



**AFPA**

Australian Federal  
Police Association

EA 2021  
**OPERATION**  
**RECOGNITION**

**A Job or a Career?**

**Promotions Discussion Paper**

## Message from President Angela Smith

**While AFP employees commit themselves to serving the public, all too often the agency doesn't match that commitment by supporting them through their careers.**

We know the promotions system is a cause of significant frustration among members. In our 2019 membership survey more than half of you said you were dissatisfied with the way the promotions system is currently operating.

- » Unlike the military, the AFP does not offer its people long-term career planning and mentorship for those who choose to commit to a life in law enforcement.
- » This is further frustrated by managers who may see the officer as simply an asset to be deployed rather than resources to be developed.
- » Additionally, there is widespread belief there is limited opportunity to act in higher duties to develop skills as a leader, with opportunities routinely given to "favourites".
- » And when promotions do occur there are too many unnecessary barriers that stand between our members and their career aspirations.

EA 2021 provides an opportunity to address some of these frustrations, as we consider the way the existing structures operate and at times serve as a barrier to building long-term careers for our members.



Angela Smith, AFPA President

As we put these proposals forward it's really important that we hear from you about the barriers that are holding you back.

The AFPA wants to build a modern police force that can meet the challenges of the future by combining the best of policing and criminology in a respectful and supportive environment.

**The EA is an important building block in that process. But it will only be as good as we make it. Together we can shape the future of the AFP.**

**Angela Smith**  
President



## How the Promotions System Currently Works



### Expression of Interest (EOI)

An EOI may be used internally to fill:

- » Temporary vacancies, for assignment of duties at the same level level or on higher duties;
- » Permanent vacancies if the employee is at the same substantive AFP band as the advertised position.



### Vacancy Reference Number (VRN)

A VRN process has a wider scope of use than an EOI, and is used to advertise and/or fill a vacancy, either internally or externally, for an ongoing or non-ongoing period by:

- » Employing a new external person into a vacant position;
- » Transferring a current employee who is at the band level of the vacancy, on either a permanent or temporary basis;
- » Advancing a current employee to the band level of the vacant position.



### Eligibility Requirements

Each role/vacancy has a list of eligibility requirements which must be met by applying members.



### Recruitment Gateways

All AFP recruitment processes have mandatory gateways which candidates must pass. Some processes may include additional gateways such as:

- » Employment Character Standards Test
- » Online Cognitive Ability Test
- » Literacy Testing
- » Emotional Intelligence Testing
- » Integrity Checks (PRS)
- » Reference Checks
- » Performance Development Agreement Review
- » Fitness Assessment
- » Medical Check (Physical/Medical and Psychological)
- » Interview
- » Drug Testing and Fingerprinting
- » First Aid/Swimming certificate





## Direct Engagement

AFP may directly engage external candidates in the following circumstances:

- » Re-engagement of former employees within two years of separation from the AFP or Commonwealth;
- » Fixed-term employment contract;
- » Targeted employment where an advertised selection process has failed to produce a field of suitable applicants;
- » Engagement of non-ongoing employees on an ongoing basis (after 6 months from initial engagement);
- » Where the delegate is satisfied the required skill set cannot be sourced internally and is in limited supply externally.



## Selection Advisory Committee

- » Selection Advisory Committees (SAC) are the panels responsible for assessing the suitability of candidates for advertised roles.
- » SACs are not required for direct engagement.
- » They may select an individual candidate to fill the role, a merit pool or an order of merit.
- » Merit pool: An unranked list of applicants determined to be competent and “suitable” for promotion by SAC. Offers may be made to anyone in the pool.
- » Order of merit: A ranked merit pool. Offers must be made in accordance with the listed offer.



## Merit Pools/Order of Merit

- » Once candidates have been assessed against gateways, suitable applicants are placed in a merit pool or order of merit.
- » If the merit pool/order of merit contains more competent candidates than required, the pool remains open for roles with similar skill sets/requirements.
- » Pools remain open for 12 months. Delegate may extend pool beyond 12 months or close pool earlier.



## Team Leader/Sergeant Promotions

Under the current promotion process, members wishing to apply for Team Leaders/Sergeants position are required, as the first gateway, to write a ‘two-page pitch’ about their suitability. The AFPA believes that this process is flawed as your application comes down to a thousand words and how well you sell yourself. This gateway makes it very difficult to demonstrate the attributes and skills required to be a good Sergeant or Team Leader.

The AFPA believes that a better process needs to be developed where people develop their team leader skills and attributes over a long-term period, plus undergo formal training in team leadership and managing teams and undertake ‘acting’ opportunities before applying for Team Leader/Sergeant roles.



## Roadblocks to Career Progression

**Our members have raised a series of concerns with the practical application of this process, including:**



**Mobility:** Members are often successful at getting other jobs within the AFP at the same level, but are not released by their chain-of-command. When this happens, it's a blow to morale - members work extremely hard to go through the process and write role-specific applications, are found suitable but told they cannot leave their substantive business area.



**Age Bias:** There is a perception amongst many older members that they are overlooked for promotion or meaningful career advancement due to age. Many older members feel their skills and experience are utilised to mentor and train junior staff and officers, who are then selected for promotion to Team Leader/Sergeant. Some members have even been told 'off the record' they are too old for advancement and encouraged to end their careers.



**Promotion Opportunities:** Members who are found suitable for promotion, yet remain stuck in a "merit pool" and can go without promotion for years. Many policing members plateau at Band 5, and despite having decades of policing experience are often overlooked, while most PSOs plateau at Band 3.



**Transparency:** There is very little and, often, no feedback available to members who are unsuccessful in winning a promotion – members can be found "suitable", however are continually knocked back for promotions without any feedback as to where they could improve.



**Development Opportunities:** Critically, the AFP has no formal post-recruit training programmes based on an employee's skills and desired career path. Overall, there are too few development opportunities, especially for officers wishing to become detectives or experts in specialised fields, eg: cyber crime.

### The Blind Recruitment Trial – Fair or Fail?

This policy was the result of an inquiry into the AFP by former Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick to investigate allegations of widespread bullying and sexual abuse/harassment.

She found that talent promotion requires challenging the biases and assumptions underpinning a traditional view of merit and ensuring effective performance management and recommended a blind recruitment trial.

While there are guidelines that no identifying features could be included in applications for some members, their work experience was enough information to make them identifiable, so these details needed to be redacted prior to submission.

**For example:** A sworn member applied for a role. In her application, she mentioned she worked as a Departmental Liaison Officer. As Departmental Liaison Officer roles are limited, with very few officers filling the position over time, the officer was identifiable by merely stating she was a "sworn police officer" with experience as a Departmental Liaison Officer.

**Another example:** Some highly qualified candidates missed out on opportunities for promotion because they forgot to redact gendered comments within extracts from their Performance Development Agreement.



# Active Career Development

**The common theme that we are hearing is that there is a lack of commitment to career advancement across the agency.**

## Advancement

- » There are no advancement arrangements for several role types/cohorts, particularly non-operational roles.
- » For roles without a dedicated advancement strategy, members are assigned to a role and band level. Once members reach top increment point within a band, there is no ability for progression to a higher band level unless there is a vacancy.
- » Unsworn find this unfair as they have no scope for advancement beyond the assigned band, however, are not restricted by many of the eligibility requirements associated with the advancement arrangements (eg. 12 years in policing).
- » Sworn police find it unfair as there are no time restrictions on promotion for unsworn personnel (eg. a Police Officer with 20 years AFP experience could be stuck at Band 4.5 because they have not been assigned to a role which counts toward advancement, while an unsworn employee with 6 months experience could be promoted to Band 5 or 6 within their first year in the organisation).



Image courtesy of AFP and ACT Policing

## Career Paths

- » Similarly, there are no clear career pathways and there is limited opportunity for specialisation.
- » With no career planning in place employees are deployed/assigned a position and it essentially becomes luck of the draw where their career progresses.
- » No management interest in career aspirations of employees.
- » A member's career is dictated by the AFP's distribution of staff around the country/organisation.

## Policing

- » Additionally, a series of arbitrary requirements place real barriers in the way of our members, leading to frustration and resentment.
- » Officers often aren't able to advance past Band 4 or 5 (Constable)
- » Under EA2017, progression to Band 5 requires members to have 12 years policing experience, and to have spent time assigned to a range of roles including:
  - Investigations (National or ACT);
  - ACT Policing – General Duties;
  - Airport Policing – General Duties;
  - External Territories – General Duties;
  - Learning and Development;
  - Professional Standards;
  - Police Technical Team (PTT).
- » Under EA2012, the PTT had their own Advancement Arrangements.
- » Under the new arrangement, members of the PTT stagnate at Band 4 for up to 9 years longer.
- » The time required to advance from Band 4 to 5 is far greater under Policing Advancement Arrangements than any other arrangements.



## Example:

Robert joins the AFP with the goal to work in counter-terrorism (CT). He is assigned to ACT Policing General Duties post-graduation and spends five years in ACT Policing developing skills. Robert decides to apply for CT positions and is found suitable for CT positions. However, ACT Policing chain-of-command refuses to

release Robert due to there being no one-for-one swap and limited personnel within ACT Policing, so he remains in the merit pool. After 12 months waiting for another opportunity the merit pool closes, Robert becomes disillusioned with opportunities within agency; morale declines and he ultimately resigns.

## Our Proposal

One idea the AFPA is developing is to introduce a **formal** avenue for career planning and consideration of employee aspirations. For example, if a member joins the AFP with the goal of joining the Specialist Response Group, they should work with a dedicated careers advisor manager to set out steps and training required to accomplish goal.

Younger officers should have access to dedicated careers advisors that maps out their first seven years in the AFP and be placed into a mentoring system with more experienced officers within their desired career path.

Another idea AFPA is keen to have your feedback on is whether you like the idea of the AFP conducting 'open days' and training programs for members wishing to transition to other roles that aren't 'investigative'?

**For example:** Someone wants to join the K9 team. The SRG K9 Team hosts an 'open day' for all interested members to attend and see firsthand what the role requires in terms of fitness, training, temperament etc. Then potentially three months before a recruitment process, the K9 team starts holding 'boot camps' to assist members gaining the correct fitness and temperament to be a dog handler.

For older officers there should be a planned transition program recognising that not every officer will advance up the hierarchy and some may want a dignified, respectful, managed exit. These could include:

- » utilising skills in training and mentoring,
- » increased mobility between sworn and civilian roles,
- » 'earned redundancy' arrangement,

This is a particular issue for members entering the 50-55 year bracket over the life of the next EA.



Image courtesy of AFP and ACT Policing



## Mission: Commission discussion board

As we develop our promotions policy we would like to hear from you about whether you have a clear-line of sight on your career:



Have you been given the chance to plan a long-term strategy?



Have you experienced any of the barriers described above?



If you are in an older cohort, what sort of career transitions would you be interested in accessing?

### Let us know!

- » At an upcoming AFPA workplace muster;
- » Through our AFPA website:  
**[www.afpa.org.au](http://www.afpa.org.au)**
- » Or via email: **[afpa@afpa.org.au](mailto:afpa@afpa.org.au)**





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