Navy Seeing Success in Flexible Career Progression, Education, Admiral Says



Second class petty officers assigned to Recruit Training Command take the first class petty officer Navywide advancement exam in a training classroom inside the USS Arleigh Burke recruit barracks. The Navy is starting to see results from laws, policies and processes that make career progression more flexible and more accommodating to education. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Camilo Fernan

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy is starting to see results from laws, policies and processes that make career progression more flexible and more accommodating to education, and the sea service is liking what it sees, the Navy's deputy chief of personnel said.

New provisions in law enacted in 2019 that allow personnel to interrupt their careers for such activities as advancing their education are bearing fruit, Rear Adm. Jeffrey W. Hughes, deputy chief of naval personnel, said June 8, speaking during a webinar sponsored by #NatSecGirlSquad, an organization that "builds and supports competent diversity in national security and defense through its professional development community and strategic advisory services," its website says.

Hughes cited an example of an officer eligible for promotion with a "compelling reason" – such as pursuit of an advanced degree – could defer consideration by a promotion board so that the officer was not disadvantaged by being behind his peer group in career progression.

An officer who, for example, pursued a master's degree for two

years immediately after commissioning normally would be two years behind his year group in achieving career milestones in the fleet. By being able to defer promotion consideration at the normal milestones, the officer could compete for promotion with officers originally commissioned two years later. The same could apply to an officer who pursued advanced education mid-career.

“This has been incredibly powerful,” Hughes said. “The first time we’ve used it is this past year. We have had seven people that have used it, and all seven of them were for in-residence graduate education at various levels, some right out of their commissioning source, some who took advantage of an opportunity at a high-end civilian institution, and some who were in residence at brick-and-mortar establishments such as the Naval War College or [Naval] Postgraduate School.”

Hughes said that the Navy also has seen great value in a “career intermission program going for a number of years,” describing it as a “two-or three-year off ramp.”

He said it “was not necessarily education-based but that probably more than half of the folks who take us up on this career intermission program are doing it so they can pursue education.”

Sailors using the career intermission program transfer to the Individual Ready Reserve for two years while taking a pay cut but retaining full medical benefits and funds for making the change-of-station move.

Hughes said the career intermission program has been used by many participants for pursuing advanced degrees or gaining the education that leads to commissioning as an officer.

“We freeze them in time so that when they come back [to the Navy] they are not at a disadvantage from a promotion or advancement perspective,” he said. “Frankly, the numbers have been compelling. For the hundreds of folks that have taken us

up on this [program] and come back, the promotion and advancement rates are in the high 90s [in percentage].”

“We see a great return on investment,” he said, for the Navy and the individual Sailor.

Hughes also said that educational incentives are proving to be powerful than monetary incentives in retention of Sailors, such as sending a Sailor on a demanding assignment overseas and rewarding the sacrifice with an educational opportunity afterward.