

New Recruits in the Western Australia Police

Report 8 – June 2012

Background

Western Australia Police (WAP) is responsible for policing the world's largest single police jurisdiction and in 2011 WAP had 5 866 sworn police officers in its staff. New police constables are recruited and trained to maintain WAP operational strength and meet government commitments to increase the number of police. In the past five years around 2 000 new police constables have been recruited.

In order to become a police constable, applicants need to complete three main steps; the recruitment and selection process, six months of intensive training at the Police Academy and 18 months of on-the-job training during probation. Upon completion of these stages, constables are awarded a Diploma in Public Safety (Policing) and are able to work unsupervised and can supervise the next set of probationary constables.

Our audit assessed whether the recruitment and training of new recruits in WAP is efficient and effective. We focused on three questions:

- Are WAP's recruitment and selection processes effective?
- Are new recruits adequately trained and supported?
- Is WAP using its resources to deliver police officers into the force efficiently and effectively?

Audit Conclusion

WAP understands the importance of having a well trained workforce. It invests significant resources into training new police recruits and built a state of the art training facility, the Police Academy, in Joondalup. As a Registered Training Organisation the WAP Academy provides a Diploma standard training program to all new recruits, allowing them to gain a tertiary qualification in Public Safety (Policing).

In order to ensure WAP has 'the right' people serving as police officers there are three controls in place. These are selecting the best applicants during the recruitment process, only allowing capable officers to graduate at the end of Academy training and allowing only those officers considered an acceptable standard to complete probation. However, WAP is not making full use of these

controls to identify those who may be struggling to meet the demands of being a police officer and to minimise the risk of inadequately trained recruits becoming operational. Very few recruits are removed during Academy training or probation. Under the current selection and training processes, only one recruit has been dismissed from the Academy solely for poor performance in the past five years. This places significant pressure on the recruit selection process, and there are indications that this is not reliably identifying only suitable candidates.

Academy training is aimed at delivering appropriately trained and skilled officers to the field. For many recruits this training is adequate. Some new recruits, however, graduate from the Academy without all the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to immediately perform on-the-job as probationary constables. It is anticipated that these are addressed and corrected during the probationary period. But probation is not consistently structured, constables are spending less time completing probation and supervision is inconsistent. These all increase the risk that gaps in recruit's skills and training are not adequately addressed before they become operational police officers.

WAP needs to know that it is producing the best police officer it can for the level of its investment. WAP could make better use of its information to understand whether its recruitment and training are effective and to identify opportunities to improve.

Key Findings

- WAP recruits and trains new police officers in response to attrition in its workforce and requirements set by government. Its current target, set in 2009-10, is to recruit an additional 500 police staff by 2013-14. WAP has met interim targets but, based on current application rates, is unlikely to meet the overall target and is currently considering alternative recruitment options.
- WAP's process to deliver new officers relies heavily on selecting the right applicant. This is because almost no one is removed from WAP once chosen for Academy training. In the past five years only one recruit was dismissed on the grounds of poor performance in training.



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- WAP uses its '22 dimensions of a police officer' as the basis for selecting suitable recruits. WAP has not reviewed the relevance and use of the 22 dimensions since they were developed in 1987 and needs to do so to ensure it continues to meet WAP's needs in a changing police environment.
- WAP is not meeting its diversity targets for recruiting from indigenous backgrounds or women. Only 1.7 per cent of serving officers identify themselves as coming from an indigenous background, significantly below the target of three per cent. The proportion of women officers has increased from 13 per cent in 2001 to almost 21 per cent in 2011, but remains below the target of 30 per cent.
- Psychological testing is a key element of WAP's recruitment, but there is inconsistency in how the results of these tests are reviewed. WAP reviews applicants rated as 'marginal' or 'not yet acceptable', but not those rated as 'acceptable' or recommended'. Psychological assessment results often do not match final recruitment decisions. Since 2006, 38 per cent of candidates have been accepted after review. Since our audit WAP has begun reviewing all candidates.
- WAP invests significant resources to bring its weaker performers up to standard, by providing continuous remedial training. In our sample the proportion of recruits achieving competency without additional training has fallen since 2007. This has an impact on training costs and efficiency for WAP. WAP has a process for dismissing recruits but it is not used for recruits who do not gain competency after repeated attempts.
- For most recruits Academy training is adequate, but some recruits move on to probation from the Academy requiring further development of the skills, knowledge and attitudes required for probationary constables.
- The experience recruits gain on probation varies because the number and location of placements are not consistent and levels of supervision vary. There are often not enough experienced supervisors for all recruits so some probationers are supervised by recently appointed constables. The lack of training and guidelines for supervisors reduces the assurance about the quality and consistency of supervision and training for probationers.
- In the squads we reviewed, the percentage of probationary constables coming off probation early had grown and the average length of probation served had decreased since 2007. Early-off probation was introduced as a reward for high performers, however this has now become the norm. Early-off probation has been awarded in some instances when training records indicated that constables may not have been ready.
- Communication between the Academy and police stations about probationers is limited. Better feedback and information sharing about the performance of recruits in the Academy and during probation may increase the chance that on-the-job training, supervision and support is more effectively targeted.
- WAP invests a significant amount of resources into its recruits, and more than some other jurisdictions. WAP spends over \$240 000 and two years to train a general duties constable. This includes between \$80 000 and \$154 000 on training at its purpose built Academy as well as \$90 000 on probation. WAP could make better use of its existing information to ensure that this investment is effective, part of which could be to evaluate constables' post probation performance.