

# ADF Skills and Apprenticeship Forum

## *Communiqué*

The ADF Skills and Apprenticeship Forum, organised jointly by TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) and the National Apprenticeship Employment Network (NAEN) was held in Canberra on 21-22 March 2017.

Delegates attending were leaders from the Australian VET sector, including Turnbull government ministers (Tehan and Andrews), and Shadow Minister (Richard Marles). Those from the Defence and VET sector included four TAFE institute CEOs who were former ADF senior officers, group training organisations (GTOs), along with senior officials from defence and education departments, ex-ADF personnel, defence contractors, employers, and skills service organisations.

The purpose of the ADF forum was to explore some of the challenges that stand in the way of ADF personnel successfully transitioning into civilian employment, and to examine options to better harness skills acquired in the ADF in the labour market.

This Communiqué aims to draw together the key themes discussed over the two days, and details a number of measures that could be put to government that will complement and build upon programmes already in place, as well as the career and counselling services provided by the Defence Community Organisation. In this way, it is hoped that a range of approaches can be developed to address the needs of different transitioning personnel, regardless of time served.

Recommendations (Ref p5), include proposals for an ADF Jobs and Skills Centre with priority for transitioning ADF personnel ahead of moving to civilian roles. Under protocols, the ADF Forum proposed a stepped-up role for TAFEs and group training organisations, to assess skills, up-skill with gap training to empower ADF personnel with accredited job-ready skills, with further mentoring to better equip transition into civilian employment.

The recommendations take regard of many ex-ADF personnel leaving on medical grounds, and better support for positive employment and job and life skills.

### **Overview**

Department of Defence officials outlined the measures that the ADF takes to recognise the skills acquired during military service, as well as the extensive work undertaken by the Defence Community Organisation to assist veterans and families in making career transitions. However, Defence conceded that limited accredited training is offered to current ADF enrolment personnel, and agreed transition periods held more capacity for up-skilling to equip those from the ADF (Army, Navy and Air Force), with like and job skills.

A number of ex-ADF personnel related negative experiences in transitioning out of the military, including problems having skills recognised by prospective employers, a lack of awareness of the skills acquired in the military, and even stereotypes related to military service and mental health.

There was broad recognition that the skills typically gained in military service – flexibility, discipline, leadership, dependability, integrity, teamwork, and access to latest technology – are all extremely valuable to employers.

Yet, many employers do not fully comprehend this breadth of skills and attributes, while defence rankings don't easily translate into civilian workplace hierarchies – something being addressed in a comprehensive mapping program by the NSW Government Veterans Employment Program.

The support services that are in place clearly work for some, but not all. Veterans can experience a pattern of rejection by employers, unaware of the depth of skill and commitment, with obvious costs to the national economy and a heavy personal toll on individuals.

Apprenticeships provide learners with the high-quality technical and employability they need to succeed in their careers, and represent a means of delivering work-ready graduates to the labour market at a relatively low cost to government. The implementation of a fast-track apprenticeship program for transitioning ADF personnel would help to meet the increasing need for skilled tradespersons. It became clear throughout the Forum that there are two clear strands of transitioning personnel: those who could transition fairly easily into apprenticeships, and those who would benefit from other VET options in TAFE. This paper makes recommendations that, it is hoped, seek to address both sets of often overlapping needs.

Attendees learned of a number of programmes and projects in place across jurisdictions. However, there is little national consistency and limited communication amongst jurisdictions as to the benefits these may have. It is therefore recommended that policy learning should take place across Australia in this area, and, where possible, programmes should be scaled to a national level. During his speech at the forum, the Hon Dan Tehan, Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel Support, detailed some of the work being undertaken by a new COAG for Ministers responsible for Veterans' Affairs. The Minister welcomed the initiative of the ADF Skills Forum for sharing activities – and the challenges - and invited ideas toward a national approach to providing training and employment pathways for transitioning ADF personnel.

### **Prime Minister's Veterans Employment Program 2016**

Minister Tehan pointed to the Prime Minister's Veterans' Employment Program, announced in November 2016. The Prime Minister's Veterans. Employment Program adopted the goal of to embed employment strategies into the recruitment practices of Australian business, and related government agencies. Minister Tehan invited TDA and NAEN to review how TAFE and group training may adopt ideas toward building on the Prime Minister's recommendations on veteran's employment, with an invitation for a joint and structured submission as a result of this Forum.

Minister Tehan concluded by inviting specific proposals from this forum to be presented to his office. This Communiqué concludes with the key recommendations stemming from the Forum, which TDA and NAEN hope can inform government policy.

## **Industry**

Several major defence industry employers participated in the ADF Forum. Lockheed Martin outlined its business planning, with significant demand for technical and vocational skills needs in the coming decade. This demand for VET qualifications– both by major employers and members of the supply chain – was most evident in niche areas like cyber security, radiation hazard management, and communication systems, is already quite high and expected to increase. These skills, in conjunction with the attributes and capabilities that transitioning personnel already possess (including clearances, operational understanding, leadership, and team work), would make transitioning personnel more attractive to employers in the defence sector. .

## **Tracking and mentoring of transitioning personnel**

Both the Department of Defence and former ADF personnel acknowledged that there are challenges in tracking persons who have left the ADF, many of whom change their phone numbers and email addresses upon leaving. Better understanding of transition pathways, for example at 6 and 18 months after leaving the ADF would allow for more effective training and employment programmes to be developed and implemented.

Any exit survey administered to personnel could also include information about nearby TAFE institutes and their programme offerings.

The key role of mentors to transitioning personnel was acknowledged. Extensive career mentoring could be provided by group training, for whom this is already a core offering.

## **Lack of training provisions for many transitioning personnel**

Personnel with less than 12 years of service do not have access to many of the necessary training entitlements as longer service personnel. Given that the average length of service of defence personnel is less than 12 years, they are not able to access the necessary service offerings. It is therefore recommended that Career Transition Assistance Scheme provisions should be reviewed to reflect the current reality.

## **Availability and communication of information about training and career pathways**

Currently, personnel have a very limited understanding of career and training pathways available to them post-transition. This is especially true for those who have served for less than 12 years.

TAFE Institutes and Group Training Organisations could play a number of important roles in communicating information at every Defence Transition Seminar. Were this to be done systematically, it would allow transitioning personnel to establish a network of trainers and employers, and help them better understand skills needs in their area. Such an approach would stand in stark contrast to the current model, where seminars are run by Department of Defence personnel with a limited understanding of the challenges and realities facing job-seekers. As it stands, employers are not engaged in this process. Yet, their engagement and insights into recruitment and employment requirements and practices is a critical deliverable required by these transitioning soldiers.

### **Expanded role for TAFE and GTOs**

To help transitioning personnel prepare a skills portfolio, to identify gaps in training (and propose strategies to bridge these gaps post pre- and post-transition), TAFE could be engaged to support an ADF jobs and skills centre, based on the model currently now in operation in Victoria, which would build on the initial contact made at the Defence Transition Seminars. Funding for this initiative would be provided by the Commonwealth Government.

In the United States, similar support is contracted to the American community college sector, for both active Defence personnel up-skilling, and spousal support and job-skills.

### **Recognition of skills and prior learning**

Attendees heard about the high level project management, teamwork, leadership, critical thinking, and planning skills that personnel acquire in the ADF. However, employers appear not to understand the nature and depth of these capabilities. This limitation is amplified by the fact that transitioning personnel are often unable to articulate them in a way that many employers would understand.

Attendees also learned of a very promising initiative being undertaken in NSW, in which equivalencies were drawn between various military ranks and NSW Public Service job classifications. On a national scale, such an initiative could greatly facilitate the transition of personnel to some of the country's largest employers.

To reach a larger range of employers, this initiative could be expanded into the development and articulation of ADF personnel capabilities, which describe the knowledge and skills possessed by service personnel at various levels, in the three different forces. Such a project would require the collaboration of TAFE RPL experts and the Department of Defence.

In parallel, Group Training Organisations could engage with their employer networks to allow them to better understand the rich skills profile transitioning personnel could offer, and the GTO network and TAFE institutes could work with personnel to help them articulate their capabilities in a way that is more accessible to employers. The underpinning HR and recruitment/ employment functions of GTOs provide a direct correlation to employability capabilities required by employers in today's workforce.

### **Bridging the apprenticeship wage gap**

Nationally, two out of three apprentices and trainees are under 24 years of age. The average age of departing defence personnel is over 25, meaning that transitioning personnel seeking to undertake apprenticeships must be paid at adult training wage rates. This is a significant disincentive to employers when considering taking on former ADF personnel as apprentices.

A solution would be for the government to commit to bridging this wage gap with a top up payment to the employer. A former model, the *'Support for Adult Australian Apprentices'* (SAAA) funding model is recommended for revisitation, specifically for ex-ADF personnel, when engaged by a GTO. GTOs offer wrap around support services that assist apprentices and employers to navigate the employment arrangement and encourage successful completion of the apprenticeship. The SAAA payment provided a wage top up of \$150/week in the first year of the apprenticeships, and \$100/week in the second year of the apprenticeship, to assist the employer to cover an increased wage rate for adult apprentices.

**Summary of recommendations:**

- 1. that a national, ADF Jobs and Skills Centre be established as an initial point of contact to ADF personnel seeking to transition to civilian life. The Centre would provide the following services:**
  - a. Career and training advice by TAFE staff;**
  - b. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) services that would allow ADF personnel to access fast-tracked apprenticeships;**
  - c. Coaching for résumé writing;**
  - d. Liaison with defence contractors to identify specific areas of skills need;**
  - e. Job placements including options for fast-track apprenticeships; and**
  - f. Mentoring by group training organisations.**
- 2. that a full review of CTAS should be conducted, with updates to how guidance is provided.**
- 3. that TAFE institutes and group training organisations should be present at each Defence Transition Seminar to engage personnel and provide them with a clear array of options at an early stage.**
- 4. that TDA and NAEN, in collaboration with the NSW and Commonwealth Government Veterans' Employment Programs, articulate the workplace capabilities of ADF personnel in a way that is accessible to a range of employers, and that facilitates RPL. In parallel, group training organisations work with employers to improve their understanding of what these capabilities are.**
- 5. that the Australian Government provide a top-up payment to Group Training Organisations to offset the pay gap and provide holistic pastoral care services for older apprentices and encourage increased employment of personnel transitioning out of the ADF.**
- 6. that the experience of the USA in providing pro-active spousal training and job-skills, supported by funding agreements with American community colleges, could be piloted in Australia. ADF personnel's regular interstate and overseas commitments create family dislocation and stress, therefore creating a skills and training platform of support should accompany new ADF transition skills support programs. Group training should be an additional partner to these programs, to motivate work-ready skills.**