

## **Correctional Education in Western Australia: A proven effective and cost efficient approach to the rehabilitation of the State's prisoner population**

The Department's Education and Vocational Training Unit's correctional education program seeks to demonstrate that access to a holistic education program, which includes a supportive re-entry service, can increase educational qualifications, reduce recidivism, and improve opportunities for employability and higher wages. By validating what works through an independent evaluation being undertaken with Edith Cowan University and other Eastern State universities, EVTU also hopes to encourage national replication of a true holistic approach to prisoner education.

The EVTU's strategic decision to forge a partnership with Edith Cowan and to participate in a national longitudinal research study headed by the University of New South Wales and Deakin University in Victoria, which commenced in July 2014, will provide important empirical evidence on the impact of educational attainment and prisoner employment preparation programs for ex-prisoner's reintegrating to the community. While a growing number of international studies have demonstrated that education is a critical factor in helping ex-prisoners adopt more law abiding lifestyles, no similar longitudinal research has been conducted in Australia. These two research studies will provide the State, and the nation, with an opportunity to further introduce public policies which are supported by outcome evaluations that clearly demonstrate both effectiveness and a determination to ensure that taxpayers receive an adequate return on investment.

The EVTU's nationally recognised 'throughcare' educational program, is unique in its 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.

### **Goals of the 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
8. Mentoring, tutoring and re-entry support services
9. Adapts non-accredited courses into State and/or nationally recognised training
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 nearing 5500, and the budget of the Department nearing \$900 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 increasingly to 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

The true benefits of education are transformational and extend beyond an impact upon public safety. First, increasing educational attainment can increase both employability and earnings. 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 and the Department 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. The independent Rand Corporation's report 'Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education'(October 2013), which is the largest meta-analysis of prisoner education programs undertaken, and the Washington State Institute of Public Policy's (WSIPP) studies, which include data on international prisoner programs, including Australia, together reveal that well designed correctional education programs are effective in reducing recidivism. The WSIPP study reveals that correctional and vocational education, evaluated separately, are the two most effective and cost efficient programs delivered within prisons. These two research studies reiterate the results of data compiled on prison education's impact on reoffending here in Australia.

In Western Australia, in a review of the last 5 years, data on average revealed that ex-prisoners who engaged in education and completed 5 or more units of study while incarcerated in prison, had a lower rate of return to prison of approximately 13% when compared to prisoners who did not engage or complete a unit of study (Department 2014). Quite importantly, the reduced rates of recidivism for prisoners released in 2012 but evaluated in 2014, were higher for female and Indigenous prisoners who had completed 5 or more units in vocational training. These two groups, classified as key focus groups by the Department, due to their high rates of imprisonment; Indigenous peoples comprise 40% of the total prisoner population (over 2100 in total), and the rate of incarceration for female prisoners now significantly surpasses that of male prisoners. The average reduction of 13% for all prisoners in all subjects in all the State's prisons virtually matches the rate found by the well-respected Rand Corporation report on prisoner education. This result, which measures the impact of educational participation on ex-prisoners lives post release, has a significant financial implication for 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. Over the last five years, the education program has annually enrolled 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 current capability to engage in innovation and flexibility, which allows for a consistent introduction of new initiatives in education that encourage this diverse population to address their educational deficiencies. The program uses nationally accredited training packages, develops its own accredited training, and adapts selected non-accredited courses to meet both the needs both of the individual prisoner and the requirements to meet the standards set by the national vocational education and training system.

The true value of the education program to the wider community rests with its capacity to assist the more undereducated and likely to reoffend populations within the Indigenous and disadvantaged populations in prison. The importance in providing assistance to these groups was well articulated by Ross Fitzgerald in *The Australian*, "we need to tackle structural inequality in our society. This is because the socially and economically disadvantaged sections of our nation have by far the highest rates of incarceration... if Aboriginal Australians had a similar incarceration rate as non-Aboriginal Australians, just imagine the funds that would become available..." This statement is in response to the Indigenous imprisonment rate in Australia being approximately 13 times higher when compared to the non- Aboriginal imprisonment rate. The situation is worse in Western Australia, which has the highest over representation of Indigenous peoples in Australia with the rate of imprisonment being 18 times that of non- Aboriginal adults.

For the last 10 years, EVTU has provided the largest Aboriginal adult basic education program in the State. In total, it facilitates more student curriculum hours of instruction on annual basis than some TAFE Institutes. It has developed a local Aboriginal Noongar language and cultural training program that is drawing interest from higher education providers. The Program includes regular visits from prominent Noongar leaders who mentor the prisoners; some 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. With the guidance and assistance of EVTU administrators, the staff at Hakea will be 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. This non- engagement may be due to a reluctance for a number of reasons, to attend a local education centre; the local centre lacking appropriate infrastructure and classrooms due to the record number of prisoners incarcerated in the system, security restrictions, work demands or other reasons. Hakea staff will provide a newly developed induction program for remandees but no other face to face delivery will be offered. 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. No new permanent or casual staff, or additional funding is required.
- Curtailing access to the wider EVTU curriculum to remandees at Hakea is based on a decision to better target the use of limited resources and staff to sentenced prisoners. Remandees can often serve very short periods of time in Hakea due to a significant number of these inmates being from low risk populations. Enrolling remandees often can result in an expensive expenditure of time and human and material resources on inmates who do not complete their courses of study.
- EVTU is planning a pilot program using a prison's internal television system as a resource for educational promotion, teaching and learning. EVTU will develop the resources to be broadcast, some of the content will be associated with the external studies curriculum developed at Hakea, others will 'advertise' current and future activities to be provided at the prison by the education and training centre. This will target the significant number of prisoners who remain in the living units during the day and are 'non- engagers' in education. This EVTU initiative will provide to the prison an activity to keep prisoners constructively occupied during the day- a KPI of the prison. This project will require no extra staff or resources after the initial development phase, outside of a need to update the content on a regular basis. This initiative will provide a better financial return on the Department's investment in education at this prison.
- The EVTU will be introducing the use of tablets and a stand-alone network of study at Bandyup Women's prison. This initiative will allow prisoners to study away from the education centre and after hours and on weekends. There will be 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 Department as the materials

and content development are to be provided through a partnership agreement between the EVTU and two of its university research partners. This is the first step in a new direction for correctional education in the Department. The use of personal electronic devices to expand educational participation in prisons will be of significant value to the Department when combined with the introduction of the new external studies program which is being introduced this year. Western Australia will be a leader nationally in the area of digital and electronic educational provision.

- The EVTU introduced Service Level Agreements with each public prison Superintendent in 2011 as a way of articulating its system-wide objectives for prisoner education. These Agreements reflect the individual needs and requirements of each respective prison and they are reviewed and renewed on an annual basis.

### **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 introduction of multiple and emotional intelligence training across prisons. The course targets anti- social behaviour while increasing interpersonal communication and self-awareness. The training improves the likelihood of ex-prisoners retaining employment post release. The courses are aimed at Departmental identified high risk groups; Indigenous, female and younger prisoners. 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 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 teachers with their student/prisoners enhances the students internal motivation, while teachers are importantly, also well experienced in the use of positive reinforcement to encourage learning. Quite importantly, participation in the course is voluntary, not mandated and so the motivation to participate and potentially change is qualitatively different.

- The use of professional correctional educators undertaking a more primary role in the overall management of rehabilitation process of an undereducated and increasingly diverse group of prisoners with the aim of resocialisation, 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. Any attempts to reduce the cohesiveness of the EVTU by the introduction of a decentralised model of management headed by non-professional education staff, risks diluting its capacity to engage in continuous improvement and reduce the innovation and flexibility which together has provided the platform for its long record of success.
- 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 a day off for every day they participate in an educational program which addresses the deficiencies needs assessed by educational assessors the learning
- The financial review should not exclude areas within the Department where the traditional overspends have always existed. While there are efficiencies to be considered within the service provision area, the vast majority of the overspend within the Department this last FY, and most other recent FY's, lies outside of this area and the staff responsible for rehabilitation and reintegration. It's disappointing to read that a wider net is not going to be cast to review some of the more difficult issues within the Department.
- In relation to commissioning, the website from the United Kingdom demonstrates that it has a higher rate of recidivism than that which currently exists in Western Australia. Almost half of all adults leaving prison there are reconvicted within a year, and for short prison sentences, it's 3 out of 5. This translates into almost 60% of short term prisoners returning to prison. Approximately 70% of the 85,406 prisoners are serving sentences of 1 year or less.

A focus on incarcerating prisoners who have a record of returning to prison (because 3/5th of all re-offences are committed by prisoners with 11 or more previous offenses), inevitably translates into a focus on the disadvantaged from bad neighbourhoods or /areas and on drug addicts. In WA this approach would lead to even higher rates of Indigenous imprisonment, as they are traditionally the group who are sentenced to shorter sentences.

## References

### **Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide education to Incarcerated Adults**

Rand Corporation- and Bureau of Justice Assistance 2013

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.

Lois M. Davis, Robert Bozick, Jennifer L. Steele, Jeremy N.V. Miles

[www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org)

### **Inventory of Evidence-Based and Research-Based Programs for Adult Corrections**

Washington State Institute for Public Policy December 2013

Stephanie Lee, Steve Aos, Elizabeth Drake, Marna Miller, Laurie Anderson

[www.wsipp.wa.gov](http://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.

A 2012 study, “Return on Investment: Evidence-Based Options to Improve State wide Outcomes” first released in 2006, and updated in 2009 and 2012, revealed that prisoner education programs ‘go beyond being cost-effective by producing a measurable savings for tax dollars invested by the State.’ The 2012 study analysed 545 international comparison-group evaluations (including Australia), to determine what works best to reduce crime. The research indicated 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.’



## **Decriminalise personal drug use to reduce prison population**

**Ross Fitzgerald**

**Apr 11, 2015**

The need to tackle structural inequality in our society

[www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/.../story-e6frg7eo-1227299327866](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/.../story-e6frg7eo-1227299327866)

## **Structure and Components of Successful Educational Programs**

**Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice University of Maryland 2008**

Dr. Doris MacKenzie

[http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/DorisMackenzie\\_Final.pdf](http://www.jjay.cuny.edu/DorisMackenzie_Final.pdf)

The Pennsylvania State University 2008 study, “Structure and Components of successful Educational Programs stated that, ‘One reason for the continuing emphasis on educational programs is the strong correlation between educational level and criminal activity.’ Convicted prisoners are, on average, less educated and have fewer marketable job skills than the general population (Andrews & Bonta, 2003; Harlow, 2003.) Incarcerated adults also have high rates of illiteracy. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses of vocational education programs indicate that these programs are successful in reducing the later criminal activities of participants (Wilson et al., 2000; Wilson et al., 1999; MacKenzie, 2006). Skills-based programs including those directed at improving cognition and social, as well, as employment skills have been found to be effective.

## **From the Classroom to the Community: Exploring the Role of Education during Incarceration and Reentry.**

Urban Institute 2009

Diana Brazzell, Anna Crayton, Debbie Mukamal, Amy L. Solomon, & Nicole Lindahl.

[http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411963\\_classroom\\_community.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411963_classroom_community.pdf)

Education for current and former prisoners is a cost-effective solution to reducing reoffending and improving public safety. The effect of education on recidivism has been well-demonstrated, and even small reductions in reoffending can have a significant impact when spread across large numbers of participants. In a country where second chances and opportunity are professed values, democratic access to high-quality education must include access for people in prison and people who have been convicted of crimes. We cannot bar the most vulnerable people from the very thing that has the greatest potential to change their lives.

**Education Reduces Crime, Three-State Recidivism Study - Executive Summary  
Correctional Education Association & Management and Training Corporation  
Institute 2003**

Stephen J. Steurer and Linda J. Smith

<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

**Prison Populations and Correctional Outlays: The effect of reducing re-imprisonment**

**NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, March 2010**

[http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll\\_bocsar.nsf/pages/bocsar\\_mr\\_cjb138](http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/lawlink/bocsar/ll_bocsar.nsf/pages/bocsar_mr_cjb138)

The potential benefits of reducing the rate of re-imprisonment among Indigenous prisoners are particularly noteworthy. A ten percent reduction in NSW, for example, would reduce the Indigenous sentenced prisoner population by an estimated 365 inmates, producing an estimated saving of more than \$10 million per annum. This suggests that efforts to reduce the overrepresentation of Indigenous prisoners in custody might be better off focused on back-end strategies than on front-end strategies. Indigenous prisoners are not the only group that would benefit from reduced rates of re-imprisonment. Substantial benefits in terms of reduced prison numbers and prison costs are to be expected from a reduction in re-imprisonment rates among any subgroup of prisoners with a high rate of re-imprisonment. This would include prisoners with a prior drug conviction, younger prisoners and prisoners convicted of assault, robbery and/or property prisoners (Jones et al. 2006). There are a number of other advantages in focusing policy on the rate of reimprisonment. Governments generally have far less control over the flow of new prisoners into prison than they have over the flow of prisoners back to prison. The way Governments deal with prisoners while in custody or after release, by contrast, can have a big effect on the rate of return to custody and, therewith, the size of the sentenced prisoner population.

## **Ex-prisoners and ex-prisoners and the employment connection: Assistance plus acceptance**

In 'Vocational education and training for adult prisoners and prisoners in Australia'

National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2007

Joe Graffam and Lesley Hardcastle (Deakin University)

<http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nd4200b.pdf>

Pre-employment education and training, plus employment assistance (using a case-management model) can play an important role in successful re-integration into the community. However, receptivity to the employment of ex-prisoners and ex-prisoners is necessary to complete the connection and make employment a reality. Results of the second study suggest that receptivity is fairly high, but community education, more targeted education and promotion aimed at each of the key stakeholder groups, and a strengthening of policies and programs that support the development and preparation of prisoners and prisoners are all needed. The ultimate goal is re-integration within the community. Education, training, and employment assistance provide a foundation for success in employment, and employment is very important to successful re-integration. Collaboration among service providers and development of integrated services that connect pre-employment preparation, education and training with employment assistance is the preferred approach to providing such supports.

## **Vocational education and training provision and recidivism in Queensland correctional institutions**

National Centre for Vocational Education Research 2005

Victor J Callan and John N Gardner

<http://www.ncver.edu.au/research/proj/nr4009.pdf>

The study evaluated educational programming by discussing the potential effects of education on prisoner behaviour and rates of reimprisonment by ex-prisoners. The study found being involved in VET before initial release decreases the chances of returning to prison at a statistically significant lower rate, 23% to those prisoners that had not participated 32%. It also supported the promotion of the value of VET and the role it plays in successful reintegration to the community. It recommended that 'VET programs in prisons should target the needs of Indigenous prisoners to provide them with the opportunities to address their social and educational disadvantages'.

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

Journal of Correctional Education 2012

John Nally, Susan Lockwood, Katie Knutson, Taping Ho

[www.ashland.edu/.../gill...education/journal-correctional-education](http://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.

## **Where Do Ex-Offenders Find Jobs? An Industrial Profile of the Employers of Ex-Offenders in Virginia**

by Eric Lichtenberger

The Journal of Correctional Education Volume 57, No. 4, December 2006

<http://www.ashland.edu/correctionaled/>

The information provided in this article could be used by transition coordinators in job placement activities. Furthermore, correctional education administrators could use this information for the following purposes: 1) allocating resources to the vocational areas where ex-offenders are more likely to find employment, 2) cultivating relationships with employers most likely to hire ex-offenders, and 3) influencing major employers who do not have histories of hiring ex-offenders to change their human resource practices.

## **Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2014, Report on Government Services 2014, Productivity Commission, Canberra.**

Provides information on the equity, efficiency and effectiveness of government services in Australia, through the publication of the annual Report on Government Services (RoGS).

