

## **A Correctional Education Submission to the Inquiry into Efficiency and Performance of Western Australian Prison**

### The Throughcare Education Model

The use of the term throughcare in relation to the Education and Vocational Training Unit program refers to a number of aspects of its service delivery:

- within the internal correctional prison system of the State, it refers to retaining consistency of services between prisons when prisoner transfers occur
- within the individual prison, it refers to all on-site training provision up to and including, both the pre-release and the post release periods for the prisoner as they re-enter the community, and;
- the movement between the public and private prison systems.

Since the commissioning of Acacia, EVTU has embarked on introducing a 'cooperative approach' of throughcare educational services to apply to both the public and private sector. This was introduced with the aim of ensuring that prisoners transferring between the public and private systems were provided with the best opportunity to continue their education with the least degree of interruption. A cooperative approach best provides each prisoner the opportunity to acquire the skills, behaviour and attitudes which can assist them to become law abiding members of the community. The cooperative approach does not apply in every area of educational service provision due to Serco and the EVTU having their own individual scopes of delivery registered under their own nationally Registered Training Organisation, nonetheless this approach has provided the Department with a fair degree of continuity. The result is important to the prisoner, in relation to their capacity to achieve individual educational success; to the Department, as the Commonwealth measures the State's educational provision to prisoners as a State result, not one divided among private or public prisons; and to the State itself, as numerous international studies and local Departmental data both demonstrate; well-structured education and training programs reduce reoffending and in so doing, save the State money, while importantly, also increasing community safety.

The EVTU's cooperative approach applies to its policies and procedures as they relate specifically to adult basic education, vocational training and higher education. It works to encourage systemic uniformity across the entire correctional education and training system, so as to increase efficiency, effectiveness and cooperation. A significant number of EVTU's rules and procedures for prison education service delivery and evaluation apply to both public and private prisons. These EVTU developed performance indicators, apply to all public prisons, and are also reflected in the contractual service requirements of both Serco prisons. These indicators include the areas mentioned in the Inquiry Draft Report which refer to prisoner educational participation; unit completions, and recording of engagement in education by the educationally at-risk.

## **Uniformity of Services in the State's correctional Education System**

Unlike other jurisdictions, the EVTU regularly involves private prison staff in a selection of professional development activities, and campus manager and specific issue meetings through the academic year. Additionally, EVTU administers the prisoner traineeship and higher education programs for both systems, and provides adult basic education staff training for all State correctional education staff when it is appropriate. The administration of these programs and the inclusion of the private sector education staff in EVTU activities were entered into to try and ensure a uniform system of operation was in place and all correctional education staff in the State were included in activities which would assist them in their work practices. It also promotes cooperation and open communication which serves to benefit the Department. The recognition nationally that the State is the leading jurisdiction in the provision of an innovative and holistic correctional education service to prisoners is significantly based on the cooperative approach taken by the EVTU. The service is not only effective but works to be cost efficient as well.

As an example of its innovation, the EVTU developed and is responsible for the Department's Tertiary Studies Assessment Committee, which oversees and approves prisoner university studies; this is the only committee of its type in Australia. The Committee is comprised of education, clinical governance, security and justice intelligence representatives and meets twice a year to assess prisoner tertiary applications to study. The process tries to ensure that prisoners can enrol only in degrees and qualifications which can be of use to the prisoner post release. This assists the prisoner resettle back into the community with a long term viable plan in place, which can assist them to restart their lives. At the same time the process ensures that we can, in some manner; help avoid some wastage of taxpayer's funds on prisoners studying and earning degrees in areas where they will not be able to practice due to those professions requiring criminal clearances. teaching, law, medicine, or securing degrees in professions where they may place themselves in positions where they could become a danger to the community. Due to the length of time required to complete a tertiary degree, prisoners enrolled in university and serving a sentence in the wider metropolitan area of Perth, where most prisoners are housed, will likely reside in both the public and private prison systems, this is where the cooperative approach is of value to the Department, the State and Federal governments and the Australian taxpayer. The TSAC service and the others previously mentioned (prisoner traineeships, ABE professional development...) which are provided by the EVTU to the private prisons are not included when daily costs for housing prisoners in the private prisons are calculated.

## **The Value of Vocational Education and Training to Corrections**

It should be understood that what occurs here in Western Australia is sometimes more advanced than what occurs internationally. Correctional educators from across Australia who attend international correctional education conferences usually notice that what is now accepted practice in many places in Australian prisons are considered new innovations in other jurisdictions. This is a direct result of the fact that the national VET system in Australia is considered world's best practice internationally, and correctional education programs are part of this system. These prison based programs are not reaching their full potential however, because the correctional departments they are part of lack a full understanding of what is actually achievable. This situation unfortunately is 'short changing' the community as the benefits to be realised are significant in the short, medium and long term. What restricts the progress of the programs is that there is usually no immediate political payoff for a prison administrator or sitting government and so, support is sometimes limited. There is also the issue where some staff favour pursuing short term benefits for the prison system, over long term benefits to the community. These community benefits can best be realised when the education and training possibilities available through the integrated VET and correctional education systems are allowed to achieve their potential. Sometimes, like at the present time, departments consider a particular initiative or activity the solution to recidivism. VET is viewed as part of that solution right now, segments of the community believe it can turn a prisoner into a qualified employee who will earn a wage and pay taxes and not return to a life of crime. This is quite similar to the advent of cognitive skills training, the jurisdictions internationally including the UK in a big way, suddenly considered this training as the panacea to reoffending, and they began placing prisoners in these classes in enormous numbers. Unfortunately, there is no magic solution, we are dealing with a complex problem, a complex cohort group within the community and we find ourselves in a difficult economic environment. VET has a lot to offer but there are many factors which need to be addressed if a prisoner is to drop their lifelong support networks and adopt a new lifestyle. The Draft Report recommendation to increase transparency and open communication between all levels of correctional departments is a definite requirement if change is to be introduced in an orderly, successful and sustainable manner; for the prisoner, staff and Department as a whole.

### **Correctional education**

The education being developed and provided in the State's prisons is correctional education. It uses adult basic, vocational, developmental and higher education as the vehicles that can interest and motivate the prisoner to reengage with education while they are in prison. Most prisoners, due to their previous bad experiences at school, are reluctant to participate in a voluntary education program. It is the education program however, with its professionally trained teachers and specialised adapted curriculum that for many prisoners is best situated to help them make the qualitative differences that can assist them to address the criminogenic needs which characterise the prisoner population.

It is the combination of the correctional educator's capacity to successfully engage the learner and to subsequently engender the trust necessary to reengage in the learning process that can help the prisoner both embrace change and a new way of viewing their world. It's this underlying social and professional interaction between prisoner and teacher in combination with, but not solely dependent on, the official curricula of the different educational sectors that can, for many prisoners, help them address the anti-social behaviour and attitudes which are significantly responsible for them returning to prison after release. This combination of teacher, learner motivation and 'tweaked' curricula helps the student acquire the vocational, or for some, higher education skills, that can assist the prisoner to become what the State desires; an independent, law abiding and sustainably self-supporting member of the community. It should be noted however, that a prisoner's dynamic needs can, and usually are, complex and quite diverse and so, a successful program has to be an integrated one that might have to address a significant number of educational and social deficiencies such as literacy, numeracy, vocational, interpersonal communication and self-awareness and so, it may be that a recommendation to address an assessed need as stated in the Inquiry Draft Report is too simplistic. This is especially so when discussing Indigenous peoples and many female prisoners.

Court mandated programs have been ordered by the judicial system for an extended period of time and recidivism rates for some groups have continued to remain unacceptably high across the majority of the developed world. In the current situation in the Department and in many other jurisdictions as well, these mandated programs take precedence over all other activities in prison in a race to complete them prior to the prisoner being released. Given the international results to date, it may be time to consider whether these programs, which some prisoners have taken multiple times, are the best approach for every prisoner. The answer is clearly not, and it may be time for the Department to consider new ways of approaching the recidivism problem, especially as it relates to specific disadvantaged groups of prisoners. Many prisoners lack the appropriate literacy, motivation and the understanding of the concepts discussed in these programs, this is especially so for Indigenous prisoners, who reoffend and are re-incarcerated at a much higher rate than other prisoners (13 times higher according to government research.)

Data on the flexible curriculum offered to encourage prisoners to address their learning needs and to help them fill the gaps in their education, reveals that it is the Indigenous and female prisoner populations which appear to benefit the most from participation in correctional education. This is important because this has significant financial ramifications for the State, as well as impacting on the overall levels of community safety which are a major concern of Government.

## VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMS

Prison Exits 2 years prior to 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2014

Returns within 2 years

### RATE OF RETURN TO PRISON

VET unit completions	Indig Male (1150)	Indig Female (181)	All Male (2603)	All Female (322)	TOTAL ALL (2925)
0 Units	53.97%	45.54%	42.02%	41.77%	41.99%
1-4 Units	48.60%	43.14%	37.17%	33.33%	36.83%
5 + units	37.09%	27.59%	29.58%	21.25%	28.70%
Reduced rate of return 0 vs. 5+ units	17.55%	17.95%	12.44%	20.52%	13.29%

Total Indigenous Prisoners (male and female) was 1331;

0 unit completions vs. 5+ unit completions resulted in an overall reduction in the rate of return to prison for Indigenous prisoners of **16.41%**

Total Indigenous Prisoners (male and female) was 1331;

0 unit completions vs. 5+ unit completions resulted in an overall reduction in the rate of return to prison for Indigenous prisoners of 16.41%

### University and Research Partnerships

The EVTU, through the recognition of its own programs, and its close association with the Australasian Corrections Education Association, has working partnerships with a number of universities including Edith Cowan, Curtin, University of Southern Queensland, Deakin and the University of New South Wales. Some of these research partnerships are ongoing and go back to 2004 and others, have only recently commenced. In addition, there are two proposed research studies being considered by two separate research groups and so, the knowledge base for correctional education in Western Australia and nationally, can definitely be added to over the short to medium term. This is very important because until fairly recently, local Australian research in this field has been limited.

EVTU, through its partnership with the Australasian Corrections Education Association, to organise a professional development opportunity for some of its staff to discuss the current state and progress of correctional education with the following internationally recognised and locally based academic researchers.

- **Inventory of Evidence-Based and Research-Based Programs for Adult Corrections**  
Elizabeth Drake, Washington State Institute for Public Policy
- **Evaluation of Effect of Correctional Education Programs on Post-Release Recidivism and Employment: An Empirical Study in Indiana**  
Dr. Susan Lockwood, Director Juvenile Justice, State of Indiana
- **Education Reduces Crime, Three-State Recidivism Study**  
Stephen Steurer, Executive Director Correctional Education Association USA
- **Incarcerated Students and Digital Technologies for Learning: An Overview of USQ Projects**  
Helen Farley, University of Southern Queensland
- **Prisoners' Labour Market History and Aspirations: A Focus on Western Australia**  
Margaret Giles, Edith Cowan University
- **The perceived employability of ex-prisoners and offenders**  
Joseph Graffam, Deakin University
- **A Future Beyond the Wall: Improving Post-release Employment Outcomes for People Leaving Prison**  
Eileen Baldry, University of New South Wales
- **The Delivery and Problems Associated with Innovative learning to the Prison Student Population: Working Towards a Better Outcome**  
Lorna Barrow Macquarie University
- Michael Hiscox and Bruce Western, Harvard University and Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet

## **Points to Consider**

There is a propensity by reviewers to recommend programs that have been developed in Europe for use here in Western Australia and this has been a common practice over a very long period of time. While there is always a perfunctory acknowledgement that the State and its prisoner population is different, reports nonetheless continue to state the benefits of the international models and how they could improve the correctional system achieve better results. There is no argument that the system requires improvement and that mistakes were made in the past. There should be no underestimation however, on the difficulties faced by a correctional system having to provide services to such a large geographic area and to the number of different Indigenous cultures and peoples sentenced to prison.

It is a serious oversight to not acknowledge that the Indigenous peoples in the State are not all of the same culture and so, their issues may require different approaches and solutions which may impact on financial budgets.

No European country is faced with having to deal with the magnitude of the issues that arise when 40% of the prisoner population is comprised of different Indigenous peoples and successive government policies which seems intent on continuing to embrace imprisonment rather than addressing the underlying issues which may lead to them to come in to contact with the criminal justice system in the first place. The demographics of Indigenous people in the State reveal that the correctional system is facing a continuation of high Indigenous prisoner populations into the future due to the youthful median age of that community and the high likelihood they will come in contact with the criminal justice system. Any new approaches entered into, any new recommendation adopted must strongly reflect the importance of providing quality services if the results are to be both successful and sustainable. All over the world Indigenous peoples suffer from much higher than average reincarceration rates, the State will be condemned to continuing this pattern if the issue is not seriously addressed.

Ray Chavez

Australasian Corrections Education Association

PO Box 327

Bentley 6982