



Defence Force Remuneration Tribunal

DECISION

Defence Act 1903
s.58H—Functions and powers of Tribunal

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN CORPS OF ELECTRICAL AND MECHANICAL ENGINEERS – ARTIFICER AERO (Matter 8 of 2021)

MS I. ASBURY, PRESIDENT

MR A. MORRIS, MEMBER

CANBERRA, 13 OCTOBER 2021

MAJGEN G. FOGARTY AO RETD, MEMBER

[1] This decision arises from a listing application¹ made by the Australian Defence Force (ADF) for a determination to be made under Section 58H of the *Defence Act 1903* (the Act). The listing application seeks to create an additional skill grade in both the aircraft and avionics trades at the Warrant Officer ranks, in the Royal Australian Corps of Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (RAEME). This grade is proposed to be named “Artificer Aero” and placed in pay grade 8 of the Graded Other Ranks Pay Structure (GORPS)

[2] We considered this matter via a video hearing on 20 September 2021 where Mr J. Phillips SC appeared for the ADF and Mr H. Miller for the Commonwealth.

Background

[3] Within RAEME, there are two technical aviation maintenance streams: aircraft and avionics. Aircraft Technicians are broadly responsible for the repair and maintenance of aircraft frames, engines and ancillary equipment, while Avionics Technicians are responsible for the repair and maintenance of aircraft electrical, support and computing systems.

[4] Artificers are experienced, senior technicians who are responsible for a range of technical compliance and managerial functions. While only Army use the term ‘artificer’, all three Services employ senior aircraft and avionics technicians to meet the airworthiness and technical regulatory requirements for each aircraft.

[5] In Army, once a member becomes a qualified artificer, they can be employed as a:

- a. Staff Artificer: (Aircraft or Avionics) providing maintenance, logistic planning and operational advice;
- b. Hangar Artificer: providing direct supervision to technicians aircraft/avionics, and performing managerial, quality control, and compliance duties; and
- c. Artificer Sergeant Major: the senior technician of a squadron, regiment or brigade, providing technical oversight for all technicians within their organisation, and responsible for providing advice and guidance to Command on aircraft maintenance issues.

Submissions

[6] The ADF submits it is seeking to reassess the artificer structure and work value in both the aircraft and avionics technician trades within RAEME, as recommended by internal reviews.²

[7] Specifically, the ADF seeks to:

- a. amend the Technician Aircraft and Technician Avionics employment categories by creating a new skill grade 6, to be known as “Artificer Aero”, at pay grade 8 of the GORPS commencing at Warrant Officer Class 2; and
- b. split and re-name the current skill grade 5 Warrant Officer 1 employment categories. With Artificer Air (Tiers A, B and C) to be renamed Artificer Avionics (Tier A and B), and Tier C renamed Artificer Aero Warrant Officer 1 Tier C.³

[8] The Commonwealth submission supports the proposal, noting it “*aims to address identified inequalities between the Services with regard to the remuneration of senior aircraft and avionics technicians, as recommended by the Houston Review and a 2017 RAEME Aeroskills Employment Category Review*”.⁴

Consideration

[9] This Tribunal last considered the RAEME Technician Aircraft and Technician Avionics employment categories in 2008, during the establishment of the GORPS. At the time, Army did not seek to align a similar skill or pay grade with those of Navy or Air Force, as it was “*rotating individuals through the Hangar Artificer, Staff Artificer and Squadron Artificer Sergeant Major positions, treating them as interchangeable*”.⁵

[10] Since then, Army has conducted internal reviews relating to aviation, including the aforementioned Houston Review and the RAEME Aeroskills Employment Category Review,

which have “*identified the need for a restructure of Army’s aeroskills artificers and the establishment of a distinct skill grade for appointments to Artificer Sergeant Major and subsequent Artificer Aero positions*”.⁶

[11] We accept the evidence that “*the RAEME Review, in particular identified that Army’s Artificer Sergeant Major positions have experienced an increased span of responsibilities and accountabilities in recent years, well in excess of those experienced by Hangar Artificer and Staff Artificer positions*”.⁷ We further accept the combination of reviews recommended “*an additional skill grade (6), to be remunerated at pay grade 8, specifically for Army Warrant Officers who undertake the role of an Artificer Sergeant Major*”.⁸

[12] We agree this will align with the placement in GORPS of Navy’s Flight Senior Maintenance Sailor and Air Force’s Warrant Officer Engineering.

[13] We noted the evidence that the proposed additional skill grade “*does not involve any dramatic change in the distribution of the roles or capability outcomes for artificers in skill grade 5 (and certainly no change to the Hangar Artificer or the Staff Artificer roles)*”.⁹ We accept that to be the case.

[14] Lastly, we accept the evidence that the roles and responsibilities for senior, experienced Technician Aircraft and Technician Avionics soldiers have evolved in recent years, following Army’s acquisition of more complex and sophisticated aviation platforms.

Conclusion

[15] We accept that Artificers are key enablers and their skills, experience and commensurate knowledge are essential for Army to operate within a “*complex aviation technical regulatory framework*”.¹⁰ We are persuaded that the establishment of a further skill grade 6, at pay grade 8, will recognise these increased levels of responsibility and accountability; provide for a senior technical authority on aircraft and avionics matters within squadrons, regiments and brigades; and remove “*inequity across the Services*”.¹¹

[16] Determination 16 of 2021 will give effect to our decision from 28 October 2021.

MS I. ASBURY, PRESIDENT
MR A. MORRIS, MEMBER
MAJGEN G.FOGARTY AO RETD, MEMBER

Appearances:

Mr J. Phillips SC for the ADF assisted by Mr P. Blady.

Mr H. Miller for the Commonwealth assisted by Mr J. O’Reilly.

¹ DMR/OUT/2021/12 Listing Application – *Royal Australian Army Electrical and Mechanical Engineers – Artificer Aero pay case* dated 12 July 2021.

² In October 2015, Chief of Army commissioned Air Chief Marshal Sir Angus Houston (Ret'd) to conduct a review of Army aviation. The review concluded in April 2016. Additionally, five RAEME employment categories were subject to internal review in 2017: Aircraft Structural Fitter; Aircraft Life Support Fitter; Technician Aircraft: Technician Avionics; and Artificer Aero

³ ADF Submission *Royal Australian Army Electrical and Mechanical Engineers – Artificer Aero* undated (ADF 1) page 2 paragraphs 1.5 to 1.7.

⁴ Commonwealth Submission *Royal Australian Corps of Electrical and Mechanical Engineers – Artificer Aero* dated September 2021 (CWLTH 1).

⁵ ADF 1 page 5 paragraph 2.7.

⁶ ADF 1 page 15 paragraph 4.1.

⁷ ADF 1 page 15 paragraph 4.2

⁸ ADF 1 page 6 paragraph 2.13.

⁹ ADF 1 page 22 paragraph 5.3

¹⁰ ADF 1 page 22 paragraph 5.1

¹¹ Transcript 20 September 2021 page 3 line 3.