



CAREERS & CAPABILITIES

Former Victoria Police Members
Survey Report

Authorised and published by Police Registration and Services Board
Level 6, 155 Queen Street, Melbourne VIC 3000
www.prsb.vic.gov.au
Published July 2017

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INTRODUCTION

Members of professions such as teaching, nursing, engineering and medicine, as well as licenced tradespeople, take for granted that they can take their professional skills and work for any employer they choose, throughout the state, the country, and even internationally, through mutual recognition schemes.

Police officers have a package of valuable skills, experience and qualifications, which can readily be applied in roles in other police forces, the public safety and security sector and other regulatory and investigation contexts. Capabilities such as stakeholder engagement, problem-solving, people and resource management, policy development and dealing with the public are valuable skills that can be transposed to other careers. Other capabilities are also acquired in those sectors and roles which in return, are readily transferrable to policing.

Policing is an unusual occupation, in that in each jurisdiction, there is only one employer. A choice to leave a police force, such as Victoria Police, was historically treated as a choice to leave policing for good. But this has been changing significantly over the last decade.

The Victoria Police Act 2013 established the first professional registration system for police officers in Australia, if not the world. The Act created the Police Registration and Services Board, independent of Victoria Police, with a core function to develop and administer the new registration system. A key change is the ability to assess and recognise capabilities gained by a former member since leaving Victoria Police by endorsing registration at a rank higher than the one last held.

The registration system has been developing now for over three years. The Police Profession Register opened on 1 April 2014 and 97 police officers have been registered; of these, 33 have successfully returned to work with Victoria Police. The number of applicants for registration has been increasing each year as this option becomes better known.

The benefits of allowing greater options for career mobility (such as lateral re-entry, leave without pay and secondment) have been acknowledged and acted upon by Victoria Police, including in the Victoria Police Blue Paper 2014 and through the creation of a specialist employment unit to facilitate the return of former members and recruit police officers from other jurisdictions.

Through its administration of the registration scheme, the PRSB became aware of the fascinating diversity of career paths taken by former members and the range of capabilities that they hold. We wanted to learn more about the careers of former members, their capability development and their experiences of the registration and re-entry systems.

This research report will be used by the Board to help guide future developments of the registration system. We trust too, that it will be of significant interest and value to Victoria Police and to both current and former members.

The Board would like to thank all those former Victoria Police members who gave generously of their time to share their experiences for this research. The PRSB would also like to thank former Deputy President – Registration Professor Leigh Gassner, Board Policy Officers Shay Keating and Dr. Sally Whyte and consultants Qdos for their significant contributions to this research.

Andrea Lester, President

Peter Bull, Deputy President – Registration

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

■ **Background**

The Police Profession Register (the Register) was established under the *Victoria Police Act 2013* (the Act)¹ to facilitate police career mobility; that is, the movement of people in and out of Victoria Police and into (and out of) other parts of the general workforce. The Police Registration and Services Board (PRSB), although established under the Act, is independent of Victoria Police and administers the Register². Registration was designed to aid lateral entry; to assist police to take career breaks; and to protect against (irreversibly) losing experienced police members to the profession in Victoria¹.

The PRSB has observed certain patterns with registrants whilst administering the Register: Many had resigned from Victoria Police for professional or personal reasons and had highly successful careers, across many occupations and in diverse organisations. These former members had developed capabilities, which were highly relevant and transferable to contemporary policing and had retained strong feelings of belonging and connection to policing, yet often, they were experiencing challenges and barriers to re-joining Victoria Police.

■ **The Online Survey**

To better understand the career paths and capabilities of former members, who may seek registration, the PRSB conducted a survey online between July and September 2016: 254 former Victoria Police members provided information about their career paths, capabilities, external experiences and perceptions of the re-entry pathway (Section 1). The PRSB also researched literature on re-hiring programs, career mobility and police turnover (Section 3).

The post-policing experience of participants was mostly gained in public administration and safety organisations across various occupational titles, including police services, law enforcement agencies and other government and regulatory organisations. Former members valued the opportunity to refine or hone existing skills and develop new capabilities in their careers after policing. New-found capabilities often built on existing policing skills. Capabilities were acquired in a wide range of areas such as: management and leadership, investigations and stakeholder engagement. Many of these skills are highly transferable. One third of participants held a Bachelor qualification or higher at the time of completing the survey. Since resigning from Victoria Police, 27 of the survey participants had attained a bachelor degree and 32 a post-graduate degree, including in fields related to policing.

Overall, catalysts for resignation were mostly related to family and personal circumstances and organisational factors, rather than career or their personal experience of Victoria Police. There was some gender differences observed in reasons for leaving: 58% of female participants reported that family and personal circumstances was to a 'great extent' a factor involved in their decision to resign compared with 23% of male participants.

Awareness of registration was found to be low. Research participants were given a simple explanation about the Register and their responses indicated that it was a good initiative with benefits for the organisation and current and former members. Of note, participants indicated that

¹ Parliament of Victoria, 2012.

² The Register was established under the *Victoria Police Act 2013*.

the scheme could help to reduce loss of valuable skills and experience; minimise negative implications of police attrition; attract former members with sought-after skills and external experience; encourage retention of serving members and younger generations who want career mobility; contribute to a positive culture; and be a means to create a potential pool of experienced members available for contract or temporary roles.

Of all research participants, just over a quarter had applied at some time to re-enter Victoria Police and 12% held an intention to apply for re-appointment. A higher number indicated that they were 'very likely' or 'completely likely' to apply for registration. Participants shared perceived shortcomings with the current and past re-entry processes including: the length of the process; resistant (negative) attitudes towards returnees; and an incomplete recognition of their capabilities.

■ The Focus Groups and Interviews

Survey participants were invited to participate in structured one-on-one interviews or focus groups, conducted by Qdos Research. This phase of the study explored the survey themes in more depth. Thirty eight people took part in a one-on-one phone interview and four focus groups were conducted with a total of 26 participants. Qdos Research reported on the key themes from this stage of the study (Part 2 of this Report).

■ Conclusion

The findings from this research support the benefits of career mobility as a strategy to strengthen the capability of individuals and organisations. Re-hiring former members is a well-documented, successful approach to target talent and attract employees with broad and diverse experience. It is cost-effective and results in higher retention rates. Re-entry can also assist to bring in ideas and work systems from other workplaces, allowing the spread of organisational best practice.

The study found that many former police members hold experience and skills, which could be highly valuable in today's policing environment. Many continue to work in related roles while others have developed relevant skills, albeit in different environments. Former members present a valuable pool from which to target recruitment efforts. Such recruits could quickly become job-ready, with a reduced training cost and greater service quality. Re-hiring may be a useful strategy during the current recruitment drive.

The benefits of mobility for Victoria Police, members and the community are acknowledged in key strategic documents such as the *Blue Paper*, *Independent review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour, in Victoria Police* and *Victoria Police Mental Health Review*. Career mobility is an aspirational goal at a national level.

Mobility supports a healthier workforce by providing opportunities for breaks when needed and options to pursue personal and career interests, care for family members or undertake further education, and then to return to policing. It allows valuable skills and experience to be retained.

This research has provided valuable feedback that will guide further enhancements to the registration and re-entry system to make it more welcoming and effective in meeting the needs of Victoria Police and its members.



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Research Aims

The PRSB sought to better understand the career paths and capabilities of former members who may seek registration on the Police Profession Register as part of a pathway to re-enter policing. The research was designed to:

- identify potential benefits of bringing former members back to Victoria Police;
- inform improvements to the registration application and assessment process;
- identify opportunities to improve the re-entry pathway; and
- attract high-quality former officers to return to policing.

Six themes emerged in the literature (see Part 3) and from feedback and experience in administering the Police Profession Register: (1) career within Victoria Police; (2) reasons for resigning; (3) application of policing skills post-resignation; (4) external experience; (5) new-found capabilities; and (6) views about registration and re-entry.

Methodology

The study involved three phases:

- an online survey (254 participants);
- four focus groups (26 participants); and
- one-on-one telephone interviews (38 participants).

The online survey was conducted through *SurveyMonkey*[®] between July and September, 2016. A purposive sample of former Victoria Police members was recruited through the PRSB website, Victoria Police internal communications, The Police Association newsletter and social media³. Participants provided information about their policing career, work experiences since leaving, capability development and their views about registration and re-entry.

The PRSB engaged Qdos Research to facilitate the focus groups and structured, one-on-one, telephone interviews, which took place in October and November 2016. Former members who indicated an interest in participating in the in-depth interview phase were invited to participate in an interview or focus group, which delved deeper into their experiences and views including: drivers/factors involved in their decision to resign; their thoughts and feelings about the opportunities available to them outside Victoria Police; their preparedness for work outside Victoria Police; applicability and relevance of policing craft to their work; the value of their policing experience and skills in the marketplace; their development of capabilities and knowledge applicable to policing; interest in re-entry; and incentives and disincentives to returning to policing.

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS



Survey Participants

A total of 254 former members contributed information about their careers since resigning from Victoria Police⁴. Looking at the survey cohort only, of the 58 females, 1 held less than 3 years and 4, more than 30 years of service, with most between 11 and 15. By comparison, 6 males held less than

³ Survey and interview ethics were followed according to the Australian Code of Responsible Conduct of Research, 2007, NHMRC website at <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/index.htm>.

⁴ All 254 former members did not respond to every question: Accordingly, the statistics presented are based on sub-set numbers.

3 years and 43 more than 30 years, with most serving for between 16 and 20 years: The longest serving officers were spread across the ranks from Sergeant through to Superintendent. The highest number of resignations occurred between 2010 and 2014 (n=71:30%), with 2005 to 2009 the next common period (n=46:27%). Table 1 displays these figures.

Table 1 Survey cohort: Age, resignation year, service years and rank

Former Members							
	F	M	%		F	M	%
Age			Resignation Year				
< 30 years of age	0	4	2	1989 or before	4	10	6
31 - 40	9	14	9	1990 - 1994	11	6	
41 - 50	16	71	34	1995 - 1999	5	24	12
51-60	23	61	33	2000 - 2004	8	35	18
> 60 years of age	10	45	22	2005 - 2009	3	43	19
				2010 - 2014	18	53	30
				2015 - 2016	3	17	8
Total n=253	58	195		Total n=240	52	188	
Service Years			Rank				
0 - 1 year	1	0	-	Commander & above	0	1	-
2 - 3	0	6	3	Superintendent	0	5	2
4 - 10	16	27	18	Inspector	0	11	5
11 - 15	19	36	23	Senior Sergeant	3	18	9
16 - 20	6	37	18	Sergeant	3	50	23
21-25	6	24	13	Senior Constable	42	89	55
26 - 29	1	11	5	Constable	2	12	6
> 30 years	4	43	20	Other (Reservist)	1	0	-
Total n=237	53	184		Total n=237	51	186	

Table 2 shows that typically, former members had undertaken general duties and criminal investigation functions when employed by Victoria Police⁵. Only a small number of participants (2%) had worked just in regional or rural locations, the remaining participants either worked in metropolitan locations (49%) or had worked in a combination of metropolitan and rural locations (49%).

Table 2 Survey cohort: Prior policing functions

As a Victoria Police Member		
Policing Functions	n*	%
General duties	227	94
Criminal investigation	120	50
Intelligence	48	20
Traffic/highway patrol	47	19
Education and training	42	17
Prosecutions/legal services	29	12
Administration/operational support	29	12
Internal investigations	27	11
Communications/media	18	7
Licensing and regulation	13	5
Human Resources/Personnel	11	5
Corporate strategy/planning/policy	11	5
Information technology	10	4
Other (please specify)	59	24

*Multiple responses requested.

⁵ Participants listed some specialist units and areas of Victoria Police including units, which have been renamed or superseded; e.g. SOCA.

The survey sample of these former members (N=254), who mostly resigned between 2010 and 2014, is sufficiently representative when compared with the demographics of those who completed an end-of-service questionnaire between 2001 and 2014 (N=2,364) and serving officers at end of 2016 (N=13,781)⁶. When comparing gender, age, length of service and rank across the three groups: (1) former members; (2) end-of-service; and (3) serving members, the percentage of females is consistent (23:25:28). Age-range was not consistent, with former female members at the mature age of between 51 and 60 years compared with 35 to 40 for members at end-of-service and 38 years for serving members. Length of service among males is comparable, with end-of-service members serving up to 10 years, former members between 11 and 15 years and serving members, 16 years. Rank is disparate across the 3 groups with females overall, holding lower ranks than males.

Focus Groups and Interviews

Of the survey participants, 38 participated in structured one-on-one telephone interviews and 26 in one of four focus groups. This aspect of the research was conducted by an independent research organisation, Qdos Research. Data were de-identified following the interviews and focus groups. Ten females participated in the focus groups and ten in one-on-one interviews.

⁶ Voluntary police officer resignations, 2001 to 2014; Workforce Reporting Unit, Victoria Police; Employee Headcount and FTE Report (HR33); Workforce Reporting Unit, Victoria Police.

1

FORMER MEMBERS SURVEY FINDINGS

1.1 *What experience and skills did former members take from Victoria Police into other careers?*

Three quarters of participants reported that their prior policing experience was either 'very important' (55%) or 'important' (21%) to their careers following resignation. A small number (7%) reported that their prior policing experience was 'not important'. Participants (n=186) commented on the types of skills and capabilities that they acquired in Victoria Police, which were useful in their post-resignation employment: The majority described skills and knowledge associated with police craft, broad capabilities, and personal attributes as being useful.

Police craft included skills and knowledge such as general investigatory skills (in some case specific investigatory skills such as, IT Forensics), managing critical incidences, brief preparation and knowledge of the law or criminal justice system. A small group (n=23) described their policing experience and policing skills as directly transferable and applicable to their new job. Skills were particularly transferable where members had left to join other police jurisdictions: *I transferred all the skills gained in Victoria Police to my new role in the Australian Federal Police. General duties, Investigations, Surveillance, Training and Court Experience.* They were also highly relevant in other types of roles and pivotal in obtaining positions: *My investigative skills were the reason that I was head hunted by a private sector organisation and then in the senior investigators role with the State Government.*

Broad capabilities⁷ cited by participants included verbal communication such as an 'ability to speak to people from all walks of life', 'customer service', 'interpersonal skills', 'cross cultural ability', and 'negotiation and conflict resolution'. Management and leadership skills including people management and supervision and other forms such as emergency, financial and risk management, were reported as capabilities that applied beyond policing - *I found the managerial skills and self-discipline I learnt in the police force invaluable in the private sector. When I took up my present position all my investigative and management skills were once again put to the fore.*

Personal qualities and attributes including confidence, discipline, integrity, assertiveness, empathy and self-reliance were reported by a number of participants – *Self-confidence....The importance of maintaining integrity and showing respect to all. Very high interpersonal skills. The ability and willingness to take calculated risks. The ability to assess things with an open mind.*

1.2 *What experience and skills have former members acquired since leaving Victoria Police?*

Fields of Work

Since resignation from Victoria Police, many former members took-up work within public administration and safety organisations (67%) with education and training the next most popular category (20%). A wide-range of fields across the ANZSIC Divisions⁸ followed in prevalence, including construction, retail, health care, manufacturing, finance, food services and administration, in public, private and not-for-profit sectors (see Table 3). Former members had gained diverse outside experience.

⁷ For the purpose of this discussion, broad capabilities which are sometimes referred to as 'key skills', 'employability skills' or 'generic skills', are those skills that are not specific to policing but can be applied in a range of different contexts.

⁸ Australia New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC).

Table 3 Number of former members in fields of work (by ANZSIC Divisions)

ANZSIC Divisions		
Fields of Work	n*	%
Public Administration & Safety	139	67
Education & Training	41	20
Construction	24	12
Retail Trade	24	12
Healthcare & Social Assistance	23	11
Accommodation & Food Services	22	11
Administrative & Support Services	22	11
Information, Media & Telecommunications	22	11
Professional, Scientific & Technical Services	21	10
Transport, Postal & Warehousing	20	10
Manufacturing	17	8
Financial & Insurance Services	11	5
Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing	10	5
Electricity, Gas, Water & Waste Services	8	4
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	6	3
Arts & Recreation Services	6	3
Mining	6	3
Wholesale trade	4	2

*Multiple responses requested.

Public Administration and Safety

The **public administration and safety** ANZSIC Division includes police services, justice, government (local, State and Commonwealth), regulation, fire protection and other emergency, investigation and security servicesⁱⁱ. The numbers of former members who have worked in these areas since resignation appear in Table 4 below. Many participants had worked in a more than one of these areas since resignation. Participants who had worked in public administration and safety organisations reported that their police experience was either ‘very important’ (67%) or ‘important’ (19%) in their employment after resigning.

Table 4 Public Administration and Safety Division

Public Administration and Safety Division			
Fields of Work	Female	Male	n*
Investigation and Security Services	7	47	54
Police services	9	31	40
State Government Administration	7	26	33
Regulatory Services	5	26	31
Commonwealth Government Administration	4	18	22
Local Government Administration	4	17	21
Fire Protection and Other Emergency Services	2	15	17
Justice	4	12	16
Defence		10	10
Correctional and Detention Services	2	6	8

* Multiple responses requested.

Police services mostly included participants who worked with Victoria Police in Victorian Public Sector, PSO or contractor roles; a smaller group were sworn members with the Australian Federal Police, Northern Territory Police or Queensland Police.

Although the ‘Investigation & Security Services’ group was the largest, participants specified working within a wide-range of private sector organisations, including large insurance and finance enterprises. Other public safety organisations were law enforcement-related, for example, the Independent Broad Based Anti-Corruption Commission, Australian Border Force, the Australian Crime Intelligence Commission and other anti-corruption bodies.

Survey participants have taken up work within a wide range of (local, State and Commonwealth) **government organisations**, including central agencies such as the Department of Health and Human Services, Australian Taxation Office and other statutory offices and authorities including those with investigative capacities (see Table 5).

Table 5 **Commonwealth and State government employers**

Employer	
<i>Commonwealth</i>	<i>State</i>
Australian Crime Intelligence Commission	Independent Broad Based Anti-Corruption Commission (IBAC)
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Department of Education and Training
Department of Education	Department of Health and Human Services
Australian Defence Force	Department Environment, Land Water and Planning
Australian Electoral Commission	Department of Transport
Fair Work Commission	Victorian Ombudsman
Customs Australia	Taxi Services Commission
Therapeutic Goods Administration	Fisheries Victoria
Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority	Environment Protection Agency
Australian Taxation Office	Regional Development Victoria
Australian Securities & Investment Commission	Work Safe Victoria
Australian Border Force	Victoria Building Authority
Medicare	Victorian Institute of Teaching
Centrelink	Plumbing Services Commission
	Corrections Victoria
	Melbourne Airport
	Ambulance Services VIC and QLD
	Victorian Commission for Gambling and Liquor Regulation
	Melbourne Fire Brigade
	Corruption and Crime Commission
	WA
	Community Fire Authority
	Office of Police Prosecutions

Survey participants were asked to describe their job titles. Occupational roles focussed on investigations, compliance, enforcement, regulatory, security and emergency management with varying role titles held such as, director, advisor, inspector, investigator, manager, officer, advocate, liaison and team leader.

Other Fields of Work

The **Education and Training** division included those working in TAFE, Higher Education or secondary education. In some cases, the roles as an educator were based on or linked to policing; for example, a teacher for the Diploma of Justice.

Research participants also worked in a wide range of fields and sectors across the other ANZSIC Divisions, in a range of roles including self-employment, consultancy and voluntary work. A small number reported working in roles alongside policing, such as a support role in a policing-related community organisation or initiative; that is, legacy; voluntary work supporting police officers or in victims advocacy; or as a service provider to policing.

New Skills and Capabilities Acquired Since Resigning from Victoria Police

Former members have gone on to develop their existing skills and acquire new capabilities. Generic skills acquired included managing people, communication, leadership, and customer service. Police-related skills included community engagement, interviewing and questioning techniques, investigative skills, and dealing with uncooperative and vulnerable people. Capability was also developed in procurement and contract management; information technology; financial planning; forensic accounting; managing people in care or custody; policing response; e-crime; and prosecutions. The top 10 police related and generic skills, reported as having developed 'to a great extent', are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6 **Top 10 skills reported as developed 'to a great extent'**

Top 10 Skills			
<i>Police related</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Generic</i>	<i>n</i>
Community engagement	110	Managing people	124
Interviewing and questioning techniques	83	Communication and interpersonal skills	122
Investigative skills	76	Leadership	120
Dealing with uncooperative people	74	Customer service	119
Dealing with vulnerable people	64	Problem solving	117
Critical incident response and management	52	Strategic thinking and planning	105
Security	50	Stakeholder engagement	97
Data analytics	43	Risk management	93
Human source management	40	Change management	88
Crime prevention	35	Partnership development	87

In response to a free text question, participants discussed a wide range of skills, capabilities and more specific experience and knowledge, they had acquired after leaving Victoria Police, which could be applied in policing. Management and leadership skills, stakeholder engagement and liaison and investigations skills were most commonly raised by participants. Moreover, work experience had helped to strengthen or extend skills they already held from working in Victoria Police.

Management of people generally to ensure that you have a cohesive working team around you. I have found that working with a team environment within Vic Police helped me greatly but working with clients and other stakeholders in the business strengthens those skills I had learnt. Communication skills are different from Policing. It's not so much a direction but working with someone to encourage them to take the responsibility and to the challenge of wanting to assist.

...I have become a more thorough and complete investigator and have an exceptional knowledge of occupational health and safety ... developed greater analytical skills, hazard identification and risk management, human factors and psycho-social issues.

Leadership and people management. Procurement and contract management. Liaison with groups that I wasn't exposed to during police career (ie professionals, service providers, govt departments (at exec level)).

Some participants described the positive value of applying and further developing their existing skills in a new setting, such as a corporate environment, another policing jurisdiction or other public sector body. Being exposed to different approaches and challenges, as well as having the opportunity to see things from different perspectives, had positively contributed to developing their capabilities.

Showing police how to better work with and utilise private enterprise.

Distance myself from the straight investigative police role to a more victim orientated perspective to be more proactive and compassionate.

Education and Training

A third of respondents had completed a bachelor or higher qualification at the time of completing the survey (see Table 7).

Table 7 Highest qualification attained at time of completing survey

Highest Qualification	n=234	%
Year 12 or equivalent	4	2%
Certificate I	3	1%
Certificate II	3	1%
Certificate III	12	5%
Certificate IV	41	18%
Diploma	50	21%
Advanced Diploma	29	12%
Associate Degree	2	1%
Bachelor Degree	27	12%
Graduate Certificate	14	6%
Graduate Diploma	15	6%
Bachelor (Hon.) Degree	5	2%
Master's Degree	17	7%
Doctoral Degree	0	0%
Other/ None	12	5%

Educational advancement was evident, with 28 of the 254 former members surveyed gaining a certificate or diploma before joining Victoria Police, 59 achieving this while a sworn officer and a higher number, 98, completing a qualification after resigning (see Table 8). Roughly equal numbers attained a bachelor degree across the three time-points (28: 27: 28).

Table 8 Educational attainment since leaving Victoria Police

Qualification	Before	During	Since
	n=241	n=238	n=240
Certificate - Diploma	28	59	98
Bachelor Degree	28	27	27
Postgraduate degrees	1	24	32
Doctorate	1	0	1
None of the above	188	149	104

Prior to joining the police force, participants had studied a trade, policing studies, justice or investigations, with small numbers studying nursing, arts, business, management, science, psychology, law and engineering. During their service with Victoria Police, participants undertook further studies in policing or related qualifications including criminology, investigations, public safety, policing leadership/management and security or in management including in business and frontline or workplace training and assessment. Smaller numbers reported undertaking qualifications in arts, law, business, education and fitness. Post-Victoria Police, a popular field of study was investigations in Government, policing, OHS, fraud or cyber-crime. Other common types of policing or law enforcement related qualifications were police studies, criminal justice, and security.

1.3 Why Did Former Members Leave?

Overall, management, culture and organisational environment and family and personal circumstances were more influential in the decision to resign than an individual's experience of Victoria Police or the lure of career opportunities outside policing (see Table 9).

Table 9 Factors involved in decision to resign

Factors	Factors In Decision To Resign				Rating Average	n
	Not at all	Very little	Some what	Great extent		
Victoria Police management, culture and organisational environment	62	28	67	71	2.64	228
My family and or personal circumstances	57	40	59	71	2.63	227
My individual experience of Victoria Police	82	45	59	41	2.26	227
Career opportunities outside policing	90	30	39	60	2.32	219

There were some differences in response by gender with family and personal circumstances more influential in the decision to resign for female participants and career opportunities outside policing more influential for male participants. Three quarters of female survey participants, when compared with just over one half (52%) of male participants, reported that family and personal circumstances were either 'somewhat' or 'to a great extent' a factor in their decision to resign (see Chart 1). The majority (80%) of females reported that career opportunities outside policing were 'not at all' or 'very little' a factor involved in their decision to resign, whereas just over half (52%) of male participants reported that it was either 'somewhat' or 'to a great extent' a factor in their decision to resign (see Chart 2).

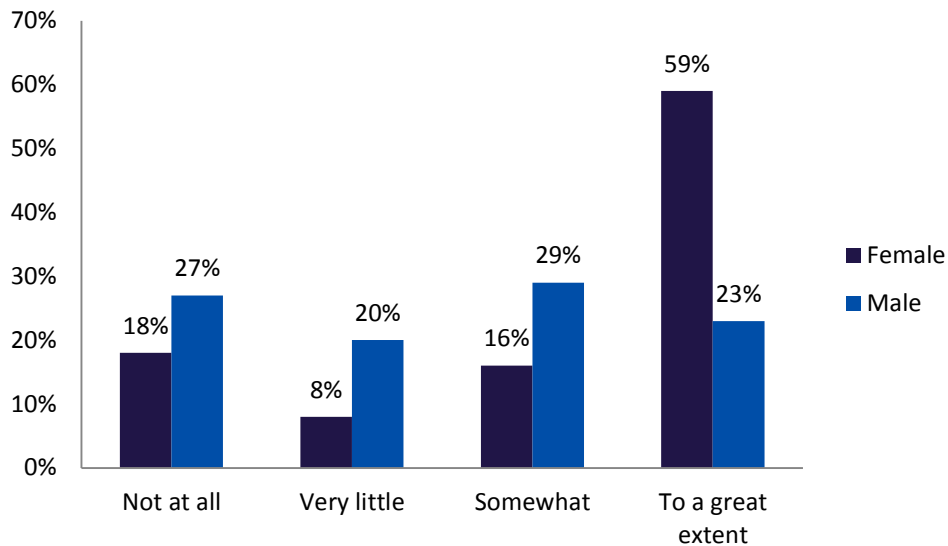


Chart 1 Extent family and personal circumstances factored in decision to resign

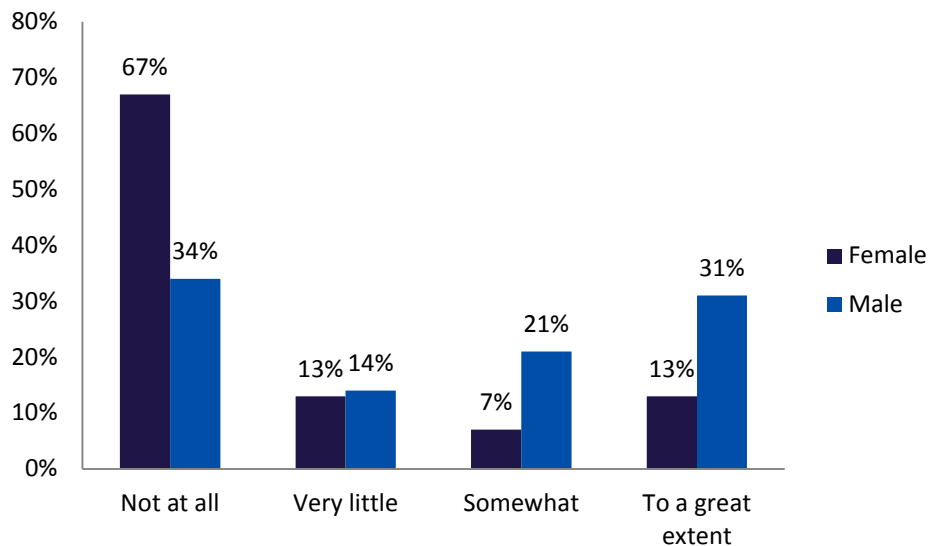


Chart 2 Extent career opportunities outside policing factored in decision to resign

In response to a free text question, organisational, personal and career factors were raised as motivators for former members to resign from Victoria Police: Career opportunities were influential in 72 resignations; 50 involved family reasons; 50 expressed dissatisfaction with aspects of the organisation; 30 were experiencing ill-health; 18 cited lack of access to leave without pay or secondments; 13 referred to elements of the job (paperwork, the van and shift-work); 12 stated having been bullied; 13 retired; 7 were ill-health retired; and 5 were the subject of disciplinary investigation at the time of resigning.

Family and personal circumstances were the most compelling reasons for resigning among former female members: *...I had two young children and was married to a policeman and we were both continually being rostered onto weekend shifts where childcare was almost impossible.* That said, both male and female participants discussed family as a reason for resigning, describing caring for

children and elderly parents; supporting a family business; or accommodating a spouse's career ambitions. Accompanying comments included a lack of workplace flexibility (part-time work), family-friendly hours or access to leave without pay.

Overall, 34% discussed career opportunities or options as a reason for resigning citing 'better opportunity', 'a fresh change', 'an opportunity to gain further experience', 'exposure to another sector', 'career advancement', 'better recognition for existing skills and experience' or 'better employment conditions (e.g. remuneration, work life balance)'. *...I resigned from Victoria Police to work with the Australian Federal Police ... to experience policing in a different jurisdiction.* Others noted a lack of leave options or transfer to other police forces: *... I moved to another policing jurisdiction ... LWOP was only provided for a minimal period, I had to resign to pursue the other opportunity.*

Former members expressed dissatisfaction with aspects of the organisation, referring to matters such as management practices, culture of the organisation, the transfer and promotion system, lack of valuing of or support for employees or general direction that Victoria Police was taking at the time of their resignation: *... Poor command decisions and lack of support for senior officers.* Some expressed frustration with the transfer, promotion and development process and opportunities for career development.

... I had a set of skills (IT Investigation) that were highly desired outside of Vic Pol, however were not regarded inside when it came to promotion etc. I was also studying to receive my Master's Degree, which was not taken into consideration for promotion at that time...

1.4 What Are Former Members' Views on Re-entry?

Awareness and Views about Registration

Awareness among the former members about the registration scheme was low: 54% knew nothing about it at the time of taking the survey and just 7% had either applied to be registered or were currently on the Register. After receiving a simple explanation, former members thought the Register was 'a good initiative and a positive step' with potential benefits for the organisation, returnees and serving members. Benefits for Victoria Police included: help to reduce loss of valuable skills and experience; minimise negative implications of police attrition; attract former members with valuable skills and external experience; encourage retention of serving members and younger generations who want career mobility; contribute to a positive culture and be a means to create a potential pool of experienced members available for contract or temporary roles. Current members were considered to be beneficiaries, with registration and return opening up new opportunities for taking career breaks or pursuing their policing career with other employers.

Positive move which would benefit the organisation and the community as a whole. Bringing back skills of those members who have previously resigned.

The experience gained by former police officers in outside employment would be invaluable in the development of a positive culture within VicPol.

It makes sense. The job is fantastic but like many jobs 30-40 year careers are becoming a thing of the past. It is healthy to be able to step away and return if an option. Also reduces loss of investment for Vicpol from training cost perspective.

For former members registration was seen as a means to: recognise prior policing experience and externally acquired capabilities; support a 'fair hearing' and assessment for re-employment; attract

people who had not considered returning; encourage a shift in attitudes about returnees; and assist career breaks.

It makes perfect sense to make the pathway back to a policing career accessible to those with a lot still to offer and contribute.

... PRSB represents a shift in the attitude to re-appointees ... if you left, then VicPol would make it as hard as possible for you to come back and took no account of experience gained while you were out ... PRSB acknowledges that external experience can be of enormous value .. I'm hopeful that this attitude is an organisational one ...

Interest in Re-entry

Just over a quarter (27%) of former members had applied at some time to re-enter Victoria Police and 12% held intention to apply for re-appointment. A higher number indicated that they were 'very likely' or 'completely likely' to apply for registration ... *I enjoyed my time working at Victoria Police immensely. I have great respect for the organisation and would relish the opportunity to continue community orientated policing in a rural setting in the future.*

Interest in re-entry for some was subject to having workplace flexibility; for example, some participants indicated that they would consider returning either for contract or part-time roles or to specific regional or rural areas.

Would absolutely consider re-joining if I was able to work around my family who are now 20, 18, and 15 year olds.

During my time with Victoria Police I acquired many skills, these were lost to the Force when I left. On many occasions after leaving I missed the people and the job and wished there was a flexible way of re-joining. For several year I worked alongside retired Military Officers who after retirement went back at their old rank and contracted for hours with the Military on particular tasks, this is a great scheme, it's a pity Vic Pol doesn't have the same. I could do this in particular tasks.

Participants raised a range of barriers to re-entry. Some had had experience with a previous re-entry pathway (prior to 2014) while others had recent experience with the current system (involving registration followed by a re-appointment application).

Employment conditions, such as flexible work options, remuneration, shift-work and nature of police work were thought to be potential barriers to returning to Victoria Police but other short-comings were identified: (1) medical and fitness requirements; (2) disciplinary background; (3) length of re-entry process including the registration and re-employment process; (4) recognition of externally acquired or matured capabilities; (5) currency of policing skills; and (6) access to employment conditions to meet individual needs or preferences. In short, processes, systems, (negative) attitudes and organisational culture were barriers.

Comments on medical and fitness requirements for re-entry were unsolicited⁹; however, perceptions of unfairness exist where for example, the requirements for recruits were applied equally to former members.

⁹ Medical and fitness screening is not applicable to registration; however, registration is conditional upon satisfying Victoria Police employment requirements.

This is without doubt the most daunting hurdle of all. I do not feel at all comfortable with that as a concept in any way. If I was likely returning as a constable to work the van then OK it makes sense. But the absence of common sense and the blanket imposition of a common physical barrier test is just a total turn off. Otherwise I'd be thinking about coming back now in a heartbeat ...

Similarly, standards of good character and reputation standards may be perceived to be a barrier where members had disciplinary matters at the end of their service with Victoria Police¹⁰.

I had a trivial and minor discipline matter outstanding at my time of resignation that is precluding my re-entry to VicPol.

Some former members were not confident that their skills, particularly those acquired outside Victoria Police, would be recognised. Lack of contemporary policing experience and no options for bridging or training course, were also identified as possible barriers. There was a perception among some former members that there was a cultural hurdle to be overcome before the current registration and re-appointment process would work effectively.

I would think the skills I have developed now may not be fully recognized by Victoria Police.

The attitude of some serving members towards my re-application includes a perception that: - I haven't done the hard yards - I am circumventing the normal process - I'm taking someone else's opportunity - how could someone who left as a Detective Sergeant come back after 5 years as an Inspector. This appears to be a cultural hurdle that needs to be considered.

¹⁰ Good character and reputation are criteria for registration on the Police Profession Register.

2

KEY FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Qdos Research identified strong and consistent themes emerging from the focus groups and interviews on career experiences and paths, structural and systemic barriers and reasons for leaving Victoria Police.

2.1 Career Experiences and Paths

There was a strong feeling among former members that the skills they have gained outside Victoria Police have given them a much broader perspective on work and life, and this means they would be better police officers today.

Apart from the obvious qualification stuff and the leadership stuff that I've done, I'm a different person to what I was when I was in the police force and I'm much more orientated to a welfare basis of the troops.

Former police officers felt they have acquired strong organisational, people and analytical skills. These include organisational and management skills with broad application, such as auditing, financial management, information technology, planning and human resource management.

Many former police officers have also continued to acquire law enforcement specific skills and experience by working in the private sector (for example, security related roles in aviation, shipping, finance or security) or for other Government agencies (such as anti-terrorism bodies, regulatory and enforcement agencies, corruption watchdogs or public prosecutions).

Many of the former police officers who were interviewed felt that they have a new level of appreciation for what constitutes best practice in organisations, rather than knowing only 'how it is done in Victoria Police'. Many have benefitted from further training and professional development and/or from undertaking further tertiary studies.

In some cases, the participants felt they have now seen things 'from the other side' and have a much better sense of how other people experience the police service.

For many former police officers, prior policing experience was highly valuable in gaining employment outside in related roles within the public or private sector.

When I was applying for these jobs definitely having a police background gave me a really good step-up to getting jobs.

I leveraged off a lot of the contacts and experience I had working in the crime squad.

I have no doubt that the one I'm in - my current role - was based on my experience as an investigator and as a supervisor with Vic Pol.

In particular, interpersonal skills such as communication, conflict resolution and the ability to remain calm under pressure were considered applicable and valuable in other jobs outside policing. The reputation for integrity was also considered valuable.

It's a recognised profession and well thought of within the community so they know that you've got communication skills. I think they saw me as well rounded. It still gets my foot in the door for (teaching) interviews.

Former members still identify strongly with Victoria Police; they still felt a high degree of loyalty despite no longer being employed by the Force.

I miss the camaraderie; it was great it was like a family. You don't spend 20 years in an organisation and not feel like you're part of the thing...

A manifestation of this strong sense of identification with the organisation was for former police officers to hold strong negative opinions of certain practices of Victoria Police while also retaining a strong affection for the organisation. Many hold a nostalgic view of their time in the force.

They largely viewed policing as a vocational calling and most of those who participated in the research have stayed in roles related to policing. Some felt a sense of loss for the deep comradery of Victoria Police members, something they invariably did not find in other organisations. Some also had significant regrets about leaving, even those who did not leave in the best of circumstances.

Not all former police officers found gaining employment outside Victoria Police straightforward.

Some said their policing qualifications were not well recognised outside policing. Others observed that members themselves did not always understand that they had a set of transferable skills which could be valuable in other professions.

A lot of the qualifications you obtain in the Force are not recognised anywhere else...people should be recognised, they should be portable to go other places, we put a lot time into training and it's just not recognised.

Leaving Victoria Police was absolutely terrifying for me...the transferable skills (you learn) at Vic Pol that they don't tell you you've got.

2.2 Structural and Systemic Barriers

For the most part, former police officers would happily return to Victoria Police (or at least consider it), however many perceived there to be significant barriers in the re-entry system.

It was acknowledged that there were 'forward thinkers' in Victoria Police but generally, it was felt that a negative attitude prevails regarding members who leave the organisation. This was seen to be a cultural problem.

It's very easy to write a new process, it's very different to change a perception and a culture that says people who have left were abandoning their position and were considered to be less valuable because they've walked away.

Some former members expressed the view that aspects of Victoria Police were regimented, self-protective and inward-focussed.

They do become very closeted in their thinking.

These views were not necessarily put as a criticism, but an observation of aspects of the culture. It is important to note that many participants' experience is not current. Their experiences after leaving had 'opened their eyes' to the significant room for improvement that exists if Victoria Police would take on new ideas and best practices from other sectors and organisations.

Since leaving, former members felt somewhat frozen out by Victoria Police and perceived themselves judged by current police officers as being all but 'traitors'.

There's nothing more ex than an ex-cop.

Once you're an ex you're an ex...I (still) work straight alongside them, do exactly the same work as them but you're an ex-member; doesn't matter how much wealth of experience you've got.

This feeling of being disregarded and undervalued jarred with their sense of professional identity and the strong feelings held of 'once a cop, always a cop'.

Some had experienced these obstacles when engaged with the current registration and re-employment process, while the experience of others pre-dates the introduction of the registration scheme.

In general, many former police officers felt there was a distinct lack of recognition of their previous police service in their attempts to return to Victoria Police, and particularly the relevant skills and experience they had acquired in roles since. This was especially inexplicable to them where they had continued to do similar work in other organisations.

I can still put together a brief of evidence.

I was effectively doing the same job for a different organisation... that's the mystifying part; I'm probably doing the same job I was doing 10 years ago and I still have retained skills to do my job...

I saw people that left the force trying to get back in...they were Senior Sergeants... and they just didn't recognise anything they had done. What an insult, working as a connie.

It was strongly felt that new capabilities and experience acquired in subsequent roles were not well understood and were much less valued or appreciated compared to experience gained within Victoria Police. Some also mentioned the need to 'play down' their achievements in interviews.

A lack of contemporary policing experience was identified as a major obstacle for some former police officers in the re-appointment process.

The absence of opportunities to work as a police officer outside Victoria Police was seen as an insurmountable problem. Some participants felt this could be addressed through a bridging course.

The brick wall is that you haven't got contemporary policing... that's the Catch-22.

You do the 25 page application, you get registered and there's no gateway to get you in...where are the bridging courses?

We work with the FBI, leading agencies, so I have a lot of experience since I left the job. I've been at executive level. I spoke to HR but there is no bridging course for me to get back in to (bridge) the gap of contemporary (service).

Re-entry was seen to be based on, "it's who you know, not what you know".

This was a very strong and consistent theme among those interviewed, with a strong view that unless you had an internal advocate or sponsor (a "mate") you would have little chance of getting a position.

I would never get a job over an internal applicant unless I was sponsored from above...it's an unconscious bias.

They've got their mates and without being cynical, nepotism still exists in the police force.

It was felt that there was a lack of recognition of PRSB rank accreditation or at least that it was inconsistently applied by interview panels.

... the PSRB sets your rank at Inspector therefore you are clearly qualified to apply for this position... versus ... the PSRB may set your rank at Inspector but as you do not have current experience as an Inspector you are clearly ineligible for this position...

(The PRSB and Force) have the same vision, 'we recognise that there's a whole stack of ex-members out there who have picked up a pile of useful skills, we want to encourage those people to apply because then you get a much bigger pool of applicants'. That's not the issue; the issue is the people who are actually selecting for those positions...

Those who had applied for several positions felt there was no consistency in the process.

I was advised it would be between six weeks and 15 weeks depending on what you've retained. Then the last time I spoke to them they said, 'You've been out five years it might be easier to put you through 33 (weeks)'.

Former members are very happy to undertake bridging courses and training, but felt they were being asked to 'go through a lot of hoops' when they won't necessarily be 'on the street'. Medical and physical entry requirements were a barrier for some former police officers.

2.3 Reasons for Leaving the Force

Reasons for leaving the force varied and were dependent on individual circumstances. Many former officers cited a lack of flexibility that all but compelled them to leave.

A lack of flexibility in relation to changing family circumstances was cited by many as the reason that they left, when they would otherwise have happily stayed. Women in particular felt their opportunity to pursue a policing career had all but been cut off once they decided to have a family, although men also expressed similar sentiments about a lack of flexibility.

There was no part-time policing in those days...We were exited out.

How many women they wasted, we were well trained they just wasted us, we weren't invited back, all those skills, we were cannon fodder, we went off and had our kids and that was it.

It was never set up for it, that's the problem with the culture. All the courses - you think about detective training school, all the weeks you had to be at the academy that automatically excludes anyone who has a commitment outside the job, it automatically pushes toward a certain individual.

Several felt that improving options for career breaks could prevent valuable officers from resigning.

...leave without pay was not an option with Vic Pol at that point so they really did force my hand.

Had Vic Pol sat down with me and said, 'Let's have a bit of a chat, is there anything that we as an organisation can do for you?' I could have discussed those issues, such as leave without pay. If they had a proper management plan in place, exit plan, it may very well have changed my mind and may have given me the opportunity to stay.

There's a time in many police officers' careers where they say, 'I can't do this anymore.' If they self check-out and do another business that's really good for their mental health and Vic Pol needs to recognise that it's a really healthy thing for an individual to do, especially if they gain other experience that will add to the tapestry of policing and re-join. Not to respect that is really naïve...

An opportunity to pursue other careers, or being approached by other organisations seeking specialist skills or knowledge gained in Victoria Police, were key reasons why some former police officers resigned. This often related to a feeling that getting promoted was a slow process (waiting in line) or that there were a lack of opportunities for promotion.

It's just one of those things. Reading the Herald Sun one Saturday, I saw the ad in there and it basically afforded me the opportunity to utilise the skills I'd learnt inside Vic Pol, I suppose, in a different forum. I was still young. ... it was probably more to see what is out there and what else is available I guess.

ASIC were wanting experienced investigators to look after corporate investigations. I looked at the potential chances of getting promoted in Vic Pol and decided that my career probably would be better served going someone else because I didn't see being promoted, given the fact that I was at that stage in my late 20s, I couldn't see sort of developing my career with Vic Pol in any time soon. So I went.

Smaller numbers raised the following factors involved in their resignation:

- breakdown in relationships with their supervisors;
- bullying by colleagues or supervisors;
- mental health issues including post-traumatic stress disorder; and
- experiences of the disciplinary process.

3

OVERVIEW OF LITERATURE

The PRSB general research on career mobility and re-hiring programs was aimed at learning about the benefits of career mobility, re-hiring as a human resources strategy and police turnover. Literature reviewed included: The Victoria Police Knowledge Bank; reviews on gender equity and member welfare; and academic and business literature about re-hiring, workforce flexibility and mobility.

3.1 Career Mobility

Benefits to be gained from enhancing the mobility of a police workforce are well-documented, including the promotion of professionalisation, gender equity and member welfare, and assisting members to experience other professions and sectorsⁱⁱⁱ. The *Blue Paper*^{iv} identified police career mobility, including re-entry of former members, as a means to strengthen both individual and organisational capability. For the individual, being able to take career breaks or lateral-exit and re-entry would enhance capability and not hamper career progression. For an organisation, ‘... recruiting experienced police offers more rounded leaders with wider experience ... has the potential to reduce parochial and insular aspects of culture ... [and] attracts the very best talent and leadership in an open market’. Victoria Police is already committed to the principles of career mobility^v. Commission (VEOHRC) *Independent review into sex discrimination and sexual harassment, including predatory behaviour, in Victoria Police* identified issues with promoting and retaining women in the organisation. Improving workplace flexibility was identified as a key strategy to retain women^{vi}. The *Victoria Police Mental Health Review* similarly recommended the need to improve options for members to take career breaks for their mental health and welfare.

The *Leadership Review* by the College of Policing (2015) noted that re-entry, secondment, talent programs and direct entry can contribute to leadership capability and to diversity of backgrounds, experience, thinking and perspectives, which has an impact on positive cultural change^{vii}. Both the VEOHRC and Mental Health Reviews indicated the need for managers and supervisors at all levels to adopt a more people-focussed leadership style. Preferred qualities and behaviours include: integrity; role modelling; empathy; effective communication; self-awareness; understanding of the issues that employees face; transparent decision-making; building clarity and accountability for results and behaviours; and proactively initiating supportive conversations with at-risk individuals^{viii}. The Victoria Police desired contemporary leadership style was articulated in *The Capability Plan 2016-2025*^{ix} as ‘confident, humble, respectful and people-focussed’.

Improving career mobility between policing organisations has been an aspiration of national bodies such as Australian New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency (ANZPAA) and the Police Federation of Australia (PFA) for some time. Nationally, occupational mobility supports interoperability; consistent service delivery; flexibility; and efficient use of resources^x.

The Australian Public Service recognises career mobility as a key approach to managing talent, planning a workforce and developing professionals. The *Blue Print for Australian Government Administration Reform*^{xi} noted mobility as providing a breadth of capability and adaptability, recommending that pathways be provided for high-performing individuals through secondments to private and not-for-profit sectors. Although talent management and mobility are recognised as critical for retaining employees, few agencies within the APS approach it systematically. An APS Review^{xii} examined ways to enhance workforce management through career mobility to attract and challenge the best people, citing benefits such as exposing employees to different approaches, which they then take back to their home agency. Substantial experience in the public service craft is balanced with external experiences, which promote a broader perspective and enable employees to

better understand the impact of government policy on community, business and other sectors^{xiii}. At the workforce level, the APS Review concluded that 'mobility unlocks organisational agility by enabling capabilities to be quickly moved to emerging priorities'. Actions arising from this APS Review included the implementation of a Capability Interchange Program.

3.2 Police Turnover

Employee turnover – voluntary or otherwise – is costly for any organisation. The challenge however, is to identify the clear and universal reasons for voluntary turnover. In an Australasian study of policing organisations, from 1999-2000 through to 2002-2003, it was estimated that 59% of serving member turnover was voluntary and therefore, potentially avoidable. Contributing factors were: (1) quality of life and satisfaction; (2) flexibility issues and flexible solutions; (3) management and leadership; (4) promotions and other career issues; and (5) resources^{xiv}. Female turnover is additionally linked to other work stressors and more particularly gender discrimination and sexual harassment^{xv}. Notwithstanding the financial impost, organisations lose corporate memory, become skill-depleted and experience reduced productivity^{xvi}.

One option to avoid the loss of valuable, organisational skill and knowledge and minimise the concomitant cost of training new employees, is to re-hire former members. More specifically, police organisations should:

...make it easier for good people to re-join the department by: assessing ex-officers' competencies upon recommencement, rather than requiring all reappointed officers to do the same amount of training: and exploring the possibilities of introducing lateral transfers to encourage former officers to join other police departments^{xvii}.

3.3 Rehiring Former Employees

Re-hiring is a form of targeted recruitment, which has been shown to be highly successful because former employees have a more accurate understanding of job duties, supervisory styles, work schedules, co-worker relationships and organisational values. The benefit of re-hiring employees with broad and diverse experience is well-understood in the private sector and as a human resources strategy, has gained popularity in large private organisations such as, Deloitte and Ernst and Young, where up to 16% of new hires are former employees^{xviii}.

Supporters highlight a range of organisational benefits like cost-effectiveness and higher retention rates of re-hires, who are quicker to reach minimum productivity compared with 'newbies'^{xix} and bring back re-fresh perspectives with new skills and strategies^{xx}. From a values-based approach,

... outsiders-insiders can walk a fine line of balancing a deep understanding of the company's culture with the right amount of perspective and independence to push the changes necessary for organisational growth^{xxi}.

Re-hires often hold greater self-insight to better evaluate how their values, interests and talents match the positions on offer^{xxii}. Re-hiring has often been used for more risky occupations because of the ability to generate more accurate information about potential employees: In policing, selection errors or adverse selections can be costly either because of the damage potential or the training costs involved in replacing personnel^{xxiii}.

A pro-active, supportive and welcoming approach to recruitment seems essential for any organisation competing for in-demand skills and talent. An ‘open-door policy’ for former employees is one successful approach used within the private sector to re-hire former employees. Popular literature^{xxiv} recommends components for successful ‘open door’ approaches (See Figure 1).

REHIRING PROGRAM		
Commitment from leadership		
Clear policies and procedures		
Identification of type of former employees that fit the strategic vision		
Integration of program with other HR functions		
Communication with staff in the organisation about the rehiring strategy		
Program metrics to measure the success of the program		
AFTER EXIT	RECRUITMENT	POST-HIRE
Maintain relationships with former employees.	Robust selection processes and due diligence to ‘check for fit.’	Briefing and refreshers for former employees.
Provide access to information about the opportunities and developments within the organisation.	Assessment of training needs.	Follow up with rehired employees to check on how they are going.
	Assessment of former employees’ new skills and capabilities.	

Figure 1 Re-hiring programs: Components of ‘open door’ approaches

4

CONCLUSION & OPPORTUNITIES

The findings from this research support the benefits of career mobility as a strategy to strengthen the capability of individuals and organisations including Victoria Police. Re-entry does not just bring back individuals with particular skills, but brings in new ideas, cultures and work systems from other organisations, allowing the spread of organisational best practice. It is a well-documented, successful approach to managing talent and developing well-rounded professionals. Employees are exposed to different ideas, methods and approaches, and organisations benefit from a skilled and motivated workforce.

Many former police officers have built on their policing experience and gained new skills and experiences in other organisations and sectors. This means this is a highly valuable pool from which to target recruitment efforts. Such recruits could quickly become job-ready, with a reduced training cost and known and improved standards of service quality. Moreover, re-hiring may be a useful strategy during the current recruitment drive which involves recruiting an unprecedented 3,135 new police on the frontline by 2022^{xxv}.

Re-hiring programs are a popular, targeted recruitment strategy in many high-performing businesses and organisations. They are a cost-effective way of recruiting and result in higher retention rates. Re-hires can quickly become job-ready: Re-hires know what to expect and in risky occupations like policing, costly selection errors can be minimised, as re-hires are a 'known quantity'.

Career mobility also supports a healthier workforce and member well-being, by providing opportunities for people have time away from the mental and physical demands of their work, when needed. Mobility can also meet people's personal aspirations and needs by offering options to pursue personal and career interests, care for family members or undertake further education, and then return. In this way, valuable skills and experience are retained rather than permanently lost to other sectors or organisations.

The benefits of mobility for Victoria Police, police members and the community are acknowledged in key strategic documents such as the *Blue Paper*, the *Mental Health Review*, *Review of Sexual Discrimination and Sexual Harassment including Predatory Behaviour in Victoria Police*. These benefits underpin the creation of Australia's only independent professional registration process for police, which involves rigorous and independent checks of a former police officer's character and reputation and recognises capabilities, qualifications and experience inside and outside of policing.

Career mobility is an aspirational goal at national level and strongly interlinked with the broader goal around professionalising policing. Mobility supports jurisdictional interoperability; consistent service delivery; individual choice and flexibility; and efficient use of resources.

Many people who left Victoria Police have gone on to work in roles and organisations strongly related to policing. This group has readily transferable and relevant capabilities which could be highly valuable in today's policing environment. Other former police officers have worked in unrelated sectors and gained highly transferable capabilities (for example, in leadership, management and strategic thinking). Bringing in knowledge of different organisations and their work cultures, systems and work methods may be highly valuable to Victoria Police.

Many former police officers are passionate about re-joining policing and what they can offer. The study confirms that there is interest in and support for the registration and return scheme.

The approach to recruiting former members could be strategically targeted. The re-entry pathway provides an opportunity for Victoria Police to draw upon this pool of potential recruits to bring in desired and in-demand capabilities and qualities. This would allow Victoria Police to capitalise on their initial investment in training these police officers, while leveraging from the externally acquired skills, capabilities, experience and mindsets acquired by former police officers. Of course, not all former police officers are suitable to return. Some left after performance issues, are not motivated to return for the right reasons or do not have the desired capabilities and mindsets. Some may not be competitive against the high standards of current recruits.

There are several cultural and systems barriers to re-entry. These include process and system issues as well as cultural and attitudinal barriers. Many former police officers described the re-entry process as unwelcoming and felt that their prior policing skills, as well as the skills and experience acquired outside policing, were not properly recognised or valued in the selection process. The lack of pathways and opportunities to maintain contemporary policing skills, or indeed to demonstrate that they had maintained these skills in related roles, was a significant barrier.

The career pathways of former police officers provide valuable insights for current members about the value and transferability of their policing skills and experience. Understanding the transferability and recognition of their skills in the broader job market may contribute to a sense of professionalism and self-worth. Better understanding the career paths of former members can be used to support career planning by illustrating a wider range of possible career pathways within and outside Victoria Police. Over time, departure to other roles and organisations and re-entry would be normalised, with a balanced flow of mid-career police officers coming into and out of Victoria Police. External work experience would be regarded as valuable.

Career-mapping could also empower and support members to make choices. Members who have become disengaged, who need a break (including for personal, family or wellbeing reasons) or who are simply planning to move on from policing to explore other careers may find this of value.

The findings confirm the importance of flexible work arrangements (including breaks). Many of the members in the study enjoyed successful careers but felt that they had no choice but to resign, given personal circumstances.

This research has provided valuable feedback to guide further enhancements to the registration and re-entry system, which will better meet the needs of Victoria Police and current and former members. In collaboration with Victoria Police, the PRSB will focus on:

- Redesigning the re-entry process to be client-centric, engaging and supportive so that would-be returnees feel welcome and their capabilities will be recognised, utilised and valued;
- Enhancing the reliability of and trust in the PRSB capability assessments and registered ranks;
- Establishing alumni services to engage and inform those former members who may be interested in returning;
- Stronger focus on using registration to meet the capability needs of Victoria Police, including by identifying desired skill sets; and
- More active promotion of registration among current and former members (including senior officers) to raise awareness of the potential benefits of mobility and availability of registration as the pathway to return to policing.



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