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Truly Putting Our People First: Flexible Service and Robust Leave Options for CAF Members

Lieutenant-Commander Lance Mooney

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Service Paper – Étude militaire

**TRULY PUTTING OUR PEOPLE FIRST: FLEXIBLE SERVICE AND
ROBUST LEAVE OPTIONS FOR CAF MEMBERS**

Lieutenant-Commander Lance Mooney

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TRULY PUTTING OUR PEOPLE FIRST: FLEXIBLE SERVICE AND ROBUST LEAVE OPTIONS FOR CAF MEMBERS

AIM

1. In order to compete with industry and attract the varied and technologically capable skillsets that will both rebuild the CAF from its current degraded levels and strengthen it for an uncertain future the organization needs to, "...provide the career options, satisfaction, and support necessary for [its] people and their families to succeed."¹ Canada can learn from its more progressive allies the UK and Australia in developing greater flexibility in how it employs its members, giving them options to achieve a satisfying work-life balance at every stage of their life and career. CAF needs to consider both flexible service options and additional leave choices to attract and retain the most fundamental capability needed to defend Canada, people.

INTRODUCTION

2. People are the key element to every capability that the CAF delivers on behalf of the Government of Canada and a severe shortage of this critical asset is preventing the organization from repairing many significant deficiencies that could mean Canada isn't ready for the challenges that lay ahead in an increasingly dangerous world. The importance of the men and women, and the families that support them, is clearly demonstrated by the placement of precedence in what can be considered the highest-level guidance from the government; Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy's first chapter focuses on the importance of the people that make up the defence team.² The more recently published CDS/DM CAF Directive for Reconstitution also places people as the number one priority in building the organization up to deliver the defence of Canada.³

3. The subjects of both recruitment of new people into the military and retention of existing trained personnel each have multiple factors to be considered and the CAF needs to improve in both areas. One factor that is common to both is improved work-life balance. Due to the nature of military employment, including lengthy deployments and unlimited liability, there is a degree of understanding from those who join that this balance will have a different meaning, but to be an employer of choice in a competitive job market the CAF needs to explore, "...increased flexibility with respect to military employment."⁴

4. From a demographic standpoint, to have healthy numbers of people in uniform, the CAF needs to attract and retain members of the Millennial and Gen Z cohort and to do that needs to modernize employment options for its members. The 2022 Deloitte survey of these groups identified good work/life balance, learning and development opportunities, and pay and other

¹ Canada, Department of National Defence, 'Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy', 22.

² Canada, Department of National Defence, 'Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy'.

³ Eyre and Matthews, 'CDS/DM Directive for CAF Reconstitution'.

⁴ Eyre and Matthews, 7.

financial benefits as the top 3 reasons they chose to work for their current organization.⁵ Efforts are underway to adjust CAF member's financial compensation to better meet the high cost of living and the organization excels at providing development opportunities for those that seek them, but is challenged when it comes to offering employment that allows its members to achieve work-life balance.

5. This paper will summarize high level CAF documents supporting more employment flexibility for CAF members. It will then explore flexible service and enhanced leave options offered to military members by two of our more progressive five eyes allies, the United Kingdom and Australia. Finally, it will make recommendations for similar employment benefits that could be incorporated into the CAF Offer.

DISCUSSION

6. A number of high-level CAF documents support further investigation and consideration of more flexible employment options for military members. Canada's defense policy describes a, "...competitive compensation package [that] goes beyond an adequate salary and includes a wide range of benefits, recognition, care and support throughout military members' careers."⁶ SSE goes even further to describe the need to explore flexibility in military careers including making it easier to switch between part and full-time service to allow members to develop wholistic careers while improving retention. A specific initiative set out in SSE seeks to review conditions of service and career paths with an aim to allow greater flexibility for a more tailored career plan based on an individual's aspirations,⁷ though it's not clear where effort has been applied to this initiative in the past 5 years.

7. The CDS and DM Reconstitution Directive supports the consideration of flexible employment options in a number of sections. Within the document's assumptions it's identified that flexible work arrangements should continue and be encouraged where possible to add increased flexibility to military employment. A further assumption is made that the institutional climate needs to be more welcoming and inclusive to improve retention (listed as a strategic priority⁸) and attraction and issues.⁹ All L1s were tasked as part of reconstitution and modernization efforts to, "... enable a quality of life balance between service and CAF member's private lives," through improvements to process and policy among other tools.¹⁰ Stated in various locations throughout the document and identified as a both a line of effort and strategic objective¹¹, Mil Pers Com has been directed to coordinate with the other L1s the implementation of a modernized Military Personnel Management System (MPMS) to ensure personnel can

⁵ Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited, 'Striving for Balance Advocating for Change - The Deloitte Global 2022 Gen Z & Millennial Survey', 12.

⁶ Canada, Department of National Defence, 'Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy', 22.

⁷ Canada, Department of National Defence, 22.

⁸ Eyre and Matthews, 'CDS/DM Directive for CAF Reconstitution', 14.

⁹ Eyre and Matthews, 7.

¹⁰ Eyre and Matthews, 23.

¹¹ Eyre and Matthews, 9-10.

achieve their goals and thus improve retention. A significantly more modern MPMS will be essential in implementing more flexible work options similar to our allies.

8. Retention of CAF members has been identified as being in some ways, a significantly more complicated problem than attraction as there are multiple reasons why personnel leave the forces. The CAF Retention Directive identifies what are the key areas where the organization needs to focus to improve retention, one of which is flexibility and individual choice. Within the document it identifies that while operational success needs to be a primary objective the organization must, "... balance institutional and service requirements with members' personal aspirations to the extent possible."¹²

9. The directive sets out various strategic objectives, under 6 Lines of Effort, three of which could directly benefit from more flexible employment options. Strategic Objective 3b calls for a comprehensive review of Personnel Policies and Programs which is the ideal initiative under which the changes proposed in this paper could be implemented.¹³ Strategic Objective 5d aims to improve the transition process for members looking to leave the military and specifically directs the expansion of short to long term options that would allow members to continue to serve, which is exactly what some of the options proposed would enable.¹⁴ Strategic Objective 6a aims to better understand what is needed for members to better balance family life with uniformed service; flexible work and expanded leave options would provide the tools to better achieve balance when needed.¹⁵

10. Lastly, Annex A of the Retention Directive looks specifically at the strategies to retain underrepresented populations. While there are many complexities to the subject, flexible work options could have significant impacts on the retention of women in uniform. Societal norms, while slowly changing, still place women as the primary caregiver¹⁶ when children are born and studies show that becoming a parent is the main reason for a career break.¹⁷ Service options that would allow women (or men) to adjust their required levels of commitment to meet family needs while continuing to wear the uniform would go a long way towards long term career satisfaction and retention.¹⁸

11. The paper will now describe some of the flexible working arrangements that are offered by the CAF allies UK and Australia. The first category of options is what the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) calls Alternative Work Arrangements (AWA). These AWA include remote

¹² Canada, Department of National Defence, 'Canadian Armed Forces Retention Strategy', 25.

¹³ Canada, Department of National Defence, 31.

¹⁴ Canada, Department of National Defence, 34.

¹⁵ Canada, Department of National Defence, 35.

¹⁶ Canada, Department of National Defence, 37.

¹⁷ Arora and Kumari, 'The Future of Work: Career Reentry Programs for Women in the Workforce'; Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Review into the Treatment of Women in the Australian Defence Force - Chapter 6', 218.

¹⁸ The author's spouse chose to retire from the military rather than be away from their very young children to attend a career course. Alternative options proposed to the chain of command that would have kept her in uniform were denied.

working where a member is permitted to work from home or at a MOD location that is closer to where they live. The second AWA offered to UK service members is compressed working where the member works full time hours in a shorter timeframe during the week. An example of this is those who have a long commute to their family on weekends¹⁹ work longer days to start work later on Mondays and leave earlier on Fridays. The last AWA is variable start and finish times to meet the members needs. All of the above are enabled through policy but are achieved through informal agreement with the member's direct supervisor. The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has similar Flexible Work Arrangements to the UK, which will not be detailed here. Fortunately, with the CAF (and DND) moving to implement hybrid remote working options, similar AWA are possible within current policy but will require cultural change to become more broadly accepted practices.

12. Flexible Service (FS) options for UK service members, which came into effect in 2019 under the Armed Forces Flexible Working Bill²⁰, would require significant effort and possibly legislative change to implement similar in the CAF, but the flexibility offered would be worth the effort. Under the FS arrangements, full time (reg force) service personnel can apply for Part Time Work (PTW) arrangements with a reduction of their working time of either 20% or 40%, meaning working 4 or 3 days respectively when in a normal 5 days a week job.²¹ Those who are employed in shift work can also apply for FS with an associated reduction in commitment determined based on job requirements. When under a part time work arrangement, the member's pay and other benefits such as leave allocation and pensionable service time are reduced by an equivalent percentage.

13. Another option under FS policy is that members can apply for Restricted Separation (RS) which sees elements of the members pay reduced an amount in exchange for having a maximum number of 35 separation days (24 hours absence from home) per year. RS can be combined with PTW where 20% reduction means maximum 28 days separation and 40% means equates to 21 days.²² The last option offered as part of FS is Job Share (JS) which allows two full-time service personnel to share the duties and responsibilities of one full-time post with each member expected to complete 60% output and thus would receive 60% compensation similar to the PTW arrangements. The 60% work commitment ensures 1 day of overlap between members each week to allow for continuity in the position. Of note, while the UK has a robust career management organization in place to assist, the onus is on the service members to find a JS counterpart and make the necessary application.²³

14. FS options in the UK do not preclude the service from meeting its requirements to defend and represents the nation's interests, with, "...primacy of operational capability [being] the main

¹⁹ An Imposed Restrictions type of arrangement is common in the UK to provide family stability while members move positions. Service members are provided accommodations where they're employed and are compensated mileage and in some instances flights, to commute home on weekends.

²⁰ Government United Kingdom, 'New Plans for Military Flexible Working Become Law'.

²¹ UK Ministry of Defence, 'Joint Service Publication 750: Centrally Determined Terms of Service', 14.

²² UK Ministry of Defence, 23.

²³ UK Ministry of Defence, 20.

consideration in any FS decision”²⁴ by a CO. FS is intended as a temporary measure and is established through a formal agreement lasting from a minimum of 3 months to a maximum of 3 years with an aggregate maximum duration of 4 years in a rolling 12 year period. The guiding directive also provides means of terminating, varying or suspending the FS usually with 90 days notice to the member, but can occur immediately if operational reasons drive the requirement.²⁵

15. The ADF offers its members something similar to the UK’s FS option. In 2013 Project Suakin was launched to determine how best, “to respond to current and future workforce challenges [through] a more flexible workforce structure.”²⁶ The output from the project was the Total Workforce Model (TWM) which enables greater career flexibility, including full and part-time service for both permanent (reg force) and reserve force members, with compensation and benefits adjusted to match. Key efforts to implement the TWM included a ForceNet ePortal to help better match member capabilities, including reserve or retired members, with military job opportunities. The project was also very aware of the potential organizational culture challenges in allowing part time service and designed the processes to best enable the transition.²⁷

16. The ADF Total Workforce System was implemented in 2016 and enables part-time flexible work options through 7 Service Categories (SERCAT), with SERCAT 6 detailing permanent force part-time options. Under SERCAT 6 military members discuss with their supervisor their needs and the needs of the service to determine a suitable pattern of work in days per fortnight, weeks per months, months per year or some combination and the duration of the modified service, with 3 months being the minimum.²⁸ In a similar manner as the UK MOD, a SERCAT 6 includes an associated reduction in pay and benefits and can be cancelled when necessary to meet service needs.

17. Both UK FS and ADF SERCAT 6 employment are similar to Leave with Income Averaging,²⁹ which is offered to Canadian Public Service members. Thus there is potentially a useful framework upon which to build something similar for the CAF.

18. In both the UK MOD and ADF when FS options do not provide the member with sufficient flexibility to manage their personal issues or take time to broaden their life experiences, a number of leave options are available that would provide the member the necessary time while increasing the likelihood of them continuing to serve. UK Enhanced Leave allows regular service personnel who have served for 15 years to apply for an extended block of 50 days leave in one continuous period,³⁰ the ADF offers Long Service Leave where members who have completed 10 years of accrued service or more can take 0.3 months for each full year

²⁴ UK Ministry of Defence, 17.

²⁵ UK Ministry of Defence, 15-16.

²⁶ Australian Defence Reserves Association, ‘Project SUAKIN (Total Workforce Model)’.

²⁷ Australian Defence Reserves Association.

²⁸ Australian Government - Defence, ‘ADF Total Workforce System | Pay and Conditions’.

²⁹ Canada, Public Service Canada, ‘Leave with Income Averaging - Canada.Ca’.

³⁰ UK Ministry of Defence, ‘Joint Service Publication 760: Tri-Service Regulations for Leave and Other Types of Absence’, 7-1.

served.³¹ The UK MOD allows members to transfer up to 10 days of leave between service spouses or civil partners and up to 15 days if one of the members is deployed on an operational tour of at least 180 days.³²

19. UK MOD policy also permits members to apply for periods of Career Intermission from 3 months to 3 years for, "...personal or professional growth outside the Service," with overall approval taking service needs into consideration.³³ The ADF and CAF both offer similar with the option to apply for Leave Without Pay, ADF up to 2 years on approval of the Chief of Defence Force³⁴ and CAF over 30 days with approval of DGMC, though neither nation seems to use this option to empower their members' growth with the aim of having them return to service like the UK does. These are a few of the additional leave options ideas that could be considered for implementation by the CAF to provide better flexible employment for its members.

CONCLUSION

20. Among many challenges currently faced by the CAF, the shortage of service members is the most pressing, as people form the foundation to rebuild the organization to be best prepared to defend Canadian interests. There are many complicated factors to consider to recover from the current 10 000-person shortfall³⁵, but modernizing the structure under which members are employed is critical for both attraction and retention and is supported by various policies and directives. Fortunately, our allies have faced similar challenges and generated more progressive service options that the CAF can leverage to more rapidly modernize how it employs its people.

RECOMMENDATION

21. Recommendation #1: CMP leverage the research conducted by both the UK MOD in generating FS options and the ADF in building their TWM, and consider Canadian public service income averaging to create flexible part time service options suitable to CAF organizational and member needs.

22. Recommendation #2: CMP investigate leave options offered by our allies for inclusion in an updated version of the CFLPM, including long service leave, transfer between service spouses and broader acceptance criteria for LWOP.

³¹ Australian Government - Defence, 'ADF Pay and Conditions Manual - PACMAN', 5.5.8

³² UK Ministry of Defence, 'Joint Service Publication 760: Tri-Service Regulations for Leave and Other Types of Absence', 8-1.

³³ UK Ministry of Defence, 5-1.

³⁴ Australian Government - Defence, 'ADF Pay and Conditions Manual - PACMAN', 5.10.4

³⁵ Brewster and Raycraft, 'Military Personnel Shortage Will Get Worse before It Gets Better, Top Soldier Says'.

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