to access classified resources, based on a whole person assessment. The criteria for assessing suitability are contained in the Protective Security Policy Framework.

The results of the analysis process form the basis of a recommendation on the clearance subject’s suitability to hold a security clearance at the requested level.

6. Vetting Decision: Delegation

After a recommendation is made by an assessing officer, the case is allocated to a delegate to review and make a decision. Based on their review of the case, the delegate may approve the recommendation, modify the recommendation, or refer it back to an assessing officer for re-work or on to the Complex Vetting team for the application of procedural fairness.
7. Complex Vetting

Complex Vetting is the process for handling complex cases where the clearance subject may be denied a clearance at the level requested. The outcome of this process is to ensure that the principles of procedural fairness are followed and an appropriate vetting decision is made.

The Protective Security Policy Framework stipulates that all vetting decisions are to be based on an assessment of the whole person and, at all stages, are to be made in accordance with the principles of natural justice and procedural fairness.

8. Ongoing Clearance Management

Once a clearance is granted, agencies and individuals are responsible for advising any significant changes in personal circumstances that may impact on an individual’s continued suitability to hold a security clearance. These issues are assessed and managed as part of the ongoing clearance management process.

Security clearance aftercare also extends to the periodic revalidations or re-evaluations of security clearances at all levels
Quality Management System

The AGSVA has implemented and maintains a quality management system and continually improves its effectiveness in accordance with the requirements of AS/NZS ISO 9001:2008.

We use the PDCA (plan-do-check-act) four-step management method for the control and continual improvement of our processes, products and services.

Planning for Success

We undertake planning as part of our quality management system. Planning is focussed on achieving business objectives and specifying the necessary operational requirements and related resources to meet business targets.
Key planning steps include:

**Engagement**

A key input into the planning process is our regular engagement with customers, clients and stakeholders:

- Our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) team engages with customers and manages their feedback. Customer Agency Forums are held several times per year to enable a formal two-way exchange of information between the AGSVA and Agency Security Advisors and representatives.

- Our Client Service Centre (CSC) in Adelaide engages on a day-to-day basis with the general public and clearance subjects. Client feedback, which is sought throughout the vetting process, is processed by the CSC and used to improve our processes.

- Stakeholder Engagement Forums comprising a broader range of our executive level service delivery partners and customers are conducted regularly throughout the year. As well as reporting on performance against the Service Level Charter the forum is a mechanism for obtaining feedback for continual improvement.

**Change Management**

A change control board manages and directs our change management strategies and processes. The AGSVA Change Control Board meets regularly to ensure that all major changes are appropriately planned, coordinated, communicated and implemented.

**Documented Procedures**

The documented procedures established for the quality management system are all held in the AGSVA Documentation Framework. The AGSVA is committed to a ‘single source of truth’ for all documentation affecting product conformity.

Staff access to the Documentation Framework is via the AGSVA ‘Policy and Procedures’ SharePoint page. IVP companies each hold a digital copy of our documented procedures, and regularly receive updated versions, which are managed via a distribution register.

**Resource Requirements**

We conduct periodic structural and staffing reviews to ensure that the AGSVA has the resources needed to be successful. Resource requirements are reviewed each quarter at management review meetings.
Implementing Processes

Our vetting practitioners and supporting staff are trained to implement the processes that underpin the quality management system. In addition, quality control checking occurs at pre-determined points in the vetting process to identify and correct errors before the clearance is finalised.

Training and Development

The DSA Skilling Framework provides a skilling and training framework for all staff to enable them to succeed in their roles.

Specialist vetting roles (eg assessing officers and delegates) complete appropriate training before carrying out personnel security clearance assessments. This typically involves completion of Certificate III or IV in Personnel Security (Vetting) or equivalent.

Quality Control

Our vetting practitioners are trained to apply quality control principles to their work. This is supported and reinforced by two important quality control gates:

- **Gate 1 – Quality Assurance Managers** at the National Coordination Centre in Brisbane perform quality control inspections early in the security clearance process.
- **Gate 2 – Delegates** from every office perform quality control inspections towards the end of the security clearance process, which is the final inspection point prior to the vetting decision.

Deviations from the criteria that characterise a quality product are treated as non-conforming product. At the vetting decision stage the case file is removed from the production flow, re-worked by an assessing officer, and returned for delegation.

Our quality control activities are documented and formally reviewed each quarter at management review meetings.
Reviewing and Evaluating

The quality management system is periodically checked to ensure that it is meeting our requirements. We measure the effectiveness of the system through:

**Contract Management**

Our workforce is supplemented by contract staff, a panel of psychologists and IVP contractors that operate interdependently with the AGSVA.

Work received from our suppliers is checked to ensure that it meets the requirements for accuracy, completeness and timeliness. The effectiveness of these arrangements is also reviewed at least annually to ensure that supplied products and services continue to meet requirements.

External arrangements for criminal history checking, financial background checking and records management are also reviewed and evaluated at least annually.

**Internal Audit**

Audits of the quality management system are conducted regularly by trained internal and external auditors. Audit results are documented and corrective and preventive actions taken to remove the cause of actual and potential problems.

A summary audit report is shared with staff at the conclusion of each audit.

**Management Review**

Management reviews are conducted quarterly to assess the suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of the quality management system as well as the overall performance of the organisation.

A summary of management review outcomes is shared with staff to promote visibility, transparency and a combined sense of purpose.
Adjusting and Improving

The quality management system is designed to ensure continual improvement. Our improvement loop is driven by:

Feedback

Feedback from customers, clients and stakeholders is valued and dealt with in accordance with our formal feedback framework. For example:

- Interviews with the clearance subject or their referees include a step where the feedback framework is communicated to them. This affords the participants in a security clearance process an opportunity to evaluate and comment on our performance.
- Compliments or complaints relating to AGSVA products and services are managed by our CRM and CSC teams. This data is reported quarterly and addressed strategically during the management review meetings.

The AGSVA Improvement Suggestion Program

All parties involved in personnel security clearance vetting are encouraged to contribute their ideas for improving our organisation. This initiative is championed by the Quality Management team and it supports our commitment to delivering high quality vetting products and services.

Corrective and Preventive Action Registers

Actions to deal with problems or potential problems are captured in our Corrective and Preventive Action Registers.

The Quality Management team reviews both registers on a regular basis to ensure that actions are effectively implemented in a suitable timeframe. Actions are only closed upon verification that the item has been implemented effectively.
Quality Management Team

An Afterword from the Director Quality Management

Let me introduce my team and our role in the quality management system.

As Director Quality Management in the AGSVA I have the lead role in making sure that our quality management system is established, implemented and maintained.

I am supported in my endeavours by a strong team of trained quality management professionals and together we:

• conduct internal audits of the quality management system
• report regularly to the Assistant Secretary Vetting on the performance of the quality management system and any need for improvement
• promote awareness of customer requirements across the organisation
• ensure that any corrective or preventive actions needed to improve the quality management system are implemented.

It is important that our customer agencies have confidence in the vetting process to deliver an effective outcome for them. I trust that the overview of our quality management system provided in this manual instils confidence regarding the manner in which the AGSVA operates.

If you need more information on our quality management system, or would like to provide feedback, please contact the team through agsva.quality@defence.gov.au.

I would like to close by reiterating the final sentence of our quality policy:

‘Quality is important to everything we do and we won’t compromise on quality’.

Mark Lawrence
Director Quality Management
AGSVA Quality Policy

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