



Defence*FIRST*:
**A framework to enhance the Defence
environment as an employer of choice.**

A SADILP 2017 Concept Paper
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Executive Summary

The human resource capability and capacity challenges that currently face Defence are well understood and publicised. The ADF's challenges include the need to increase the proportion of females and indigenous Australians in its ranks, and to attract enough talented young people to rise to the complex challenges of cyber security and information warfare. Many organisations in Australia's Defence industry are busily addressing "nice problems to have" as they are finding ways to mobilise the large teams of skilled workers required to delivery on the many upcoming capability acquisition projects. Perhaps the most prominent of all, much of Defence is currently focused on attracting and retaining young people who have the potential to become experts in the "STEM" domains: science, technology, engineering and maths.

We have discovered that a major barrier to Defence's ability to solve these challenges lies in the poor perception of what a career in Defence means to the wider community. We have discovered that people's understanding of Defence careers does not extend past the three armed forces, and that the diverse career opportunities within those are not well understood. There is little awareness of the opportunities in the Australian public service or the many organisations that form the Defence industry. Public perceptions of Defence careers are usually focussed on traditional warfighting roles, in which physical strength, limited intellectual stimulation, and the potential for serious physical or mental injury are perceived to be the dominant features. As such, Defence is generally not regarded as an employer of choice.

This is unfortunate. The difficulty that Defence has in attracting top talent is a barrier to national security, to a strong sovereign defence capability and even to our nation's economic performance. Yet Defence has much to offer prospective employees, and to help communicate this we introduce the concept of the Defence Career Ecosystem (DCE). The DCE is an abstract concept which helps to visualise the many diverse career paths that are available across the armed forces, public service and industry. It is comprised of all the people and organisations in these sectors. The appeal of the DCE is that it can offer Australia's top talent entire careers that span many different organisations, technologies, jobs, levels of seniority and working conditions, which can change according to their aspirations and stage of life.

To attract, retain and support people and organisations in the DCE, our core recommendation is the formation of a strategically wedded framework through a consortium of government and industry. Known as DefenceFIRST, the consortium will position Defence as "The First" choice among Australia's best & brightest for a career both now and in the future. DefenceFIRST's core missions will be the promotion, growth and strengthening of the DCE. It will achieve this through the provision of three key services:

1. **Attraction** – of talented people into the DCE, with the right attitude and attributes needed by the organisations in the DCE.
2. **Retention and re-mobilisation** – of those talented people, by ensuring that their career aspirations are satisfied by easily moving throughout the DCE to make the most of opportunities. This also includes the flexibility to take a break and return, for personal or professional reasons.
3. **Advocacy** – Acting as a voice of the DCE to government and other external organisations to ensure that the DCE retains the work backlog, infrastructure, policies and working conditions required to remain an employer of choice.

If successful, DefenceFIRST will deliver many benefits, including:

- A stronger Defence Sovereign Capability;
- A well-known and respected industry among young people;
- Providing a framework to promote and advance the common interests of the participants, while still allowing for the necessary competitive tensions in industry;
- Making our industry a global leader in employee attraction, retention and development initiatives; and
- Economic benefits to Australia as the Defence industry emerges as a major exporter and employer.

Our vision is that when Australia's best and brightest are considering their career options, that they will think of DefenceFIRST.

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Is Defence an Employer of Choice?

Defence, as a prospective employer for many talented young Australians, has a perception problem among the general public. As an example, a Defence Force Recruiting (DFR) commissioned report¹ has shown that among young, educated people who are prime candidates for recruitment into Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) roles, Defence offers very limited opportunities. The perception is that 'Defence' comprises only the armed forces (Navy, Army and Air Force), and that the roles on offer are predominantly combat related.

There seems to be little awareness in the community that Defence, as a government department, is much larger than the three forces and includes disciplines much broader than combat roles.

Barriers to Defence Careers for Potential Talent

When the general perception is that Defence career opportunities are limited to combat roles in the armed forces, there are significant barriers to attracting talent into Defence. The danger associated with the increased possibility of involvement in conflict in our current geopolitical environment is viewed as a significant concern to those entering the workforce or thinking about a career change. This is exacerbated by the increased awareness and publicity of the mental health issues being experienced by returned soldiers.

Furthermore, there are other barriers to attracting talent that go beyond the dangers of armed conflict. Defence service involves frequent and potentially unpredictable posting cycles, especially early in a service person's career, which many see as potentially disruptive to their social or family lives. For some the perception of a lack of diversity, with Defence being very much a male dominated environment, is also a concern. There is also a popular perception that jobs in defence lack innovation and do not work with cutting edge technologies, with limited roles and career paths for people who are passionate about STEM. Defence careers are seen as more about maintenance and operations than innovation, development and advanced technology¹.

¹ Project STEM, Defence Force Recruiting, Commissioned by: Linda Hein, DFR July 2017

The Defence Career Ecosystem

The narrow understanding among the general public of Defence career opportunities being limited to the armed forces, and the barriers to entry that those opportunities represent (either real or perceived) means that the organisations that form the wider Defence capability in Australia do not often rank highly as employers of choice among secondary and university students.

For Defence to feature more prominently as an employer of choice in the community, it is necessary to take a broader, more holistic view of the organisations that form part of Australia's Defence capability, and the career opportunities that they provide both individually and collectively.

In addition to the three armed forces, Defence should be more broadly defined to include the Australian public service (including academic institutions) and the commercial industry participants that supply materiel and services to the Commonwealth.



Figure 1 - The Defence Career Ecosystem

Considering first the public sector, the Commonwealth Department of Defence comprises many agencies, including:

- Capability Acquisition & Sustainment Group (CAS-G);
- Defence Science and Technology Group (DST-G);
- Strategic Policy & Intelligence Group;
- Vice Chief of the Defence Force Group;
- Chief Information Officer Group;
- Chief Finance Officer Group;

- People Group;
- Estate & Infrastructure Group; and
- Joint Operations Command.

The Department's mandate is broad, as its own web site² defines 'matters dealt with by the Department' as including:

- international defence relations and defence co-operation;
- defence scientific research and development;
- defence procurement and purchasing; and
- defence industry development and co-operation.

To fulfill its mission, the Department relies on an extensive, diverse supply chain of commercial industry participants. Indeed, the 2016 Defence whitepaper³ identified Australia's Defence industry for the first time as a "fundamental input to capability". This was widely regarded as a recognition of the critical role that industry plays in the defence of our nation, and set a mandate for the Department of Defence to collaborate and engage with industry more effectively in the future.

The Defence industry comprises many different types of private sector companies. Much of the media attention is focused on the large multi-national "primes", because they are often awarded the largest, most valuable and therefore politically important contracts. However, these are supported by complex supply chains that include small to medium enterprises, engineering and project management consultancies, niche technology and services providers and local equipment resellers. These supply chains directly deliver warfighting capabilities and technologies. Industry also provides the goods and services that augment warfighting capability, such as estate and infrastructure management and specialist services such as recruitment, financial and legal services. There are between 15,000 and 25,000 persons employed by firms in the Defence industry⁴, and the top 40 firms had an estimated turnover of \$9.27 billion in 2014⁵.

It can be seen that the armed forces, the public service and defence industry collectively provide a wide range of organisations to work for and jobs to be employed in. This provides great opportunities for career longevity, variety and flexibility which appeals to many career-minded people. As such, we need people to understand that by establishing themselves in Defence through any organization or sector, they are lucky enough have a vast choice of options to potentially move, change, grow, work, lead and serve throughout the forces, the public service and industry.

It is with this purpose in mind that we introduce the concept of the Defence Career Ecosystem (DCE). Although it traditionally has biological connotations, Oxford also defines 'ecosystem' as a 'complex network or interconnected system'. That's clearly what Defence is: our warfighters are supported by ADF non-combatant staff, who are all part of the ADF chain of command. They are recruited, enabled and supported by the wider Department of Defence. They also acquire their

² <http://www.defence.gov.au/AboutUs.asp>

³ <http://www.defence.gov.au/WhitePaper/Docs/2016-Defence-White-Paper.pdf>

⁴ Skills Australia, Building Australia's Defence Supply Capabilities, Main Report for the Defence Industry Workforce Strategy, 2012

⁵ Australian Defence Magazine Vol 23 (Oct 2014)

material capability from industry who provide equipment and services through complex domestic and international supply chains, as well as engaging their in-house capabilities.

Many people who work in Defence do have an ADF background; there is a lot of movement of staff between Defence contractors due to the life cycle of contracts⁴, and those who work on acquisition contracts may transition to a support role along the life cycle of the platform they developed, to show a few examples. Defence is an industry where “corporate knowledge” is highly valued, and highly transferable. This means that people can move within the DCE, applying the knowledge gained to different projects and organisations.

Unified by the common purpose of the defence of our nation, the people working in Defence are just as much a part of the ecosystem as the other organizational entities. Being part of it means being able to work within it, move around it, interact with the other elements and, ideally, sustainably grow and benefit from it.

By considering a career through the lens of the DCE, rather than just the armed forces, many of the barriers to a Defence career no longer apply. We can start changing the perception of Defence in the mind of the general public to break down those barriers. For example, working in the DCE means that a career:

- is not restricted to combat roles;
- is not directed or limited by posting cycles;
- can include organisations that appear in top employers of choice rankings; and
- includes opportunities to work with cutting edge technology.

Furthermore, establishing a career in the DCE also provides:

- opportunities to work in a variety of locations, including overseas experience;
- the ability to switch between roles and functions;
- opportunities to grow in seniority through the accumulation of knowledge and experience, which are transferable across a very large number of organisations within the DCE; and
- the choice of a large number of organisations competing to hire the top talent.

The Australian Government's Defence Industry Initiative

In November 2017, the Australian government launched the 'Defence Industry' campaign in an attempt to promote non-uniformed or public service job opportunities in defence. The initiative is accessible through its web site⁶ and defines:

"The 'defence industry' is the thousands of Australian businesses, men and women across the country who aren't in the Defence Force but use their expertise, experience and trade skills to supply and support it - they are the Workforce Behind The Defence Force."⁷

The website very briefly discusses the investment that the government is making in the Defence Force and the need for a skilled workforce and the potential opportunities for small business. The website links to a number of other government agencies that are designed to help small business participate in the defence supply chain or the Australian government JobActive website. Where the initiative does promote the investment that government is making in the defence force, and how this is an opportunity for the private section, the initiative does not:

1. promote the vast range of long term career options that are available in the defence sector (both uniformed and non-uniformed and public or private sector); or
2. provide any information on the current employers in the defence industry and the capabilities they employ.

So, where the Australian government's Defence Industry initiative does highlight that there are career options that are involved in the broader defence environment, it does not provide any real insight into the range and breadth of opportunities, nor does it describe links between the private industry opportunities and the public service or uniformed opportunities and the career pathways that this enables.

⁶ <https://www.defenceindustry.gov.au/>

⁷ <https://www.defenceindustry.gov.au/about-defence-industry>

Core Recommendation: DefenceFIRST

The human resourcing challenges facing Defence have been identified, and the strengthening of the DCE and its promotion to the general public have been proposed as solutions to the root causes of many barriers to people entering careers in Defence. To realise these objectives, the establishment of the right organisation is required.

Our core recommendation is the foundation of a strategically wedded framework through a consortium of DCE participants. To be known as DefenceFIRST, its fundamental role is to position DEFENCE as “THE FIRST” choice among Australia’s best & brightest for a career both now and in the future.

This collaboration is critical to foster innovation, develop workforces and retain talent in support of building, sustaining and operating Australia’s warfighting capability. The consortium will be committed to collaborative approaches and strategic partnerships. It will rely heavily on the authentic collaboration and symbiotic relationship between defence and industry. The partnership will need to cross both federal and state divides, breakdown institutional silos and put aside industry rivals.

The DefenceFIRST partners will form a governance committee to ensure that their operations are strategically aligned to sovereign capability, future proofing both Australian defence capability and employment opportunities.

Defence First will require representation from Australian Defence Force members, Defence industry, government organisations, Industry associations and relevant entities.

Such collaboration has precedent, with examples of successful collaborations including:

- Centre for Defence Industry Capability;
- Indigenous Consortium;
- The SEA1000 Program;
- Defence Force Recruiting; and
- The Australian Defence Force Academy.

But DefenceFIRST will go further. It’s activities and membership will be broad, and will be adaptable according to the specific needs of the DCE members as they arise.

What will DefenceFIRST do?

DefenceFIRST’s main goals with respect to the DCE are attraction, retention and advocacy.

Attraction

The DCE is already a vibrant and engaging sector to work in, but it is not doing a good job at getting the word out. Over recent years Defence Force Recruiting has run campaigns around promoting the diversity of roles available in the Australian Defence Force, with a focus on attracting more women into ADF. These campaigns have had great success in not only boosting the numbers of recruits, but also attracting top quality candidates. DefenceFIRST will continue the good work done by Defence Force Recruiting and the Australian Government to include the even broader ranging opportunities that exist within the sector.

Retention

Once we are attracting the best talent, the next challenge is to retain it. Many strategies could be utilised by DefenceFIRST to achieve this. They could range from quite simple initiatives such as:

- Providing tailored training and development courses relevant to skills required within the DCE;
- Organising visits across ADF, Public Service and Industry members to promote better understanding of the role they all play within the DCE; and
- Publishing wage benchmarks to provide wage parity between the sexes and minimise the loss of people leaving to chase a better wage in competing sectors.

To the much more difficult to implement options of:

- Providing a framework for employees to easily transfer between organisations to follow a specific project through its various lifecycles; and
- Providing support for an individual's career path development, particularly for SME's with critical skills where that next step may not be possible within the current organisation.

Advocacy

Once a capable workforce has been attracted and wants to remain within the DCE, DefenceFIRST must put in its best effort to smooth the workload and ensure that the size of the workforce matches the current and projected demand. This must by necessity take a two-pronged approach.

The first of which is to:

- Conduct labour market analysis of the current workload and develop strategies for workforce uplift to meet the new project and capability environment which is being brought about by the current year on year uplift in defence spending [Reference 3, pg. 25]; and secondly
- DefenceFIRST must be the advocate representing the people and organisations of the DCE to the government to smooth the boom/bust cycle.

A DefenceFIRST Vignette

DefenceFIRST has the potential to benefit the nation, the Defence sector as a whole and the organisational and individual participants in the DCE. However, the focus will always be on people, and how to support Australia's best talent through their career journey. The following vignette describes how the DCE can positively impact Katie, an intelligent and ambitious school student from regional Australia.

Katie is a regional high school student from the Yorke Peninsula with high grades and a passion for maths, physics and sport. During Year 11 her school is visited by ADF members from Defence Force Recruiting. This inspires her to attend an information evening, run by DefenceFIRST, about the potential career opportunities and paths that are available in the DCE.

On leaving high school she attends the Australian Defence Force Academy for an engineering degree, followed by the Royal Military College which leads to a role with the Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

After 10 years of distinguished full time service including secondments to the US and UK, she marries and decides to have a child. Not wanting to deploy any more, she contacts a specialist defence career coach through DefenceFIRST, who can present all the options available to her.

Following her departure with Army, she undertakes an online project management qualification through Open Universities Australia during her maternity leave. After two years, she still isn't ready to come back full time so she joins the Army Reserve, Adelaide University Regiment, training new recruits.

Once Katie's child reaches school age, Katie, with her qualifications and Defence experience wishes to join Naval Group and help to secure a contract to work on the Future Submarine Program. She finds this role through a DefenceFIRST online careers portal, which leads her to a recruitment consultant specialising in Defence.

Now at the age of 45 she has started her own engineering and consulting firm, designing high reliability electronics for the Future Submarine Program and employing 20 staff. Her company is a member of DefenceFIRST, and she chairs a subcommittee chartered with improving the proportion of Australians from a non-English speaking background working in the Defence industry. To give back to the community, she also supports future leaders by providing four scholarships each year to regional students.

Katie journey started as a young regional student, then embarked on and is now enjoying and re-investing her military and industry experience.

Her goal now is to expand her company and now export her products to an international supply chain whilst increasing her work force.

This example exemplifies the possibilities that could exist through the promotion of DefenceFIRST and the Defence Career Eco-System.

Key Recommendations

In summary, our key recommendations are:

1. Establish DefenceFIRST, a consortium of defence and industry to position Defence and supporting industry as an employer of choice. This will include establishing a mindset among the general public, and in high school and university students in particular, that Defence is the first choice for employment.
2. Develop career pathways into and within the Defence Career Eco System to inform those making career decisions on the options available within defence.
3. Industry, Public Service and Uniformed Personnel to work together and jointly promote all career options for those considering a career in defence.
4. Promote the flexibility available with all aspect of a career in the Defence Career Eco System.

Conclusion

DefenceFIRST will deliver many benefits, including:

1. A stronger Defence Sovereign Capability which will comprise the right people, in the right roles, with the right organisations, who will build the right infrastructure.
2. A well-known and respected industry among young people that provides wide ranging and prosperous career opportunities.
3. Providing a framework to promote and advance the many the common interests of the participants, while still allowing for the necessary competitive tensions in industry.
4. Making our industry a global leader in employee attraction, retention and development initiatives.
5. Economic benefits to Australia as the Defence industry emerges as a major exporter and employer.