Part 3: Chapter 1 - Administrative Issues

Last Updated: March 30, 2017

SUBCHAPTER I. JURISDICTION PROCEDURES

1.01 GENERAL

a. RPO Responsibility. All RPOs (Regional Processing Offices) are responsible for processing education benefits under Chapters 30, 32, 33, 35 of Title 38, U.S. Code, Chapter 1606 and 1607 of Title 10, U.S. Code, National Call to Service (Section 531 of PL 107-314) and, Section 903 of Public Law 96-342. The Muskogee RPO is responsible for Section 901 cases.

In addition, the RPOs are responsible for processing Chapter 32 refunds for Veterans within its jurisdiction. This includes death refund development and payments.

b. RO Responsibility. All ROs (Regional Offices) are responsible for the following:

(1) Handling requests for general information. (ROs should send inquiries regarding specific claims and related information to RPOs.)

(2) Provide character of service determinations for Veterans with service not characterized as Honorable or Under Honorable Conditions

NOTE: Veteran Claims Examiners (VCEs) should follow local RPO procedures regarding how to send a request to a RO.

c. Education Folders. Paper folders were used for claimant records in the pre-TIMS (The Image Management System) era but are seldom created or used in current processing. Paper folders may be stored at an RPO, off site under a RPO's supervision, or at a Record Management Center. RPOs may recall paper folders at their discretion. An RPO may occasionally need to review documents in a paper folder that are missing from the TIMS record. The types of folders that exist are listed below

(1) Electronic Folder Management System. All Education processing is done within TIMS. This is the primary folder for storing claims related information. For additional information regarding creating folders in TIMS, refer to Chapter 14, Upstream Procedures.

NOTE: The only types of folders that can be recorded in BDN (Benefit Delivery Network) are claims folders, Chapter 30 folders, DEA (Dependents' Educational Assistance) folders, and EDU folders. BDN does not indicate whether a TIMS folder or a paper folder exists.

(2) Claims Folder. This is a three-part red paper folder known as red-rope. It has three flaps with fasteners attached on the inside. Claims folders were used to process Chapter 32, Section 903, and Chapter 1606 benefits before June 1994. Since June 1994, Education (EDU) folders were used for these benefits. The Waco RO used paper claims folders for Section 901 claims until the Muskogee RPO assumed jurisdiction for this benefit in 2005. Since then, Section 901 records have been converted to TIMS. The Chapter 34 benefit of Title 38 (which expired on December 31, 1989) was processed entirely with claims folders.

(3) CH30 (Chapter 30) Folder. This is a two-part paper folder containing Chapter 30 material only. Initially, RPOs built two-part gray folders for Chapter 30 claims until the stock of those folders was depleted. Then the RPOs used Kraft folders (light brown in color) as Chapter 30 folders. These folders were discontinued in the 1990s and replaced with EDU (Education) folders.

(4) EDU Folder. This is a two-part Kraft brown paper folder containing material for Chapters 30, 32, 1606, or Section 903. The physical EDU folders have not been created since the 1990s. However, the TIMS folders for all education benefits (except Chapter 35) are recorded as EDU folders in BDN.

NOTE 1: For claims established before October 16, 2000, a Veteran could have two folders (both an EDU and a CH30 folder) shown in BDN and in some instances two paper folders. In this situation, RPOs had two options: to retain both folders, or to destroy one folder and retain only one folder. If the RPO decided to destroy a folder, the RPO needed to request and adjustment in BDN from the Records Management Center (RMC). A claimant should only have one electronic folder.

NOTE 2: The multiple folders in BIRLS (Benefits Information Record Location System) or BDN occurred because before October 1, 2000, the CEST (Claims Establishment) processing for Chapter 30 caused BIRLS to indicate the existence of a CH30 folder and the CEST processing for Chapters 32 and 1606 caused BIRLS to indicate the existence of an EDU folder. CEST processing was changed effective October 1, 2000, to automatically create only an EDU folder in BIRLS for these education benefits.

(5) Dependents' Educational Assistance (DEA) Folder. This is a two-part blue paper folder created for Chapter 35 benefits. These paper folders are seldom used except in rare situations when a dependent has no SSN, there is a second (subsequent)

spouse, or a 10th (subsequent) child and TIMS is unable to support the paperless folder.

d. Folder Required. All claims are required to have the TIMS folder before any award is processed. VCEs should follow local RPO procedures regarding folder transfer procedures. The RPO may process a hardship claim working with the RPO where the current folder is located to review the file for any discrepancies, and request expedition of the folder to the new jurisdiction.

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1.02 JURISDICTION - RPO

a. General. The following jurisdiction rules apply for all education benefits except Section 901:

(1) School Known. If the claim is for enrollment in a specific school or training establishment, the RPO with jurisdiction over the **school** (or the primary school in situations where the claimant is attending more than one facility) will have jurisdiction over the claim. This does not apply to correspondence training or licensing and certification tests. In certain situations Guest Student certifications (transient or secondary school locations) should be processed by the RPO having jurisdiction over the school that will confer the degree, diploma or certificate for the program being pursued.

(2) School Not Known. If the claim does not specify enrollment in a particular school or training establishment, the RPO with jurisdiction over the claimant's stated **residence** will have jurisdiction over the claim. If an enrollment certification is later received showing jurisdiction of a different RPO, the claimant's folder will be transferred to the RPO having jurisdiction over the school's address. Once an enrollment certification is received, the school will dictate the actual RPO jurisdiction. RPOs should appropriately transfer the electronic claims folder for processing.

(3) Correspondence School. If the claim is for enrollment in a correspondence or combination correspondence and residence school, the RPO with jurisdiction over the claimant's stated residence will have jurisdiction over the claim.

(4) Licensing and Certification Tests and National Tests. The RPO with an existing education folder will have jurisdiction over the licensing and certification or national test claim. If no education folder exists, the RPO with jurisdiction over the claimant's stated residence will have jurisdiction.

(5) Original Claims—Army Post Office (APO), Diplomatic Post Office (DPO), and Fleet Post Office (FPO) Addresses. If the claimant has an APO, DPO, or FPO address, the above rules will *not* apply. Jurisdiction will be determined as follows:

- Buffalo – APO/DPO/FPO AA (Armed Forces Americas) and APO/FP AE (Armed Forces Europe, Canada, Middle East, Africa)
- Muskogee -- APO/DPO/FPO AP (Armed Forces Pacific)

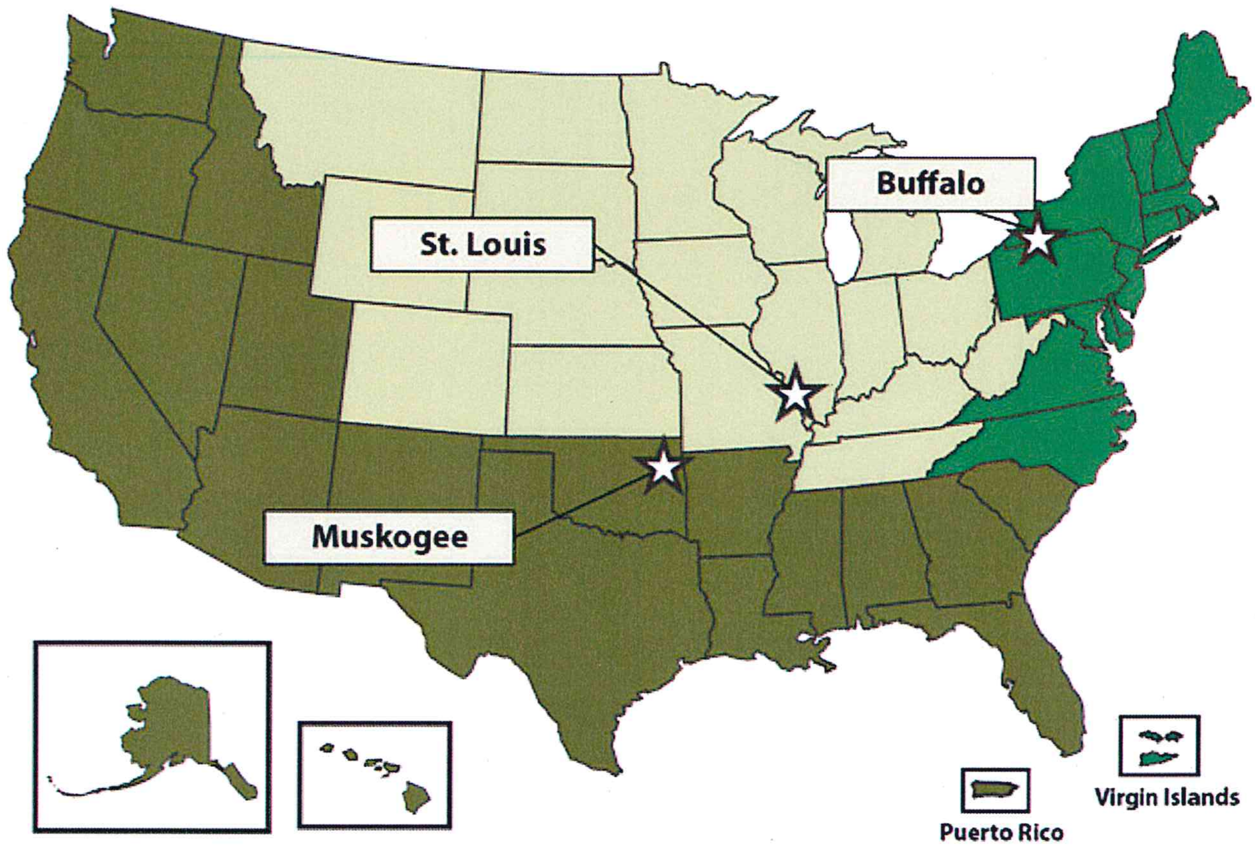
(6) Jurisdiction of education processing by state:

Figure 1.01 RPO JURISDICTION BY STATE

Buffalo	Muskogee	St. Louis
Connecticut	Alabama	Colorado
Delaware	Alaska	Illinois
Maine	Arizona	Indiana

Maryland	Arkansas	Iowa
Massachusetts	California	Kansas
New Hampshire	Florida	Kentucky
New Jersey	Georgia	Michigan
New York	Hawaii	Minnesota
North Carolina	Idaho	Missouri
Pennsylvania	Louisiana	Montana
Rhode Island	Mississippi	Nebraska
Vermont	New Mexico	North Dakota
Virginia	Nevada	Ohio
Washington, DC	Oklahoma	South Dakota
Foreign Schools	Oregon	Tennessee
APO/FPO/DPO addresses	Philippines	West Virginia
U.S. Virgin Islands	Puerto Rico	Wisconsin
	South Carolina	Wyoming
	Texas	
	Utah	
	Washington	
	Trust Territories	

Figure 1.02 RPO JURISDICTION MAP



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1.03 JURISDICTION OVER FOREIGN TRAINING

a. The Buffalo RPO will process foreign enrollments for all education benefits with the following exceptions:

The Muskogee RPO will process all claims for training in Puerto Rico, the Philippines, American Samoa, Guam, Midway and the Wake Islands, any of the islands in the Federated States of the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau.

b. Foreign branches of U.S. schools are under the jurisdiction of the RPO having claim processing authority over the parent school.

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1.04 JURISDICTION -- RPO EMPLOYEES

Active education folders (including Work Study and dependent's Chapter 35 TIMS folders) for current RPO personnel must be transferred to another RPO in accordance with the procedures set forth below.

a. Folders will be transferred from the RPO of employment to the RPO for claims processing based on the table below.

RPO of Employment	RPO for Claims Processing

Buffalo	Muskogee
Muskogee	Buffalo
St. Louis	Muskogee

b. Before transfer, a Note should be placed in TIMS that states "Claimant is an employee at RPO 3XX. Do not return to RPO" to ensure that the folder is not returned to the RPO of employment. Once the folder is transferred, the new RPO should create a FLASH from the note. (Note can be deleted once Flash is created).

NOTE: The transfer of a RPO employee's folder will not change the electronic intake process for electronic forms. RPOs will have to transfer electronic files received subsequent to the folder transfer.

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1.05 JURISDICTION -- COMPLIANCE AND LIAISON EMPLOYEES

All education folders for current Compliance & Liaison (C&L) personnel (including Work Study) and their dependents' Chapter 35 claims must be transferred to another RPO in accordance with the procedures set forth below. Since each Chief Education Liaison Officer (CELO) has personnel based at ROs in multiple states each CELO will identify current employees with both active and inactive education folders and folders will be transferred from the RPO of jurisdiction to the RPO for claims processing based on the table below.

Before the transfer, a NOTE should be placed in TIMS that states "Claimant works under the jurisdiction of the RPO 3XX. Do not return to RPO" to ensure that the folder is not returned to the RPO of jurisdiction. Once the transfer is complete, the receiving RPO should create a FLASH from the note. The note may be deleted once the FLASH is created.

NOTE: The transfer of an employee's folder working in a specific jurisdiction will not change the electronic intake process for electronic forms. RPOs will have to transfer electronic files received subsequent to the folder transfer.

CELO Jurisdiction	**Out based employee located in the following states:**	**RPO for Claims Processing**
Atlanta	Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Puerto Rico	Buffalo
Buffalo	Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, West Virginia	St. Louis
Muskogee	Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Utah, Washington, Wyoming	St. Louis
St. Louis	Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin	Muskogee

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1.06 JURISDICTION -- SECTION 901 AND ANTITERRORISM ACT

The Muskogee RPO has jurisdiction over all claims for section 901 benefits and the Antiterrorism Act. See part III - Chapter 11 and Chapter 12 for more information on these benefits.

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SUBCHAPTER II. MAIL AND FOLDER PROCEDURES

1.07 MAIL ANALYSIS

a. General. The overall mail management program is the responsibility of the Support Services Division following the procedures in M23-1, part I, Chapter 1. Education mail is any form with a 22 prefix or any document that pertains to a benefit covered by this manual. All mail must be properly analyzed to determine the appropriate action. Some mail must be controlled by a pending issue in the BDN.

b. Electronic Processing. Documents identified as education mail are scanned and indexed for electronic processing. The paper document may be destroyed six months after scanning according to the Records Control Schedule (RCS) reports. For additional issues regarding Upstream processing, refer to Part 3, Chapter 14 Upstream Procedures.

NOTE 1: The RPOs receive most claims through an online process [i.e. VONAPP (Veterans Online Application) or vets.gov] and enrollment certifications and notices of change in student status through the VA Online Certification of Enrollment System (VA-ONCE) rather than by paper mail. Electronic certifications received through VA-ONCE are processed through BDN to some extent by the Electronic Certification Automated Program (ECAP). In some cases, ECAP will set up the pending issue. The electronic data from these claims and certifications is retained in the claimant's TIMS folder.

NOTE 2: Chapter 33 VA-ONCE [and information from WEAMS (Web Enabled Approval Management System] files are handled by EIP (Enterprise Integration Pattern/Process) which is a part of the Long Term Solution (LTS). This complete system facilitates an end-to-end process which will establish and clear an end product when fully automated or will only establish the end product control when the claim is "off-ramped" for additional review and manual processing by a VCE/SVCE. There is no electronic data of the pending issue captured into the TIMS folder for claims that are fully automated. Only the enrollment certification or changes to enrollment documents are downloaded from a file into the TIMS folder.

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1.08 DIVISION MAIL MANAGEMENT

Once the Support Services Division delivers the paper mail to the Education Division, the Upstream section is responsible for ensuring the mail is associated with an education claims folder.

NOTE: Each RPO may locally determine who will perform each action below, presuming the VA Employee has received the appropriate training and has the appropriate commands. The use of the phrase of Upstream team and/or Program Support Assistants (PSAs) is to provide basic guidance.

a. There are 4 types of incoming paper mail:

(1) **Active mail** which includes all forms and letters not considered priority mail and received from outside the Education division. Active mail could be received via Post Office, fax machine, or other sources.

(2) **File mail** which includes BDN/LTS-generated award or denial letters and copies of other letters to be filed in the TIMS folder. All BDN/LTS-generated award or denial letters received in paper form are to be placed in the claimant's folder within 60 days of date of receipt or 90 days during extreme heavy peak periods.

(3) **Priority mail** which requires immediate processing. Priority processing could include but is not limited to Veterans and claimants under extreme financial hardship, homeless claimants, special requests determined by the Education Officer or the RO Director.

(4) **Unidentified mail** includes any mail that does not identify the claimant or cannot be associated with any claimant.

b. The Upstream section is generally responsible for batching the mail into categories as defined by the RPO, scanning the active mail into TIMS, indexing the mail into the appropriate TIMS folders which ensures the work is assigned through TIMS. File mail is also batched and scanned into TIMS but as drop mail and is not assigned to processing.

c. The Upstream section is also generally responsible for establishing control in BDN for all active mail. The employees assigned should CEST appropriate original end products when indexing and creating new folders in TIMS. All other active mail should be placed under control in TIMS within 7 days from the date of receipt. However, due to the nature of Education work, during extreme heavy volume periods, this may be expanded to 14 days. If additional time is needed to place all mail under control in TIMS is needed, the RPO Director must coordinate the request with the Director of Education Service or his/her designee.

d. If mail is unable to be associated with one particular claimant (herein called unidentified mail), the document(s) must be returned to the sender with a cover letter explaining the reason for the return. See Figure 1.03, **Return Mail Cover Letter Sample**. If the correspondence cannot be returned to the sender, the RPO must retain the document according to the RCS Schedule.

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1.09 UNDELIVERABLE MAIL PROCEDURES

Undeliverable mail generally falls within one or two categories:

- Essential (has evidentiary value), or
- Non-essential (has no evidentiary value).

Essential mail is defined as notices of proposed adverse action, due process notices, any decision notices (i.e. award letters), and requests for evidence (letters of development) from claimants, record centers, schools, other agencies, etc. Non-essential mail is any type of correspondence not covered under essential mail.

NOTE: Award letters are essential mail because they provide the claimant their appropriate appellate rights (therefore, has evidentiary value). However, for the purposes of handling returned essential mail, treat award letters as non-essential if the letter is solely an award letter. Any letter which provides due process, creates an overpayment, or requests development must be treated as essential mail to include terminating/suspending the award as appropriate.

a. Undeliverable *nonessential* mail. This category of mail should be reviewed and completed within 90 days of receipt, except during peak periods by permission of the RPO director. The RPO employee designated to this task should check to see if the envelope in which VA originally enclosed the mail has a yellow-colored, United States Postal Service (USPS) sticker that shows a forwarding address. (In addition, the RPO employee could use a card or letter sent from the Post Office, etc).

(1) If the sticker with the forwarding address is present:

a. CADD the new address on the 601 screen in BDN, or in LTS, or FOCAS, as appropriate. It is important all systems are updated with the correct address.

b. Ensure the copy of the letter originally sent is in TIMS. If not, send a copy of the returned letter to scan/drop

c. Prepare the Return mail cover letter (Figure 1.03)

d. Capture cover letter to TIMS

e. Send the cover letter (enclosing the original returned mail) to the new address.

NOTE: if there is a copy of the returned letter already in TIMS, a second copy does not need to be scan/drop filed as long as the letter sent to the claimant identifies specifically which letter was returned. The VCE should ensure the returned letter is appropriately disposed as per VBA Directive 6300.

(2) If no forwarding address is on the envelope, follow the steps below:

a. If a letter is already captured in TIMS, change the document type to "RTN Mail", place in Remarks *"no forwarding address (NFA) and current date"*. Dispose of the returned letter and envelope following appropriate disposal procedures.

b. If a letter is NOT captured in TIMS, document on letter *"no forwarding address found (NFA)"*. Send everything to scan/drop. Take no other action.

b. Undeliverable *essential* mail. Undeliverable *essential* mail requires immediate action as the information is dated and the Veteran/student may need to respond timely. This type of mail will be handled, outside of TIMS, to expedite the process. Scanning all documents as drop mail will be handled after the fact. This type of mail should be handled by someone knowledgeable with claims processing. Typically this would be a VCE, etc. The RPO may determine who performs this task. Due to the timeliness nature of this mail, however, a review of undeliverable essential mail should be completed within 60 days of receipt. Exceptions to this should be few, and only authorized by the RPO Director.

VCE should review the TIMS folder and all payment systems as appropriate (i.e. BDN/LTS/FOCAS) to ensure the address used on the undeliverable mail matches the current address of record. If a different (more current address) is found in TIMS or BDN, VCE should resend the returned letter to the updated address. Other sources for current addresses may include VIS, CAROLS, etc. VCEs should consider all available sources to help determine the most current address.

NOTE: As stated previously, the VCE should use the yellow sticker on the original envelope if available as the new address.

Whenever possible, VCEs may attempt to contact the claimant by phone. This is encouraged since telephone numbers are less likely to change during moves.

An e-mail or fax from a claimant is an acceptable form of communication to change an address. The VCE should capture any document regarding the change of address into TIMS.

Whatever means the VCE uses, confirm that the person with whom the VCE is communicating is the claimant.

(1) **Correct address is unattainable**. If the VCE is unable to obtain the correct address for undeliverable essential mail, create a note in TIMS explaining all attempts to find a correct address have failed.

A. If the master record is terminated (no active running award) but an end product is running.

- **For Non-Chapter 33 benefits:**
  - Deny the pending claim as RSN 29 and place "whereabouts unknown" in remarks next to the award document in the TIMS folder. Add the message ***"STOP: address unknown"*** on the award, and
  - Suppress the letter in BDN at the time of authorization
  - Flash the folder in TIMS explaining all attempts to find a good address have failed
  - The flash must include the date of the letter which was returned **OR** the letter and envelope should be sent to scan/drop as evidence in the folder.

    - Properly dispose of the letter and envelope through appropriate RCS disposal process if a copy of letter is already in the folder.

- **For Chapter 33 Benefits:**

  There is no action to be done in LTS

    - PCAN the end product and cancel the Work product in LTS.
    - Flash the folder in TIMS explaining all attempts to find a good address have failed
    - The flash must include the date of the letter which was returned or the returned mail and original envelope should be sent to scan/drop.
    - Properly dispose of the letter and envelope through appropriate RCS disposal process if a copy of the letter is already in the folder.

B. If the master record is active and an end product is pending and the essential mail was either a letter providing due process OR development letter**

NOTE: Since the master record is in active status and the undeliverable mail was either proposing an action (i.e. due process) OR was developing something necessary for award action, a letter is necessary to stop automatic payments from being released until an address can be identified. Although a good address has not been located, the letter advising due process or development must be released in good faith. If the letter is returned, and placed in the TIMS folder, there is now evidence VA attempted to contact the claimant before terminating or reducing benefits.

- **For Non-Chapter 33 benefits:**
    - Cancel the pending EP
    - Send a letter advising VA will discontinue benefits to the last address of record
    - Establish a supplemental end product with a suspense date that is 35 days from the date of the letter
    - Terminate benefits DLP if the beneficiary does not respond within 30 days
    - In the award message line, place remark ***"STOP: address unknown"***

- **For Chapter 33 benefits:**

  <u>If it is an IHL Facility:</u>

    - In a Work Product, terminate any enrollment period "Student did not attend" that has yet to be paid. Use caution, payments may be released up to 2 weeks before the term starts. Review Net Awards for the presence of any debts. If any exist, review and correct all actions.
    - Manually process a fiscal transaction to stop MHA/kickers with the current system DLP.
    - Enter Stop automation on Biography Page in LTS
    - Put a Flash in TIMS.
    - When address is verified and updated, remove the Stop automation message in LTS and the TIMS Flash, delete amendments to future terms

adjusted (if any) and authorize with automatic payments. MHA/Kickers will pick up where left off and all future funds for training will be released.

If it is an NCD Facility:

- In a Work Product, enter LOA (Last date of Attendance) amendment with effective date the system DLP (Date Last Paid). If the school reports sessions (standard terms), refer to IHL guidance above. Debts should appear.
- Enter Stop automation on Biography Page in LTS
- Put a Flash in TIMS.
- When address is verified and updated, remove the Stop automation message in LTS and TIMS Flash, delete amendments to future terms adjusted (if any) and authorize with automatic payments.
- MHA/Kickers/B&S will pick up where left off and all future funds for training will be released.

In any situation, allow the decision letter to be released. If it is returned undeliverable, send to drop file as instructed above.

(2) **Correct address has been Obtained**

A. Related EP still pending:

When a new address is obtained for undeliverable *essential* mail and the related EP is *still* pending:

- The VCE should CADD the Pending Issue (PIF) **AND** the Master Record in BDN/LTS
- The VCE should generate a new letter(s) with the correct address and send along with the returned mail cover (Figure 1.03). Ensure copies of all letters are captured into the TIMS folder.
- The VCE should extend the end product for the new appropriate due process (or development period). (i.e. Grant another 30 days from date of new letter)
- The VCE should place the claim token in AWAIT MAIL in TIMS for another 30 days.

B. EP no longer running

When a new address is obtained for undeliverable *essential* mail but the related EP is no longer running:

1 If the letter was due to a development issue:

- The VCE should CADD the master record in BDN/LTS/FOCAS as appropriate.
- The VCE should establish an EP 930.
- The VCE should generate a new letter with the correct address and send to the claimant, along with the returned mail cover letter (Figure 1.03). Ensure copies of all letters are captured into the TIMS folder.
- VCE should annotate in remarks next to original letter *"returned mail and date"*. (If original letter was not captured into TIMS, the returned letter and envelope must be sent to Upstream for scan/drop).

- VCE should destroy the original letter and envelope per VBA Directive 6300.

2 If the letter was a decision notification (i.e. award letter)

- The VCE should CADD the Master Record in BDN/LTS/FOCAS as appropriate.
- VCE should generate a claimant notification letter with the correct address and attach a *Return Mail* cover letter. (Figure 1.03) Ensure copies of all letters are captured into the TIMS folder.
- VCE should annotate in remarks next to original letter *"returned mail and date"*. (If original letter was not captured into TIMS, the returned letter and envelope must be sent to Upstream for scan/drop).
- VCE should destroy the original letter and envelope per local RPO procedures.

NOTE: No additional end product credit is allowed. The end product associated with the award was cleared initially. This should be performed as non-production time if VCE re-issues letter.

***Exception*:** If there is a returned mail issue associated with an appeal, the issue must be controlled on the existing 270 EP or re-establish the 270 EP.

c. Returned Mail from School:

School addresses should be current in WEAMS. If mail is returned from a school, the VCE should:

- Verify that the address is the same one in WEAMS. If any part of the address was mistyped, etc. the VCE should correct the error and prepare a new letter to the correct address. VCE should extend any diaries or controls if a response is required. VCE should ensure the “new” letter is captured into TIMS and a Note added explaining the reason for the second letter. VCEs should follow appropriate disposal procedures per VBA Directive 6300 for the “returned” letter.
- If the address is the same one in WEAMS, the VCE should email the ELR of jurisdiction (and send a copy to the CELO of jurisdiction) and ask for the address to be updated in WEAMS. VCE should open a claim token in TIMS (ideally using the copy of the returned letter as the claim token) and control for a response from the ELR within 14 days from date of email.
- Once the ELR has updated the address in WEAMS, the VCE should send the letter to the correct address. If there is a control for a response, the VCE should re-establish the control (i.e. extend the End Product date, extend the waiting mail date in TIMS).
- If the ELR fails to respond within 14 days, the VCE should contact the CELO of jurisdiction for an update to the issue.
- If the CELO fails to respond within 30 days from the initial email contact, the VCE should inform their EO through their coach for assistance.
- VCE should remember to close the claim token once this issue is resolved and letter has been released to appropriate school address.

FIGURE 1.03 RETURN MAIL COVER LETTER SAMPLE

Dear Mr. Doe:

{Optional paragraph for undeliverable mail}

The enclosed correspondence dated XXXXXX was returned to the VA Regional Processing Office by the US Postal Service as undeliverable on <*insert date*>. The above address has since been discovered. Should this letter reach you, please call us at the number listed below to ensure we have your correct contact information.

{Optional paragraph for unidentified mail}

The enclosed correspondence dated XXXXXX was received at the VA Regional Processing Office. Unfortunately, we are able to associate the document with a specific Veteran or beneficiary. If this document was to be used in association with a specific claim for VA education benefits, please return it with the claimant's full name and Social Security Number.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR NEED ASSISTANCE

If you have any questions or need assistance with this claim, you may contact us by telephone, e-mail, or letter.

If you	Here is what to do.
Telephone	Call us at 1-888-442-4551. If you use a Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TD Federal number is 711.
Use the Internet	Use the GI Bill website: http://benefits.va.gov/gibill - click on "Submit a question", the continue.
Write	For all written communications, put your full name and VA file number on the letter. F or fax all written correspondence to the address provided in the letterhead.

In all cases, be sure to refer to your VA File Number, XXXXXXXXX.

If you are looking for general information about benefits and eligibility, you should visit our website at www.gibill.gov or search the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

Sincerely yours,

EDUCATION OFFICER

ENCLOSURES: Returned letter or Original Document

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1.10 REMOVAL OF MATERIAL IN FOLDERS

Only documents and forms with probative value will be maintained in a claimant's education folder. Dispose of material which does not directly support a claim or a VA award action, including duplicate or redundant material, in accordance with Records Control Schedule VB 1, Part I, Item # 13-052.200.

NOTE: All individuals who handle education claims and folders should be careful to not destroy or discard any material which may have value to the claimant. When such material is no longer necessary for documentation, return the material to the claimant along with an explanatory letter.

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1.11 CONTROL OVER SENSITIVE CASES

Figure 1.04 shows BDN sensitivity levels (as stated in OFO letter 20F-12-04) with their corresponding TIMS sensitivity levels. As provided earlier in this chapter, Veteran-employees' folders must be processed at stations other than the home station. In addition, BDN/LTS sensitize the master records. Folders for Veteran-employees, relatives of employees, work-study students on station, and fugitive felon cases should be assigned TIMS sensitivity level 3 and the corresponding BDN sensitivity level 7. Only Senior VCEs, coaches and higher levels of authority should have access to these folders.

Based on CSEM, Sensitive and Access Levels are determined for VBA in BDN/SHARE. This chart adds the appropriate LTS and TIMS level:

FIGURE 1.04 SENSITIVITY LEVEL TABLE

Level of Sensitivity	VA Records	Level of BDN/Share Access	Authorized Employees
0		0	All employees not authorized access to sensitive file records
6	Relatives of VA employees	6	All employees not authorized access to sensitive file records
6	Work-study employees and VSOs	6	All employees not authorized access to sensitive file records
7	VBA employees	7	Limited number of employees configured by RPO Director anc ISO
8	VA SES, Directors, Asst. Directors, Division Chiefs	8	Must request temporary sensitiv access for anyone in a position less than a division chief
9	President, Cabinet level positions, Deputy Secretary of VA, VA Dept. Directors and Deputies	9	Must request temporary sensitiv access for anyone

NOTE: All OIG, Fraud, or special cases designated by the RPO should be in TIMS as level 4. The chart above is the minimum which must be reflected.

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SUBCHAPTER III. CONTROLS ON PENDING ISSUES

1.12 GENERAL

The RPO uses controls to ensure that appropriate and timely action is taken on claims or other issues requiring future action. These controls are defined in the following paragraphs on pending issue control, future diary, and TIMS controls.

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1.13 PENDING ISSUE CONTROL

Pending issues in BDN *must* be established for all formal claims (see Part 3, Chapter 3 for definition) and for all other issues that require adjudicative action. A Pending Issue File (PIF) is established in BDN through the CEST and CADJ (Claims Adjudication) commands. For more information regarding CEST, refer to Part 3, Chapter 14, Subchapter 5. Pending issue controls are cleared under the CAUT (Claims Authorization) and PCLR (Pending Issue Clear) commands. Pending issues are cancelled using the PCAN (Pending Issue Canceled) command.

a. Suspense Dates. Every pending claim or issue is assigned an EPC (End Product Code) which has an automatic suspense date (i.e., date when the pending issue requires review). Currently, every pending EPC will have an automatic suspense date of 30 days except for EPC 270 (Notice of Disagreement) which will have a suspense date of 60 days. If the automatically generated control period is inappropriate for a particular issue, enter the desired suspense date in the SUSPENSE DATE field on the 101 screen. (See M22-3, Appendix A for a list of the EPCs for education issues.)

b. Date of Claim. The date of claim entry required on the BDN 101 screen will be the earliest date of receipt in any VA facility, to include eBenefits and scanning vendor sites. VA employees should identify this date from the earliest VA date stamp or equivalent. (This is not necessarily the date of claim in the legal sense. See Part 3, Chapter 3.) If multiple documents are received on one claim, use the earliest date of receipt as the date of claim. In some cases, it is appropriate to use the date an issue arose as the date of claim as explained in examples 2 and 3 that follow.

EXAMPLE 1: An application is received in the Buffalo RPO on July 1, but not actually received in the Muskogee RPO (the office of jurisdiction) until July 15. When establishing the pending issue control, the Muskogee office must use July 1 as the date of claim.

EXAMPLE 2: VA receives an enrollment certification for reenrollment in the same program. There is no claim (in the legal sense). Therefore, use the date the enrollment certification was received in the RPO for the date of claim entry.

EXAMPLE 3: Education Service forwards a "fugitive felon" case to the RPO for action. Education Service received the referral from the Office of Inspector General (OIG). In this situation, the RPO should use the date of referral from the Education Service as the date of claim.

c. Timeliness. All mail should be reviewed and placed in TIMS within 7 calendar days from the date of receipt. A PIF must be established for original claims within this period (if one does not already exist). This is true even if a claim cannot be adjudicated within the 7-day period. However, before establishment of the pending issue, all master records and PIFs already existing for the file number should be reviewed through the SINQ (Status Inquiry) command. This will reduce the possibility of the establishment of an improper end product. The 7-day timeliness period will <u>not</u> be extended if a pending issue must be changed or canceled and reestablished.

d. Final Disposition of BDN Pending Issue Control. Leave the control pending in BDN until <u>final</u> resolution of <u>all</u> related issues.

e. ECAP. In some case, ECAP establishes the pending issue but VCEs must process the award. VCEs need to review for the existence of additional master records and pending issues to reduce the possibility of an improperly established end product. See Training Guide 22-99-4 for background on ECAP.

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1.14 FUTURE DIARY CONTROL

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a. A BDN future diary control is generally used when a control period of more than 30 days is appropriate.

FIGURE 1.05 FUTURE PENDING ISSUE CONTROL ESTABLISHMENT SCREEN

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101                    PENDING ISSUE CONTROL ESTABLISHMENT                 10-17-16
      FILE NUMBER 999 99 9999  00  END PRODUCT 344 CH33    NAME  F M LASTO

 NAME        FURUS M LASTON                 NAME LINE NO
  AND        1800 G ST NW
   ADDRESS   WASHINGTON DC                  POWER OF ATTORNEY  NONE
             20006                          FIDUCIARY FILE LOC

                                            VET STUB NAME

BENE STUB NAME                              BENE BIRTH DATE
END PRODUCT CODE                            SECTION/UNIT NO     2201
DATE OF CLAIM                               SUSPENSE DATE       12-31-25
GW REGISTRY PERMIT                          FUTURE REASON       39
SUPPRESS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT LETTER             SPECIAL ISSUE CASE

                                    DISPOSITION DATA
FOLDER WITH CLAIM  Y                        DISPOSITION  ORSN?
                                     FOLDER REQUEST
PREPARE       FROM FILES       FROM OTHER VA       OTHER FOLDER DELAY
                                                              NEXT SCREEN
```

b. When establishing a future diary control, the EPC entered on the Ready screen is the appropriate supplemental end product based on the benefit when the diary matures. When establishing a future EPC, it is recommended the appropriate EP series end with a "2". This will help identify these types of claims easier on work management reports.

On the 101 screen, control code 39 is entered in the FUTURE DATE REASON field, and the desired suspense date (BDN has a limitation of at least 10 calendar days but not more than 1 year in the future) is entered in the SUSPENSE DATE field.

NOTE: If the diary cannot be established in BDN because the future date is less than 10 days from "today's" date, the VCE should use the original date received as the date of claim in this situation.

c. Upon maturity, the future diary control converts to a pending issue control which may be cleared under the CAUT or PCLR command or canceled under the PCAN command. Before maturity, a future diary control may be canceled under the PCAN command.

NOTE: If action needs to be taken on an award and a future diary set for adjusting that award has not yet matured, cancel the future diary using the PCAN command. Take a separate (supplemental) EP for preparing the award. The VCE must be sure to use the appropriate date of claim based on the date the issue was received.

d. Using certain disposition codes on the S99 screen is a key in workload management issues. Education Service encourages the use of the following disposition codes on future diary issues:

- **O-L/S-** Used for lump sum awards under Non-Chapter 33 benefits. The diary is set for the first day of the term as indicated on the enrollment certification.
- **OIGRD-** Used to identify the end of the period the school has indicated the student has to complete an incomplete grade OR one year from the date the term ends, whichever is earlier.
- **OFUTR-** Used to diary first Chapter 35 awards or any future terms for other benefits**. The diary is set for the first day of the term as indicated on the enrollment certification. ** for enrollment certifications received for terms which start more than 120 or 180 days in the future, refer to Part 4, Chapter 1 for processing instructions.
- **O-RAD-** Used to track a future RAD if more than 10 days from today's date.
- **O-FGN-** Used in Foreign School Currency conversions. Use the rate effective on the first day of the month of July that precedes the beginning date of the individual's enrollment period.

EXAMPLE 1: The VCE previously set the suspense date as 05/01/2016. On March 1, 2016, the VCE reviews the EP after receiving the information on February 25, 2016, needed to process an award. The VCE should cancel the pending issue (using the PCAN command) as it has not yet matured. Then the VCE should process an award with a supplemental EP with a date of claim of February 25, 2016.

EXAMPLE 2: The VCE previously set the suspense date as May 1, 2016. On May 10, 2016, the VCE reviews the EP after receiving the information needed on May 2, 2016, to process an award. The VCE can use the EP previously set by the pending issue as it "matured" on May 1, 2016. The VCE should process an award with the supplemental EP previously established by the pending issue.

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1.15 TIMS CONTROLS

VCEs should use TIMS to supplement BDN controls or as a sole means of control when BDN cannot be used. There are two methods in TIMS for establishing controls: Await Mail and Individual Suspense. Await Mail is generally used when the control date is more than 30 days in the future. Individual Suspense is generally used when the control date is less than 30 days.

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1.16 BDN WIPP (WORK-IN-PROCESS) SUBSYSTEM

The BDN WIPP (Work-In-Process) subsystem assists management in identifying areas which require attention and analysis. It provides information from the PIF concerning processing timeliness by end product, during the current and previous calendar months, as well as information on all cases in a pending status. (Refer to M22-3 regarding the use of WIPP review.)

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1.17 VOR (VETSNET OPERATION REPORTS) SYSTEM

The VETSNET Operations Reports (VOR) is a suite of workload reports designed to **replace the BDN, WIPP, and PIF reports**. These full-featured reports contain all of the functionality of existing reports.

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SUBCHAPTER IV. DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY FOR EDUCATION CLAIMS

1.18 CORRESPONDENCE

The Education Officer may delegate authority to sign his or her name relating to education claims as he or she deems advisable.

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1.19 SINGLE SIGNATURE AUTHORITY

The Education Officer, at his or her discretion, may designate single signature authority. This authority can be to specific individuals or for specific types of actions. Such authority allows individuals to approve award actions with only the signature of a Veterans Claim Examiner (VCE). Single signature authority will be given based on demonstrated competence in education award processing and reassessed on an annual basis. The actions listed below, however, must be reviewed and signed by two or more persons unless otherwise indicated:

NOTE: Effective immediately, the use of Blind Sign awards is no longer authorized. Any award authorized as eligible for single signature but BDN/LTS rejects must have two signatures for authorization

a. Original Basic Eligibility Determinations. It should be noted ALL original awards MUST have two signatures. Original Chapter 35 COEs must have two signatures
b. Changes in Basic Eligibility. Changes in basic eligibility include any change in which

eligibility was modified, i.e. a change in VIS, service dates, etc. An example for Chapter 33 would be any change in the Service Data Screen and the Entitlement & Kickers Screen.

c. Awards for Claimants who are VA Employees and relatives of VA Employees.
d. Awards Resulting from Administrative Decisions
e. Awards involving Use of an Override Indicator for the Monthly Rate
f. Awards involving Incarcerated Claimants
g. Awards involving Entitlement Exhausted.
h. Awards involving Extensions of Delimiting Date.
i. Awards over Big Payment Thresholds as in Section 1.23

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1.20 PROCEDURES FOR GRANTING OR REMOVING SINGLE SIGNATURE AUTHORITY

In order to maintain consistency among the RPOs, the granting and removing of single signature must be the same nationwide.

a. Granting Single Signature Authority. Single signature authority may only be granted when the VCE has completed formal training and has demonstrated ability to meet current quality measures for the VCE level, he/she has attained (individual quality measures for GS 5/7/9). In all situations, the employee must be in the VCE position a minimum of 90 days before single signature authority may be granted.

Single signature authority may be granted for one type of case (i.e. enrollments, reductions/terminations, etc.) and for one or more type of benefits (i.e. Chapter 33, Chapter 30, etc.).

1. Type of Reviews

Single Signature(s) review should be conducted separately for each of the following types of cases:

- Enrollments
- Reduction and/or terminations(1999b, Certs)
- Misc. docs (DD Form 214, CORRA, 1995, 119, MISC)
- TATU/LAC
- Hardcopy(OOS claims)
- ACCEL Pay

The review should also be specific to benefit type (i.e. ch33, non33, ch35). In other words, if a single signature review is reviewed for non 33 enrollments the employee will only receive authority to single sign non 33 supplemental enrollments. A separate review should be done for ch33 enrollments. While ultimately only the Education Officer may grant single signature, the Coach has the authority to undertake the procedure and make the recommendation to the EO.

2. Selecting and Assigning Cases.

A. Single Benefit & Type Case Review. The coach should assign 15 cases to a VCE to work and randomly select 10 of these cases for review. The cases may be either assigned directly to the VCEs individual queue or placed in a holding queue. The coach should select the cases for review before assigning them to VCE.

B. Multiple Benefit/Type Case Review. If a review is being conducted for multiple benefits (i.e. Ch. 33 and non 33) or multiple type cases (i.e. enrollments & 99bs) the coach should assign 15 cases of each type/benefit and select 10 cases of each type/benefit for review. Each benefit /type case grouping should be scored separately. In other words if you were doing enrollments and 99b review, you would score the enrollments and the 99bs separately.

b. Annual Review for Single Signature Authority. Each VCE should be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure single signature authority should continue to be authorized. Failure to meet the current quality measures at the time of the annual review may result in the authority being removed.

Additional procedures for the annual certification will be published at a later date from Education Service.

c. REMOVAL/REVOCATION OF SINGLE SIGNATURE AUTHORITY. VCEs may lose their single signature authority for several different reasons.

Procedures will be published at a later date from Education Service.

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1.21 EDUCATION BIG PAY REVIEW

Education payments over specific thresholds are mandated to have multiple levels of approval before payment should be issued. This includes any big pay using the CERT command or fiscal transactions done by other divisions, such as Support Services. Each benefit has a different threshold; however, in every situation the VCE must adhere to the following procedures.

The process of big pay review is the same regardless of the benefit type. The only difference is the definition of the dollar amount by benefit type.

Once the big payment threshold has been met, the Veterans Claims Examiner (VCE) must create an audit worksheet to verify the payment amount is correct. The VCE should capture this document as MISC in the claimant's TIMS folder. The VCE should follow local RPO guidance regarding where to route the TIMS folder for authorization.

The authorizer (a Senior VCE in most situations) should review the audit worksheet along with the award information before sending the award to the Coach (first line supervisor) for third signature approval.

*NOTE: All supporting documents for the payment must be captured in the folder. This includes T-sheets for FOCAS and the WPS in LTS. The information contained with the T-Sheet and LTS must include the term dates, monthly certification and total payment amounts being released. LTS should be captured when authorization is complete.

A note must be created in TIMS. The VCE should create this note which must include the following:

- Beginning and ending dates of the award
- Facility name and facility code
- Cumulative payment amount
- Verification the audit worksheet (if required) is correct and date of review by the coach that the VCE, SVCE and Coach reviewed the case.

After the note is created by the VCE, all levels of appropriate authorization are expected to add concurrence to the note by annotating comments if applicable. Initials and date at each level (i.e., SVCE, Coach, or higher level employee) must be annotated to the note within the claim. The payment must be authorized by a Senior VCE or higher level employee. Local RPO procedures may be followed. The authorizer must ensure all proper letters have been released, and should finish the claim token as appropriate. As stated above, before the award is authorized, all appropriate approvals must be annotated on the note in TIMS.

In big payment awards, which meet the level of a fourth level reviewer, the Coach (as indicated above), will forward the claim through TIMS to the fourth level reviewer. This reviewer must be another GS-12 Coach or a person with a higher grade.

The third or fourth level reviewer will verify all of the previous steps including the audit worksheet and note in the TIMS folder are completed and accurate. Once final review is completed and the big pay note has been properly updated to include all reviewers' information, the payment may be authorized and released by the third or fourth level reviewer. Follow local RPO procedures.

After release of payment, the third or fourth reviewer will contact the Director's office notifying of the release of the payment. Follow local RPO procedures. This information regarding the big payment must be sent to the Director's office within 3 business days of the payment being authorized. The Director's office must archive the document as appropriate.

a. Big Payment Thresholds:

1. Chapter 32, 1606, and 1607.

- Any award action that issues a payment between $8,000.00 and $12,000.00 requires three signatures.
- Any award action equal to or over $12,000 requires four signatures.

2. Chapter 30 and 35.

- Any award action that issues a payment between $15,000.00 and $20,000.00 requires three signatures.
- Any award action equal to or over $20,000 requires four signatures.

3. Post-9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33)

- A VCE may not process a single payment to a school if the payment is equal to or over $35,000. In this instance, four signatures are required.
- A VCE may not process a single payment to an individual if the payment is equal to or over $20,000. In this instance, four signatures are required.

NOTE 1: A VCE may process a single payment to a school if it is less than $35,000, and may process a single payment to an individual if it is less than $20,000, without additional signatures.

NOTE 2: The RPOs may not use the practice of breaking up big payment awards on multiple work products to justify NOT following the above procedures. A big or large retroactive payment is an award where the *cumulative* payment reaches the threshold amounts.

NOTE 3: An exception to Note 2 is that LTS payments currently will fail if payment over $40,000 is attempted. Due to this system limitation, it is acceptable to break the payments up into multiple work products to ensure the payments are authorized. One of the payments must be over the threshold but under $40,000. The remaining payments may be under the threshold. However, the instructions regarding third and fourth signatures are required for the entire cumulative total of payment due to the student or school.

EXAMPLE:

Chapter 33 Big Pay amount is $65,000.00
First WP is authorized with a T&F payment =$25,000.00
Second WP is authorized with a T&F payment =$40,000.00
Total T&F paid to school is $65,000.00

NOTE 4: When completing big pay paperwork for Chapter 33 and Chapter 35, VCEs must be mindful of the full file pass. The full file pass for recurring payments is scheduled starting on the 20th or after each month. If the VCE is completing big pay paperwork on or after the 20th of the month, verify the amount accounts for any potential payment due for the current month. For the exact date of the full file pass each month, refer to the BDN Schedule of Operations. The RPOs should make every effort to anticipate these events and adjust the awards, documentation, and audit worksheets as necessary.

BDN and LTS in some instances are limited in their capacity to deliver payments for an entire award. In order to achieve full payment of an award the RPO may use multiple end products, but only one original or one supplemental EP to authorize big payment awards. Subsequent end products must be a 930ep. RPOs are encouraged to follow local procedures to ensure VCEs receive appropriate end product credit.

4. Director's Review of Big payments. In order to strengthen the integrity of the Education program, an additional review at the Director level is required for all payments that exceed $20,000 for student payments and $35,000 for school payments.

a. Each RPO will receive an e-mail report of the cases where education payments over $20,000 (or $35,000 as appropriate) were released. This report is generated from Data and Information Systems (D&IS). The e-mails are sent to a mailbox established for this purpose at each RPO named VAVBALLL/EDUPMT, with LLL representing the station identifier. These e-mails are sent on a regular basis and will generally not exceed two per week. Each e-mail includes all of the payments for review along with the checklist below each payment. If no payment greater than the designated amount was generated for that period then the RPO will receive a negative e-mail report.

b. The RPO Director is responsible for ensuring that the checklist located below is completed for each case on the e-mail. The checklist will include the following questions:

- Did you review the electronic education folder or an extract from the electronic folder?
- Is there documentation (such as an enrollment certification) with a captured award screen that supports the retroactive payment of $20K (or 35K) or greater?
- Did the action that generated the payment go through the proper review at the division level?
- Was the payment properly issued to the Serviceperson, Veteran, or Veteran's beneficiary as confirmed by the evidence of record?

c. If there is a "no" response to any of these questions, especially if there is no documentation to support the payment, and it is suspected there was a fraudulent payment, the RPO Director's office should contact the Inspector General's office, and should also contact Education Service for assistance by notifying the Quality Assurance team at VAVBAWAS/CO/222B. Provide a brief explanation of the problem(s) found.

d. RPO Directors must ensure each e-mail will be reviewed with a response completed, no later than 15 days from the day the list is generated. The response should be returned to Education Service at VAVBAWAS/CO/222B.

e. These completed e-mails should be printed after they are sent and signed by the Director or Assistant Director. The signed e-mail must be maintained in chronological order in the Director's office so that they are available for review upon request.

f. Each RPO must conduct an annual systematic analysis of operations (SAO) on the review process of these large payments. When reporting local findings, include an analysis of the third or fourth signature procedures, the accuracy of payments, and outline a plan of action to address inaccuracies and fraud.

FIGURE 1.06 BIG PAYMENT REVIEW CHECKLIST EXAMPLE

Education BIG PAYMENT Case Review

Station No.: File No.: Stub Name:

Payment Amount: Date of Payment:

Full Address/Direct Deposit Info:

1. Did you review the electronic education folder or an extract from the electronic folder?

YES		NO	

2. Is there documentation (such as an enrollment certification) with a captured award screen that supports the retroactive payment of $20K (or $35K) or greater?

YES		NO	

3. Did the action that generated the payment go through the proper review at the division level?

YES		NO	

4. Was the payment properly issued to the Serviceperson, Veteran, or Veteran's beneficiary as confirmed by the evidence of record?

YES		NO	

Note: If there is any "no" response to any of the questions above, you must explain the reason below. For #4, please include the amount of any overpayment created due to an erroneous payment and if the overpayment was recovered.

COMMENTS:

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