

Australian Federal Police: a new approach

WHEN an employer announces a commitment to generalists and to multiculturalism, a concern to increase the number of women recruits, support for undergraduates, and grand plans for an all-graduate intake, these are pretty good credentials in today's market.

And it is reassuring to find that in this case we are not dealing with the uninformed enthusiasm of an inexperienced recruiter making noises in the market.

Instead, such claims are the stated goals of the graduate recruitment initiatives of the Australian Federal Police, and part of an ambitious graduate recruitment program to be managed by Ian Hansen, of Burson-Marsteller - the person who successfully introduced the large scale recruitment of generalists to the Australian Public Service in the late seventies.

Those were the days in which the Australian Public Service actively discriminated against graduates of all disciplines - not just Arts graduates!

While it seems hard to believe now, at that time Commonwealth legislation specifically limited the intake of graduates to the APS to no more than 10% of the total intake in any year. In many instances a degree became a disqualification. The breakthrough in the recruitment of generalist graduates to the APS, well before the private sector would have anything much to do with them, was a major development in the graduate market and perhaps Ian Hansen can once again pull it off.

A nice idea, but can the AFP be sold on campus?

The AFP's commitment to graduate recruitment flows from the increasing sophistication, complexity and internationalisation of criminal activity these days, together with the AFP's increasing investigative and intelligence gathering responsibilities rather than a day to day community policing role.

Graduates are not being sought to go "on the beat", earning their keep in the traditional policing mode.

The Australian Federal Police is likely to become one of Australia's largest employers of graduates, ranking alongside the Public Service and the banking sector.

This was acknowledged in a recent newsletter item published by the Graduate Careers Council of Australia; the text of which is reprinted here in full.

Unlike many employers who fail to make use of the very particular skills which graduates have, Ian Hansen argues that the whole foundation of the AFP's graduate initiatives is its need for the research, analytical and investigative skills which graduates are so keen to use in their work.

As a recent article pointed out, "We are getting a better sort of criminal these days - better dressed, respectable, meticulous and organised, and international in outlook," and the AFP has to be more than a match for them.

Drugs, Organised Crime and Fraud

The investigative work of the AFP centres on drug trafficking, organised crime, and fraud, together with general investigations which may cover a range of matters from the illegal export of birds to claims of rigging a union election.

However, it is drug trafficking and organised crime in particular which gives the AFP's work its international character. Drug trafficking and organised crime tend to be international, and the investigation of them is a major research and intelligence gathering exercise, involving the co-ordination of the work of agencies in other states and countries. This research and intelligence work is surely the province of graduates.

The restructuring of the AFP

The graduate recruitment initiatives of the AFP are only one element of a restructuring of their organisation to create the capacity to deal with the more dynamic, organised and international nature of criminal activity.

Through the introduction of fixed

term contract appointments, the AFP is creating an environment in which performance and results are the crucial ingredients of success, rather than one in which promotion and success flow simply from time-serving. Without this development, the AFP's chances of mounting an effective graduate recruitment campaign would be very limited, and Ian Hansen recognises that "if we weren't concerned with performance rather than conformance, we would have no place in the graduate market".

Women, Multiculturalism and Generalists

The particular importance of the AFP's recruitment initiatives is that they are specifically directed at those graduates who have faced the greatest difficulties in the labour market.

According to Ian Hansen, the particular under-representation of those from a non English speaking Background is both socially and operationally unacceptable. Unless the AFP reflects the multiculturalism of Australian society, it is going to lack the knowledge, skills, acceptance and credibility which are crucial to its effectiveness.

Undergraduate Program

In addition to a committed graduate program, the AFP has announced an undergraduate program for a minimum of 140 undergraduates to commence degree courses each year in Police Studies or criminal justice administration at universities in Victoria, Western Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. •