

AN ASSET-BASED CAREER DEVELOPMENT APPROACH TO ADF PARTNER EMPLOYMENT

Australian Defence Force (ADF) partner employment is a career development issue. Rather than a problem-focused deficit approach (e.g. focusing on unemployment figures), ADF partner employment can be approached with an asset model mindset and a focus on the opportunities that arise from investing in career development support for ADF partners.

The knowledge that career development is good for individuals, families, communities, employers and the economy (and in this context, good for defence and national security) becomes the **foundation** for identifying and creating a suitable ADF partner career development strategy and framework and designing, developing and investing in suitable career development policies and programs.

This approach aligns with the current Government focus on the importance of career development and its approach to establish and strengthen and modernise Australia's skills and careers sectors.¹

Definitions

Career

There are many contemporary definitions of career.

The International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy (ICCDPP) describe career as *"the individual's path through life, learning and work"*.²

The Australian Government's National Careers Institute Background Paper uses the definition of careers as *"dynamic, unique to each person, and involve individuals balancing paid work and personal life roles. As distinct from a job (the work a person does to earn money), a career is the interaction of work roles over a person's lifespan"*.¹

Careers are a social construct. They are where the individual meets organisations and institutions⁴. Thus it is not only individual knowledge and skills that contribute to career success but how the environment enables them to be utilised optimally or not.

Career Development

According to the Australian Government Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business career development is *"the process of managing learning, work, leisure, and transitions throughout life to meet our personal aspirations and goals"*.¹

The OECD definition is *"Career guidance refers to services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers"*³

The Career Guidance for Social Justice authors define it as “*Career guidance supports individuals and groups to discover more about work, leisure and learning and to consider their place in the world and plan for their futures*”⁴.

The Australian Government has grouped career development services into the following broad categories:

- career advice
- career education
- career information
- career pathways
- career technology

Career development is delivered by a wide range of stakeholders including governments, education providers, the career development sector, industry and non-profits.

Career Development is a specific discipline underpinned by accredited qualifications, proven theory and recognised practice.⁵

Career development is not something that happens at a single point in time but is important throughout life.¹

Why Is Career Development Important?

*“A strong, efficient and effective career development services system is critical to our economy and to helping prepare Australians for the workforce of today and the future. Career development informs people’s job, industry, education and training decisions and helps individuals to find and succeed at work”*¹

Career development benefits individuals, employers, society and the economy.

Research has shown that people who receive career development support are 2 times more likely to find work⁶. Goals for career development support for adults include upskilling and reskilling, lifelong learning, employment and employability and managing multiple work transitions.²

Employers benefit from better responses to skills shortages, workforce adaptability and smoother labour market transitions.

The availability of career development leads to stronger social inclusion through better employment outcomes for disadvantaged cohorts. For vulnerable groups it addresses social justice through education and workforce participation.

All of these benefits contribute to the efficient functioning of the labour market and broader economy.

The Communique from the recent ICCDPP International Symposium identified that

“Moving to take up a new job, set up a new business, share parental leave, reduce the hours you spend in paid work, enroll in adult learning or leave school are all career decisions that have a profound impact on individual wellbeing as well as on wider society. Because of this governments, societies, employers and educational organisations have an interest in supporting people to build good, productive and meaningful careers”²

It goes on to say that career development links with a wide range of wider policy agendas notably economic policy, educational policy and social policy:

“Career development policies, programmes and services can empower individuals by supporting them to explore the labour market, analyse changes and build responses to these changes that enhance resilience and ensure their livelihoods. It can support employers by strengthening the links between education and employment, addressing skills needs and smoothing labour market transitions. It can also serve enhance equality and social inclusion by providing useful information and access to networks for the disadvantaged”

Career development is also important in achieving international goals and obligations such as the United Nations Sustainability Goals.

Government support for Career Development

Government support for career development was the focus of the recent ICCDPP Internal Symposium attended by delegates from 33 countries. Most countries reported that their government recognized the value of career development as part of public policy².

In July 2019 the Australian Government established the National Careers Institute (NCI) in response to the Strengthening Skills Expert Reviews recommendations to improve the quality of career development so that Australians can get the career support they need. The NCI is currently undertaking research and stakeholder engagement to map the career development system and identify needs and priorities of stakeholders. A history of Australia’s national career policy can be found in the NCI Background Paper.¹

The Background Paper identified Defence’s Career Transition Assistance Scheme (CTAS) for transitioning ADF members as an example of explicit government career development products and services.

Note: the NCI will be incorporating the recommendations from the ICCDPP Communique 2019 as part of its evidence gathering domestic and international.

Why ADF Partner Career Development?

As the Defence Family Support Policy identifies:

“Service in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) places unique demands on Defence members and their families. The nature of Service life and the commitment required of Defence members may impose restrictions, pressures, and difficulties on their families not generally encountered in the civilian community”

Evidence gathered over the years (quantitative, qualitative and anecdotal) indicates that the nature of Service life negatively impacts on the careers (see definition above) of ADF partners. Given the benefits of career development to Australian in general (as outlined above) it stands to reason that career development support for those experiencing additional and/or unique challenges is even more important. This is supported by the ICCDPP comment *“For others, particularly those engaged in unwanted and unexpected labour market transitions, the need for career development programs and services is acute, but access can often be limited”*.²

Chapter 2 of the Churchill Fellowship Report on Military Spouse Employment and Career Development outlines some of the specific challenges reported by Australian and international military spouses and why they matter⁷. These include reports of unwanted and/or unexpected transitions in and out of the workforce due to relocation and domestic responsibilities/roles (particularly parenting) that arise due to Service member absence from home (these have also been identified both formally and informally overseas).

In addition to the general individual, social and economic benefits of career development there are additional benefits to supporting ADF partner career development. These include recruitment and retention of ADF personnel (not just in terms of numbers but in terms of the skills needed) and the subsequent effects on ADF capability and national security, and also the contribution made to the successful transition of ADF members from military to civilian life.

In line with general points about career development it is widely acknowledged that multiple stakeholders are involved in the delivery of career development services and that no single organisation has the knowledge or capacity to deliver complete career development support to military partners.

Designing and Developing Career Development Policies and Programs

Points from key documents:

- Career guidance is both a) part of an effectively functioning education and employment system and b) a safeguard against ineffective and imperfect systems.⁴
- Career development services are delivered by a wide range of stakeholders.¹
- Career development policy typically involves multiple ministries, jurisdictions and stakeholders. It is important to establish co-operation mechanisms within government, across ministries, departments and agencies and jurisdictional levels.²
- There is a substantial evidence base on career development interventions that can be used to inform both policy and practice.²
- Career development is an international field of practice, policy and research. It is important that countries continue to dialogue with others to facilitate learning.²
- Career development is not just about making decisions during key points of transition.²
- Career development programmes and services should empower citizens and support them to develop their own careers.²
- It is important for countries to increase awareness of and access to career development programmes and services.²

- The design and organisation of programmes and services should recognise the diversity of users.²
- The people who use and benefit from career development programmes and services should be central to defining what these include and how they work.²
- Countries should provide resources to support innovation and space for piloting new career development programmes and services.²
- Effective career development is dependent on highly qualified professionals.²
- The relationship to the labour market is key⁸
- Career development is not just about one-to-one career counselling or coaching⁸
- The Australian National Careers Institute¹ has developed a preliminary list of key features of a quality career development system:
 - leadership, clarity and coordination
 - lifelong and holistic
 - relevant
 - quality
 - connected, connecting and integrated
 - tailored to the individual
 - enabling and empowering
- CDAA members have expertise to assist with design and roll-out of suitable career development strategies to support partners of ADF personnel, assist with awareness raising of the benefits of career development support and how to access it, and connect partners with professional career service providers in the community.⁹

¹ National Careers Institute Consultations and Co-design Background Paper. Department of Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business, October 2019.

² International Centre for Career Development and Public Policy (2019). Communique 2019 from the International Symposium Norway.

³ OECD 2004

⁴ Hooley T (2018). Career guidance policy. What it is and why it matters. Powerpoint presentation

⁵ www.cdaa.org.au

⁶ CDAA analysis of Whiston S et al (2017). Effectiveness of career choice interventions: A meta-analytic replication and extension. Journal of Vocational Behavior. 100 p 175

⁷ McCue A (2018). Military (ADF) Spouse Employment and Career Development. The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia.

⁸ Hooley T (2019). Challenges and benefits of engaging employers in career development. CDAA webinar.

⁹ <https://www.cdaa.org.au/documents/item/639>