

THE FUTURE OF THE DEFENCE INDUSTRY WORKFORCE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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Preparing for the workforce of the future is a challenge that all industries face. There are significant paradigm shifts coming to the workforce, which will disrupt the way in which people are recruited, developed, and maintained professionally. For an industry to continue to be effective into the coming years, it must actively plan and develop in order to account for these workforce shifts. The Defence industry in Australia is no exception to this, and the industry *as a whole* must make significant adjustments to take advantage of the next generation workforce.

This paper will recommend high-level actions, which will position the Defence Industry to develop a predominant workforce well into the future.

Adjusting for the Workforce of the Future

The government has set the goal of the South Australian Defence industry being ‘recognised as an international leader in the defence and space industries’ by 2030¹. It is indicated that this goal will be achieved in part through a focus on the workforce; but this focus is currently on upskilling, increased number of jobs, and development. These are all worthy goals, but more is required in order to fully meet the needs of the future workforce, and ensure the quality and longevity of the Defence industry.

The workforce of the future will be significantly different to that of today. The workforce will be larger, more highly skilled and specialised, and will likely have increased mobility and decreased job stability²³. The workforce will also be generationally distinct; a factor which cannot be discounted as a driving force of cultural needs and wants in the workplace.

These factors will account for the workforce of the future craving stability and structure, with a significantly different relationship between employer and employee¹. The Defence industry of the future must account for each person on a personal level, and be ready to support and sustain people in a much more direct manner. In order to achieve this connection with the workforce, and in addition to the goals already in place, this paper recommends the following:

The Defence Industry needs a career-focussed approach to the future workforce.

To have a career is more than a job and is far greater than having a skillset. A career is a professional evolution through a working life that should aim to provide progressive development and satisfaction. Careers need to be managed so they deliver on the expectations of the employees, make them feel valued and offer a path through the Defence industry over their entire working life. Offering a career, rather than a job, will increase the quality of recruits, allow for greater retention of staff, and enable progression of suitable personnel.

¹ Defence SA, ‘Defence State Sector Strategy 2030’, 2020.

² ceda, ‘Australia’s future workforce?’, 2015.

³ pwc, ‘Workforce of the future’, 2018.

In order to develop a career-focussed Defence industry, a number of changes must be made to the status quo of the industry; firstly, the industry must promote itself more widely, and develop a positive perception of the industry as a whole; next, the industry must adapt to the changing workforce landscape, to deliver the right kind of career to the workforce of the future; and lastly, the industry must unite, to provide tangible incentives to join and stay in the industry.



Meet Jane. Jane is a prospective welding technician, and part of the workforce of the future. If things go as they are, she enters the future Defence industry for a particular role that offers good perks, not because she is attracted to the industry as a whole. She moves around companies within the industry for a while, before leaving to go to university, because her company won't support her study to the extent that she requires. After she has a degree, Jane considers coming back, but she instead goes into the mining industry, seeing better opportunities, and greater career longevity. She excels at management, and becomes an executive in a highly placed role in that industry.

Jane is the sort of person that the Defence industry needs for its future workforce, but right now she is not retained, because the industry does not attract her, or provide for her in the way that she requires.

Recommendation 1: Promote

In order to achieve the goals to increase the size and skills of the workforce, it is critical that the Defence industry is widely promoted as a place to have a career, not just a job. In a similar way to the oil and gas industry, the Defence industry needs a relatable vision of longevity and opportunity that will be a huge attraction to talented workers from other sectors and certainly for those entering the workforce over the next few decades. As an industry we need to establish industry values, national pride in supporting Defence and create that sense of longevity and belonging in every member of the workforce. To be competitive against the similar workforce demands from the Australian Defence Force and Public Service, this vision needs to be strong and convincing. The Defence industry needs to *change the perception* of the nation, so that the industry itself is perceived to give long, quality careers, which give certainty and reward to the individuals pursuing them. Moreover, the confidence to start or develop a business within the industry adds further value to careers and industry growth.

With well-planned and executed promotion of Defence industry vision aligned with career management, the Defence industry will position itself well to attract the workforce of 2030. The message needs to be clearly understood in schools, universities, media and, most importantly, the homes of the future generations. The current parents of young children are

key to promoting these essential messages and they must believe in the opportunities available to the next generation before they are confident to encourage them into the Defence industry. Parents, our biggest workforce advocates, must share our vision of a sovereign capability and not just see the internationally-branded primes as the manufacturers of warfighting equipment.

We have often shaped our marketing around the Defence products, university opportunities and, to a smaller extent, STEM in schools. However, these campaigns need to reach into the homes of parents that have a greater influence on the aspirations of the next generations that we will rely on for a successful Defence industry. Giving the parents a greater understanding of the Defence industry and the career opportunities will be invaluable for building understanding, interest and educational pathways for future career choices. Changing the perception across the nation to highlight the valuable roles on offer in the Defence Industry will be the catalyst for growth; from project management, multi-disciplinary engineering, contract management and all the less-visible functional support, there are so many roles that play a part and contribute to the greater defence vision and purpose.

For those already in the Defence industry workforce, the feeling of being developed and valued increases retention. The sense of purpose and belonging within a cohesive, well-represented Defence industry increases satisfaction and career-identity. This identity promotes constant development and challenge to get the very best from the workforce. The current workforce are the role models for the next generation that will spread the message, providing they share the values and believe in promoting the industry.

In the right industry environment, a consistent approach to career management may foster collaborative behaviours across projects and create natural support networks amongst like-minded and motivated professionals. A consistent and united approach to career management with equal opportunities promotes low mobility between companies and projects where the next goal can be achieved without jumping ship. With greater certainty comes reduced stress and worry about career progression and job security that can support a strong mental health across the industry. The benefits are lower absence, reduced presenteeism and a much higher engagement in the common aim of building the sovereign capability. It is essential that the Defence industry embraces the promotion of careers with longevity, understands the needs of the next generations and starts a Defence industry career management strategy.

Web based campaigns generally target an audience of professionals already in industry outlining the Defence industry priorities and projects. Sharing the vision over the next decade to ensure the state is primed to support the nation's sovereign capability is certainly important, specifically for those already in the workforce, as are the individual recruitment campaigns run by the Australian Army, Air Force and Navy, such as the 'Discover Your Army' or '7 days in the Navy' campaigns. However, to reach the homes of non-aware parents, the Australian government must invest in TV marketing campaigns directly into the homes of many families making career choices today for employment over the next 20 to 30 years, this is going to be imperative. Competition for the same talent as the other arms of Defence means that it is critical to widely promote the valuable roles in the Defence industry that support Defence in Australia as a whole.



Jane now joins the Defence industry because it is where she has wanted to work since she was in high school. She sees herself staying in the industry, developing a career, and moving up within the industry. She is excited to join, and her parents are proud, seeing the Defence industry as a worthwhile, career-focussed industry. Her friends think that she is a high achiever, and ask her tips on how to get jobs in the Defence industry.

Recommendation 2: Adapt

With a change in perception comes the need to adapt, to deliver changes that are required to ensure that we don't just attract the talent to the defence industry but we also support them and retain them in the defence industry. We need to back up the perception shift initiated through promotion of the industry and be prepared to adjust to the required changes to meet the needs of future generations.

As an industry we need to become more aware and prepared for the future needs of industry and those that may be working in it. This means ensuring all organisations and workplaces provide advanced technology. It is vital we start to build the industry 4.0 capability across large and small organisations in the supply chain, in addition to buildings skills, research, development and innovation and infrastructure.

There also needs to be a focus on becoming culturally aligned with the needs of the future generation. Research has shown that whilst we build a highly skilled Defence workforce there will be a greater need to have the internal systems that offer a clear pathway with support and direction for individuals to keep them in industry.

There will be a growing requirement to deliver health, wellbeing and mental health programs. Employing life and career coaches, building a culture of wellness, and cultivating self-care habits amongst employees will be extremely valuable to the future workforce. The Defence industry will need to make corporate wellness a focus and make it measurable and actionable, while empowering employees to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

These health and wellness programs will need to be backed by an Employee Assistance Program. An effective EAP takes care of the most valuable asset in any industry, by providing them assistance during moments of personal strife related to mental health, substance abuse, family issues, financial troubles and other professional and personal stresses. Other initiatives such as incentivised wellness activities, like group fitness programs, donating blood, health screens; investing in supported programs that assist in increasing a healthy workplace both physically and mentally will increase workplace engagement.

There will also be a greater need for organisations to understand employee values, consistently supporting and providing professional development and personal growth. Succession and career planning will be vital to give people stability, comfort, and growth opportunities within the industry. The Defence industry will be required to understand how to gauge career aspirations and provide career pathway platforms for individual advancement, and how to support and provide training to give your human capital the best chance of reaching their career goals.

The combination of supporting careers, and supporting people personally, will allow for the workforce of the future to have confidence that the Defence industry is the right place to be. This support will increase retention, and give people higher job satisfaction, leading to greater productivity, and positive industry outcomes.

	<p>Jane loves her job but has a few personal issues in her life that could affect her work. She is also extremely busy and it is having an impact on her wellbeing and focus. Jane decided to have a conversation with her boss and the internal coaches within her company to see what can be done. She is provided flexibility in her hours and a reduced price for a gym membership to a Fitness Centre close to work. Jane opened up and discussed her personal issues and now has a schedule put in place for some one-on-one coaching sessions and a program to assist before an EAP is considered. Jane is feeling much better with her plan and feels she can work hard and stay focused. She knows that none of the measures that she took will compromise her potential promotion that is coming up in a few months.</p>
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Recommendation 3: Unite

The concept of a united Defence industry workforce encompasses training and career development needs, as well as increased job opportunity enabling the formation of a diverse, broadly experienced and highly skilled workforce. Collaboration across these fundamental areas is central to creating Defence industry careers that will attract and retain a talented workforce, and promote the community understanding that the Defence industry provides a career, not just a job.

The Defence industry must move towards a career focussed workforce, where employees are encouraged to move often between Defence prime contractors, SME's, Australian Defence Force (ADF) and the Australian Public Service (APS) in pursuit of training and career development opportunities. This resource movement has both advantages and disadvantages, which in this context relate to the availability of suitably qualified and experienced workers to

meet project demand. Benefits include a broadly experienced workforce, with staff often working on multiple projects during their career allowing them to transfer skills, knowledge and experience between projects and employers within the industry.

This concept of retaining skilled employees by allowing them to move more easily within an industry has been proven successful in other sectors. QLeave is a Queensland government initiative established in the early 1990's, which provides portable long service leave for the state's building and construction industry. The establishment of QLeave was in response to campaigning by workers who were disadvantaged due to the nature of employment in the industry making it difficult to attain long service leave. It is recommended that the Defence industry, referring to prime contractors, SME's, ADF and APS, move towards a similar strategy such that employees are enabled to move between projects easily without losing their entitlements and benefits. The freedom that this strategy affords will increase employee engagement within Defence by allowing the workforce to easily pursue career development pathways, but is also a huge attraction for talent into the industry.

There currently exists an industry collaboration award, which is awarded at both the national and state level. This award recognises an exemplary skills development collaboration between an employer or industry body and at least one organisation delivering nationally recognised training. This scheme incentivises industry to collaborate on training and development with training organisations, however this paper proposes there is a high demand for collaboration to occur within industry, particularly bridging the Commonwealth (ADF and APS) and private sector. There is also greater support and accountability required by state and federal government to ensure these programs are able to be successful.

Industry and Government must unite to identify and deliver training and development opportunities to the Defence industry workforce in an efficient and accurately targeted manner. Placing importance on not just technical skill, but also the soft skills of employees. This contributes to employee satisfaction and longevity in the industry, achieving the goal of retaining a skilled workforce for the duration of their career. The Defence strategy targets building Australian industry capability. Having a team of highly skilled workers available at the right time to meet project demand is a capability in itself, and the strategy should be updated to include a people focus.



Jane now knows that no matter where she goes in the industry, she will be supported. She moves between companies, but always stays within Defence. She keeps her leave and entitlement between jobs, which encourages her to pursue opportunities. When she moves, she feels comfortable knowing that the vacancy she leaves behind is going to be filled rapidly, and with someone skilled.

Conclusion

The Defence industry must do more in order to attract and sustain a capable future workforce. The workforce of the future will have unique needs, and will be flexible to move to whichever company or industry meets their needs best. In order to recruit and maintain a skilled and talented workforce, the Defence industry must establish a career-focused identity, which it is currently lacking. In order to establish this identity, the Defence industry must promote a change in perception, adapt to meet career needs, and unite to deliver careers *as an industry*. With these goals, the Defence industry can position itself as a desirable place to establish a career, and ensure competitiveness in the future industry landscape.



Jane is happy. Her career goals are fulfilled, and she feels supported and nurtured by the industry. She speaks highly of the industry to others, and is motivated to give back to the industry in the same ways that it has given to her. She will stay in the Defence industry for her whole career, achieve all of her career goals, and do so with a high level of job satisfaction.