

Correctional Education in Western Australia

Introduction

The 1989 Council of Europe Recommendations on Prison Education states clearly that every effort should be made to provide education in prisons which is of a very high standard. The recommendations state that “all prisoners should have access to education.....” and “Education for prisoners should be like the education provided for similar age-groups in the outside world and the range of learning opportunities should be as wide as possible” and “Education in prison shall aim to develop the whole person bearing in mind his or her social, economic and cultural context” and “Development programmes should be provided to ensure that prison educators adopt appropriate adult education methods”.

Nowhere in Australia is an appropriate context specific teacher training given to teachers who opt to teach in Prisons. Research has shown that in some places there are short induction courses for qualified teachers to teach in prisons. We see today’s session as a step in the direction to address both the lack of training which currently exists but also a start of a process which will have correctional educators better recognised for the work they provide to the community.

Professional Development (PD)

This is the situation we have:

1. Prisoners are not a homogenous group of people
2. The social, economic and cultural baggage they bring with them to prison may be widely different
3. Life for prisoners becomes very complex once inside and for a large proportion it is so prior to conviction
4. In most prisons the prison regime is rigid, many times uncomplimentary to education, strictly enforced and so, can be unaccommodating
5. Prisoners are adults or on the threshold of adulthood
6. For most of them their experience of school was negative

This PD aims to commence an introductory training programme that will better prepare teachers for teaching in prisons and possibly create a framework for future in-service courses.

The PD training reflects and follows the principles and recommendations of Lifelong Learning which has become a corner stone of adult education. Rather than pulling, pushing and squeezing students in order to fit them into established educational patterns, education should be tailored to fit the students.

The PD seeks to establish as a fact the need to consider the prison as a special teaching/learning context with a complex life of its own which is far removed from any other context. Prison teachers need to be trained specifically in adult education methodology and pedagogic practices. Teachers need to learn and be mindful during their work of cultural and gender specific aspects of learning.

The beneficiaries of this project are prisoners, teachers, educators, prison staff and prison administration. Staff and administration of prisons benefit because it has been established over a very long period of time that prisoners who put their mind to education and training

are better behaved and easier to work with. In the longer term the better the prison system of education the more employable and 'acceptable' ex-prisoners are in the community. Teachers working in prison will enjoy a better working relationship with their students if curricula and practices are more respectful of the latter's age, talents and accumulated knowledge.

Education and Vocational Training Unit (EVTU)

The EVTU's nationally recognised 'throughcare' educational program, is unique in the extent to which it has placed a consistent and long term emphasis on forging cross sector partnerships and coordination of pre- and post-release programming with Commonwealth, state and local officials, public and private vocational training providers, employers, tertiary institutions, and non-government community-based service providers.

These partnerships have allowed it to access funding and services beyond those usually found in other jurisdictions in Australia. They have helped supplement EVTU financial and human resources and worked to expand the reputation of the EVTU in academic and vocational circles. The partnerships include programs and projects which have provided prisons with Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers, training for Youth at Risk, Driver Education, higher education, prisoner preparation for employment, training for female prisoners in non-traditional trades and a number of adult basic education and vocational smaller projects.

While it is the Department's key performance indicators which are used to evaluate the satisfactory progress of the EVTU's programs and organisational outcomes, as an educational organisation, the EVTU's focus always remains on the individual prisoner. Our role is to promote positive life change in prisoners by instilling in our students the attitudes, knowledge and skills to live different kinds of lives. Our goal is assist our students to achieve more fulfilling and responsible lives as better people, who are better parents, better partners, good workers and contributing members of our communities.

Goals of the EVTU Program

1. Increase education attainment among prisoners
2. Increase opportunities for employment and higher wages among ex-prisoners as a means of addressing the cycle of inter-generational crime and poverty
3. Reduce recidivism and improve the quality of life among the disadvantaged who reside in low income communities with high rates of anti- social behaviour, crime and imprisonment
4. Demonstrate that there are effective and cost-efficient methods for addressing criminal behaviour and providing support services for current and former prisoners.

Key Features

1. In-prison and when participating in educational activities in the community, education and training is provided by nationally accredited registered training organisations
2. Adult basic, vocational, developmental and tertiary education support services
3. All prisoners are eligible to participate in education
4. Unit completions leading to certificate & qualification attainment are a primary focus
5. Qualification attainment is aligned with State and local labour market trends
6. Transfer of unit completions from prison to TAFE, private institutes and universities
7. Links to local employers whenever possible
8. Mentoring, tutoring and re-entry support services
9. Adapts non-accredited courses into State and/or nationally recognised accredited training if they are beneficial to prisoners lives post release
10. Independent evaluation focuses on implementation (replication and scale), outcomes (attainment of qualifications, degrees, employment), and impact (recidivism)

Why offer education and vocational training in prison?

Prisoners are generally from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and are significantly undereducated compared to the general population. In Western Australia, only 20 percent of prisoners are assessed as functionally literate. An extensive body of research suggests that education is a key to improving many of the long term outcomes for this vulnerable population, their families, and their communities. While locally, approximately 40 percent of ex-prisoners come in contact with the correctional system within two years, either for committing a new crime or violating conditions of their release, internationally research studies and an increasing body of local data, indicate support for a strong inverse correlation between recidivism and education.

The positive impact of education on reducing recidivism is increasingly a focus of government policy internationally. In Western Australia, the daily cost of keeping a prisoner incarcerated is approximately \$350 per day. With the average prison sentence approximately 3 years, the daily prisoner population at over 6300, and the budget of the Department at \$957 million per annum, the cost to the State is unacceptably high. Internationally, due to policy reviews and financial demands placed on governments, the trend is to try and lower prisoner numbers and reduce recidivism rates of ex-prisoners by introducing evidence-based and cost-efficient policies. The practical outcome of a reliance on these policies is reflected in government decisions to review who the system is

sentencing to prison and providing those who are incarcerated, with the education, skills and pro social behaviours necessary to reintegrate successfully into the community.

Costs and Benefits

Though the major focus for Government is on the education to employment dynamic to reduce recidivism for prisoners, the true benefits of education are much wider and transformational than its impact upon public safety. **First**, educational attainment can increase both employability and earnings of the prisoner so can address personal welfare and public safety. **Second**, increasing the education attainment of parents can impact the education achievement of their children. This can help stem the increase in intergenerational crime among the segments of the prisoner population who are the most likely to reoffend. Research studies increasingly reveal that education levels of parents are a strong predictor of the educational achievements of their children. **Finally**, because most ex-prisoners are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and communities, increasing their educational attainment, acquisition of skills and pro social behaviour can also positively impact on their communities.

The Government must start realising that the provision of correctional education of prisoners by professional educators and administrators is not a cost but an investment in the future health and well-being of the community. The long term benefits realised by the provision of the correctional education program developed by the EVTU is a valuable public asset, well recognised by other jurisdictions, and should not be put at risk.

Research indicates that education plays a key role in reducing reoffending and facilitating effective rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners back into the, particularly those from lower socio economic status and Indigenous Australians, both who are overrepresented in WA correctional system and have below average levels of educational attainment.

The Rand Corporation's report 'Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education' (October 2013), the largest meta-analysis of prisoner education programs undertaken, and the ongoing series of Adult Criminal Justice reports by the Washington State Institute of Public Policy (WSIPP) which contains data on international prisoner programs, including Australia, together reveal that well designed correctional education programs are effective in reducing recidivism. The latest (6/2016) WSIPP benefit cost study reveals that correctional and vocational education, evaluated separately, are the two most effective and cost efficient programs delivered within prisons. The RAND and WSIPP reports reiterate the results of data on prisoner education's impact on reoffending here in Western Australia.

Locally, in a review of data for the last 3 years, ex-prisoners who engaged in education and completed 5 or more units of study while in prison, had a lower rate of return to prison of approximately 11.5% when compared to prisoners who did not engage or complete a unit of study (DCS 2015). Of note, the reduced rates of recidivism for prisoners released in 2013 and evaluated in 2015, were higher for female and Indigenous prisoners who had completed 5 or more units in vocational training. These two groups are key focus groups of DCS, due to Indigenous peoples comprising 38% of the total prisoner population, and the rate of incarceration for female prisoners now surpassing that of male prisoners. The average reduction of 11.5% for all prisoners in all subjects in the State's prisons is similar to the rate listed by the Rand Corp. report on prisoner education. This result, which measures the impact of educational participation on ex-prisoners lives post release, has a significant

financial implication to the State as it costs approximately \$115,000 annually to incarcerate a prisoner in the State's prison system.

The Disadvantaged in the State Prison System

The issue of prisoner rehabilitation is much more than economic, with the United Nations calling for Australia to address the injustice of Indigenous over-imprisonment, and with Western Australia having the highest Indigenous incarceration rate in the nation; the State risks increasing international embarrassment. The Department's correctional education program is the only program that consistently provides an effective level of service to the different Indigenous populations incarcerated in the State's prisons.

Prisoners are generally from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and are significantly undereducated compared to the general population. In Western Australia, only 20 percent of prisoners are assessed as functionally literate. An extensive body of research suggests that education is a key to improving many of the long term outcomes for this vulnerable population, their families, and their communities. While locally, approximately 40 percent of ex-prisoners come in contact with the correctional system within two years, either for committing a new crime or violating conditions of their release, internationally research studies and an increasing body of local data, indicate support for a strong inverse correlation between recidivism and education. In total, the EVTU facilitates more student curriculum hours of instruction on an annual basis than some of the states' TAFE Institutes.

Over the last five years, the education program has managed to annually enrol approximately 40% of the total Indigenous prisoner population, maintaining this level while the total number of Indigenous prisoners has increased on an annual basis. The capacity to retain high levels of voluntary participation by Indigenous prisoners is based on the EVTU's focus on the educationally at risk and its consistent introduction of new initiatives in education that encourage this diverse population to address their educational deficiencies. The program uses a combination of nationally accredited training packages, the development of its own accredited training, and adapts selected non-accredited courses to meet both the needs of the individual prisoner and the requirements to meet the standards set by the national vocational education and training system.

The EVTU has developed a local Aboriginal Noongar language and cultural training program that has drawn interest from both local and interstate universities. The Program includes regular visits from prominent Noongar leaders who mentor the prisoners; some visitors are from local universities, with two having been awarded Order of Australia Medals.

The EVTU development and use of Aboriginal educational resources helps attract the educationally at risk prisoners that require assistance but often do not engage. Due to the lifestyle when living in the community, these prisoners usually do not participate in education outside of prison. The EVTU program is a real 'second chance' opportunity to fill the gaps in education. Departmental data on rates of return to prison reveal that Aboriginal prisoners benefit the most from a structured program of education. This is important due to the fact that this group is also the most likely to reoffend when in the community. This being the case, the development and use of these Aboriginal resources is a proven effective and cost efficient use of funding by the Department.

Increasing cost efficiency

- The EVTU is introducing an external studies component to its business practices. An EVTU team effort has seen the staff at Hakea responsible for the development, administration and assessment of external units of study for prisoners residing in any of the 13 public prisons state-wide. This will offer more educational opportunities to a wider group of prisoners, who might otherwise not engage in the educational process while incarcerated. Prisoners non- engagement may be due to a number of reasons, including a reluctance to attend a local education centre; the local centre lacking appropriate infrastructure and classroom spaces due to the record number of prisoners incarcerated in the system, security restrictions on movement, work demands or other reasons. In addition to the external studies program, Hakea staff are providing a newly developed induction program for remandees who now total approximately 1500 in total across the prison system. The program is projected to provide more students, an increase in participation, a higher profile for education, and further assistance in prisoner management to local prison administrators.
- The EVTU, with the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), is piloting the introduction of a stand-alone digital learning network at Bandyup, Greenough and Wooroloo Prisons. This initiative will include the introduction of prison approved laptops, which will allow prisoners to study away from the education centre and after hours and on weekends. The laptops do not allow access to the internet or Wi-Fi but do allow the prisoner access to their course work. Some prisoners who will be able to participate in education solely through the use of their personal electronic devices. This initiative will be of no cost to the EVTU as the materials and content development are to be provided through a Commonwealth grant to assist the disadvantaged enrol in higher education. This is the first step in a new direction for correctional education in DCS. The use of personal electronic devices to expand educational participation among the increasing number of prisoners in the State's prisons will be of significant value to DCS when it is combined with the introduction of the new external studies program which was introduced earlier. The combination of EVTU developed digital material and resources which meet the criminogenic needs of the individual prisoner with USQ tertiary preparation course material will place DCS near the forefront of correctional digital and electronic educational provision.

Other EVTU initiatives which are not widely shared with other jurisdictions:

- Service Level Agreements with each public prison Superintendent were introduced in 2011 as a way of articulating system-wide objectives for prisoner education. These Agreements reflect individual needs and requirements of each respective prison..
- Apprenticeships and Traineeships for prisoners
- Driver education where prisoners obtain learners permits and drivers licences.
- The development and delivery of an emotional intelligence training course to meet criminogenic needs of prisoners- Standing on Solid Ground
- Developed accredited external studies units to increase participation in education
- Regular research and working partnerships with the higher education sector to discuss cooperative projects and develop appropriate learning resources

Points to Ponder

- In the wider community, education is the accepted process for facilitating learning, introducing change and preparing students for socially accepted roles in the community. Education, and this includes correctional education, uses mixed methods and modes of teaching and learning, knowledge transfer and skill acquisition from outside the core educational curriculum, to support students in their efforts to complete their education and become contributing members of the community. These methods and modes can include the use of practical contextual learning for the high number of undereducated prisoners with lower levels of educational achievement, the use of team teaching to integrate vocational skills with literacy and numeracy, improved interpersonal communication to assist with personal, social and familial interaction, and life and development skills training; all provided to assist the student with their personal, social and work life after completion of their study.

The EVTU, after reviewing the consistently high recidivism rates both locally and internationally, is expanding its provision of multiple and emotional intelligence training across prisons. The course targets anti- social behaviour while increasing interpersonal communication and self-awareness. The courses are generally aimed at Departmental identified high risk groups; Indigenous, female and younger prisoners though prisoners expressing an interest in self-improvement are not turned away.

The Education Centres are well situated to provide this type of training in a successful manner; they are professionally trained teachers and most prisoners in WA, due to their educational deficiencies, require educational tuition. The education centres provide environments that offer the prisoner an opportunity to interact in a more 'normalised' fashion when compared to the rest of the prison site; the manner of interaction used by trained correctional teachers enhances the student's internal motivation, while they also use positive reinforcement to encourage a prisoner's learning. Quite importantly, participation in the course is voluntary, not mandated and so the motivation to participate and potentially change is qualitatively different.

- Now is the time for Governments to consider an increased use of professional correctional educators to undertake a more primary role in the overall management of the rehabilitation process of an undereducated and increasingly diverse group of prisoners. This move toward teachers increasing their participation in re-socialisation, the promotion of positive change and improvement in education, training and post release employment, would mirror the accepted learning and skills acquisition practices in the wider community. Quite importantly, this would additionally serve to assist in 'normalising' the life experiences of the mostly disadvantaged prisoner populations who have missed out on this experience.
- The current system lacks incentives for prisoners to engage in education which is a voluntary activity in prison, even when they are assessed as educationally at risk and so are at a distinct disadvantaged when seeking employment and/or other law abiding activities. Prisoners should be offered the opportunity to earn credits towards an early release should they complete approved career, education, vocational and life skills programs which address identified deficiencies assessed by educational assessors and other professional staff.

Indiana Department of Corrections Education Incentive System

Program	Earned Credit Time
Basic Literacy and Life Skills	6 months
GED	6 months
Career and Vocational Program	Maximum 6 months
High School Diploma	1 year
Associate Degree	1 year
Bachelor Degree	2 years

Education is effective as a population control tool

The Indiana Department of Correction is a good example of how policies can be created and implemented, effectively linking the crime-reducing power of prison-based education to the cost-saving potential of time-off sentence credits. Through this mechanism, the costs of the educational program are more than covered by immediate and easily quantified “bed day” reductions. Further reductions in prison populations are realized post-release as recidivism is reduced, creating a virtuous cycle of crime reduction and prison cost reductions.

Unlike some other systems, there are no mandatory requirements for enrolment in and completion of education programs in Indiana. Rather, the Legislature created an incentive system for participation and completion. Under Indiana Code 35-50-6-3.3, an offender in Credit Class I who has demonstrated a pattern consistent with rehabilitation and successfully completes requirements in identified education programs may obtain credit time that is applied directly to the actual time served, as related to the individual’s earliest possible release date (see Table 1). During the 2008-2009 school year, completers of Indiana’s adult correctional education programs generated nearly 1.3 million credit/bed days. The planning division of the Indiana DOC estimated that those credit days and early releases generated \$68 million in averted costs. Indiana’s overall recidivism rate hovers at 37 percent. A longitudinal study of 6,560 offenders released in 2005 to Indiana’s five metropolitan counties-13 has revealed that the recidivism rate for GED completers is 20 percent less than the general population and the recidivism rate for college degree completers is 44 percent less than the general population.

Recommended Readings for Correctional Education Professionals

Davis, Lois M., Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, Jeremy N.V. Miles. 2013. "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide education to Incarcerated Adults". Rand Corporation- and Bureau of Justice Assistance. www.rand.org

After conducting a comprehensive literature search, the authors undertook a meta-analysis to examine the association between correctional education and reductions in recidivism, improvements in employment after release from prison, and learning in math and in reading. Their findings support the premise that receiving correctional education while incarcerated reduces an individual's risk of recidivating. They also found that those receiving correctional education had improved odds of obtaining employment after release. The authors also examined the benefits of computer-assisted learning and compared the costs of prison education programs with the costs of reincarceration.

Lee, Stephanie, Steve Aos, Elizabeth Drake, Marna Miller & Laurie Anderson. 2013. "Inventory of Evidence-Based and Research-Based Programs for Adult Corrections Washington State Institute for Public Policy". December 2013 www.wsipp.wa.gov

A series of recent public policy reforms has moved Washington State toward the use of "evidence-based" programs. The central concept behind these reforms is to identify and implement strategies shown through rigorous research to improve state-wide outcomes (e.g., crime rates or high school graduation rates) cost-effectively.

The 2013 Legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) to (1) develop definitions for "evidence-based" and "research-based" and (2) create an inventory of evidence-based and research-based programs to be used by the Department of Corrections. This report contains WSIPP's definitions, as well as an inventory of evidence-based and research-based programs for adult corrections. The research indicates that 'correctional and vocational education are the two (2) most effective evidence based prison delivered programs available to fulfilling the goal of reducing recidivism rates of adult prisoners and introducing a cost effective use of state resources.'

AUSTRALIAN RESEARCH

“National Strategy for Vocational Education & Training for Adult Prisoners and Offenders in Australia”. March 2001

http://acea.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/National_Strategy_VET_Corrections.pdf

The Commonwealth, State and Territory vocational education and training authorities and corrections authorities in the States and Territories.

The aim of this report was to develop a national strategy for vocational education and training for adult prisoners and offenders in Australia which clearly articulates objectives, takes account of recent changes and priorities in the vocational education and training sector.

Callan, Victor and John Gardner. 2005. “Vocational education and training provision and recidivism in Queensland correctional institutions”. National Centre for Vocational Education Research 25 July 2005

<http://www.ncver.edu.au>

This report examines links between prisoners’ participation in the vocational education and training programs available within the Queensland prison system and their chances of returning to prison. The findings reveal that being involved in VET before initial release decreases the chances of returning to prison from 32% to 23%. The research supports efforts to promote the value of VET and its role in prisoner rehabilitation, and to reduce barriers to accessing VET in corrections.

Dawe, Susan. 2007. “Vocational education and training for adult prisoners and offenders in Australia National Centre for Vocational Education Research”. 15 October 2007.

<http://www.ncver.edu.au>

This book of research readings provides clear evidence that adult prisoners and offenders who participate in vocational education and training (VET) during their sentence are less likely to re-offend. A reduction in recidivism represents significant cost savings to the community. This book highlights improvements in the delivery of VET for adult prisoners and offenders in Australia.

Graffam, Joseph, AJ Shinkfield and Leslie Hardcastle. 2008. “The perceived employability of ex-prisoners and offenders”. *International Journal Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*- December 2008

A large-scale study was conducted to examine the perceived employability of ex-prisoners and offenders. Four participant groups comprising 596 (50.4%) employers, 234 (19.8%) employment service workers, 176 (14.9%) corrections workers, and 175 (14.8%) prisoners and offenders completed a questionnaire assessing the likelihood of a hypothetical job seeker’s both obtaining and maintaining employment; the importance of specific skills and characteristics to employability; and the likelihood that ex-prisoners, offenders, and the general workforce exhibit these skills and characteristics.

Other

Steurer, Stephen J. and Linda J. Smith. 2003. "Education Reduces Crime, Three-State Recidivism Study - Executive Summary". Correctional Education Association & Management and Training Corporation Institute

<http://www.ceanational.org/PDFs/EdReducesCrime.pdf>

The first large scale, rigorous study to review education's impact on ex-prisoners recidivism rates. The report evaluated outcomes from three (3) American States in the USA and found that education, independent of other programs, could have significant impact on the behaviour of prisoners post release. Education participants had a 29% overall drop in recidivism when compared to the control group of non-participants. In addition and quite importantly, for each of the three years wage earnings were reported, data showed that education participants had higher earnings than non-participants

The potential benefits of reducing the rate of re-imprisonment among Indigenous prisoners are particularly noteworthy. A ten percent reduction in NSW, for example,

Evaluation of Effect of Correctional Education Programs on Post- Release Recidivism and Employment: An Empirical Study in Indiana

Nally, John, Susan Lockwood, Katie Knutson, Taping Ho. 2012. *Journal of Correctional Education*

www.ashland.edu/.../gill...education/journal-correctional-education

The 2011 study "Evaluation of Effect of Correctional Education Programs on Post-Release Recidivism and Employment", evaluated the outcome measures of 2155 ex-prisoners and revealed that the recidivism rate was 29.7% for prisoner/students while the recidivism rate reached 67.8% among those who had not engaged in education. The study revealed education and employment were the most important predictors of an ex-prisoner's post release recidivism.