Using research to inform practice: 
Western Australian correctional education

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The Education and Vocational Training Unit of the Department of Corrective Services in Western Australia adapts and integrates knowledge from international and national research reports to assist with rehabilitation of offenders and their successful re-integration into the community. Different approaches are used to increase opportunities for education staff to engage with offenders. This increased interaction can forge productive partnerships to address offenders’ learning needs. The current political and economic situation offers correctional educators and the Department of Corrective Services the opportunity to progress the ‘throughcare’ philosophy of rehabilitation to a degree not previously experienced in the state. This transformation is aided by the use of vocational education and training (VET). VET helps prepare offenders for employment, which is a major factor contributing to successful re-integration into the community.

The correctional education service coordinated by the Education and Vocational Training Unit was recognised when it was awarded the 2004 Access and Equity Award at the Western Australian Department of Education and Training’s Training Excellence awards. It subsequently won the National Australian Training Initiative Award as a model of best practice in the VET sector. In partnership with the federal Department of Education, Science and Training, TAFEWA, the Western Australian Department of Education and Training and private training providers, correctional education delivers accredited training to around 6000 prisoners a year in the state’s 12 prisons and six prisoner work camps.

Introduction

It is essential to the success of correctional education programs that its practitioners are aware of worldwide trends and issues and which are common to all educators in the field. It is also important for these educators to be aware of how different jurisdictions are approaching common problems and how they go about addressing these situations in a positive manner. A key to successful correctional education programming is the ability to adapt and integrate information from a range of professional areas and locations, and develop that
knowledge into a format that can be implemented into the local correctional environment.

This chapter will demonstrate how the Education and Vocational Training Unit (subsequently referred to as the unit) of the Western Australian Department of Corrective Services uses information from a wide range of sources to continually develop a program that is meeting the needs of the state’s disadvantaged offenders. When it became a nationally registered training organisation in 2000, the unit decided that its role must expand into the offender workplace areas located throughout the prison. Subsequently, the unit was recognised in 2004 for the manner in which it successfully provides educational services to offenders when it was presented with three separate awards. The first was the 2004 Access and Equity Award at the Western Australian Department of Education and Training’s Training Excellence awards. Subsequently, it won the National Australian Training Initiative Award as a model of best practice in the VET sector (including technical and further education [TAFE] institutes and private training providers) in the National and State Vocational Training Excellence awards and received a High Commendation in the Western Australian Premier’s Awards. Most recently its Labour Market Skills Program was a finalist in the 2006 Premier’s Award for Jobs and Economic Development\(^1\) for training prisoners specifically in industries where there are skills shortages. Through partnerships with industries, including construction, hospitality and agriculture, employment is secured for prisoners on release from prison.

Presented here is a general outline of the development and organisation of the program. A practical example of the program’s implementation at Casuarina prison, located in Perth’s outer metropolitan area, is also provided.

Before discussing Casuarina prison, it is worth taking note of some of the factors, organisational details and the philosophical underpinnings of the unit. As Western Australia covers 2.5 million square kilometres (one million square miles), the ‘tyranny of distance’ plays a definite role in the administration and provision of correctional education services to the state’s offenders. Another distinguishing characteristic of the prison system is the high percentage of Indigenous Australian offenders (approximately 40%) from across the state. This population is comprised of people from remote communities, regional centres and metropolitan areas. In addition, there is an increasing number of foreign nationals being incarcerated for illegal entry into Australia. This segment of the prison population is of non-English speaking background, so their needs can significantly impact on service delivery.

The unit is responsible for the provision of adult basic, secondary, tertiary and vocational training education at each of the 12 public prisons in Western Australia. This involves educational delivery in each education centre and the organisation of vocational training in each prison industry area in the state’s seven work camps and, increasingly, for community service work parties that are

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comprised of sentenced offenders who are housed in local prisons. It provides these services through its status as a nationally registered training organisation and a participating member of the Australian vocational education and training system. This status ensures that the unit can provide nationally recognised accredited training to offenders and develop an effective network of working partnerships with other registered training organisations, employers and industry bodies that can benefit offenders’ opportunities for employment and/or further education post-release.

The decision to become a registered training organisation in 2000 and expand services beyond what was once generally an adult basic education program was made largely to enable greater choice and flexibility in scope of delivery. It also was based on an acknowledgment of the recommendations of a number of research studies that discussed the value of vocational training and the importance of post-release employment. In recent years, these studies have increased in number, with the most comprehensive almost certainly being the American study, the Report of the Re-entry Policy Council (Council of State Governments 2005), which highlighted the importance of implementing a holistic program which includes both pre- and post-release support for offenders returning to the community.

The unit consistently reviews and is informed by national and international research studies from different disciplines and professional areas. This is one of the major ways by which the program attempts to implement a policy of continuous improvement. It also reflects the unit’s belief that a key to successful correctional education programming is the ability to adapt and integrate information from a range of areas and worldwide locations, and incorporate that knowledge into a format that can meet local conditions.

These influences are combined with a working philosophy that has guided the unit’s decision-making in regards to working within the correctional system. The unit adopted the viewpoint that it is more beneficial to pursue program goals and direction as a registered training organisation that provides its services to a correctional system rather than as a part of the correctional system that works as a registered training organisation. This viewpoint is more conducive to embracing change and innovation, a view which has not traditionally been as openly supported by all sections of the correctional system. This position also progresses the unit’s attempts to have the correctional system recognise that, as part of the community, it should adopt a more open approach to engaging and developing both internal and external working partnerships.

The Education and Vocational Training Unit’s strategic objectives are to provide a systematic, comprehensive, client-centred educational program for its multi-disadvantaged students and contribute to the ongoing cultural and operational reform in the state prisons. The unit aims to ‘normalise’ as much as possible, both the learning experience for the individual student and the existence of education and training within the prison system itself. The unit is committed to encouraging prisoner engagement with the educational process, increasing participation in further education and training, developing learning
pathways into the community for its students, and optimising their post-release employment prospects.

The unit has implemented and continues to introduce initiatives that provide incentives to prisoners to engage in the educational process and address any educational issues stemming from negative experiences in the mainstream school system. Those initiatives involve identifying systemic barriers to participation and strategically negotiating suitable solutions that expand the opportunities for prisoners to access education and vocational training during their sentence. For example, prisoners are issued with nationally recognised qualifications from training organisations such as TAFE colleges and are therefore not identified as having undertaken their studies within a prison.

The Education and Vocational Training Unit Program
The unit’s program is informed and guided by a combination of professional guidelines, standards and principles but the major influences are:

- the national strategy for vocational education and training for adult prisoners and offenders in Australia
- the Australian Qualifications Training Framework
- adult education principles
- the ‘normalisation’ concept—as it relates to the criminal justice system, where civil rights are retained
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy
- organisational management theory.

Program characteristics

- VET—increasing emphasis on vocational education and training in the curriculum
- flexible—increasing interaction with offenders where they are employed
- practical, contextual approach—increasing emphasis on the preferred learning style of most offenders
- integrated training—combining literacy and numeracy directly to VET
- post-release focus—emphasising sustainable post-release outcomes
- expansion of working partnerships—both internally and externally to the Department of Corrective Services
- program promotion—actively educating the community about the program to rehabilitate offenders and equip them with employment skills and work experience to reduce re-offending.
As may be expected, the more relevant professional sources of information and advice for the unit are necessarily derived from the education profession, especially correctional, vocational, Indigenous and adult basic education.

Importantly, however, management or organisational learning which promotes higher performance, skill development, and program accountability is of significant value, as it provides the tools to ensure the implementation of an effective and verifiable professional practice when working within a sometimes non-supportive environment.

Factors that shape the program
There are currently worldwide trends that see governments attempting to reduce public service expenditure, while at the same time they are experiencing an increase in prisoner populations. This situation has resulted in correctional educators having to assess the role they must undertake in order to be in a position to provide effective programs. Even in Western Australia, where this ‘squeeze’ has been less severe, the unit reacted by deciding to engage in the active promotion of its program to secure the political and government support necessary for the delivery of correctional education in prisons. This decision is in line with the recommendations made in Gail Spangenburg’s study (2004), which highlighted the need for educators to commence ‘performing better public relations on the importance of the job that CE [correctional education] was doing for the community’ if it were to succeed in achieving its goals.

Adhering to the need for increased program promotion, the unit now takes a more pragmatic view of proposed educational initiatives. The program is guided by adult education principles and a recognition of the importance of a holistic approach and broad interpretation of adult literacy. However, it now also considers the promotional value of any proposed initiative as it relates to publicising the program and supporting the unit’s efforts to secure appropriate budget allocations. A prime example of the new program approach was the unit’s decision to nominate for the National Training Excellence Awards in 2004. The major factors in the decision were the criteria for the awards themselves, the congruence of the national VET aims and objectives with correctional education guiding principles, and importantly, the fact that nominating for the awards would increase correctional education promotion and educate the wider community (as recommended in Spangenberg’s study). Vis-à-vis increased government interest in correctional education, today, if it occurs, it is generally related to the cost savings that may potentially be produced for the community by way of reduced re-offending (LoPinto n.d.). Interest therefore can be generated for training initiatives that provide offenders with opportunities for securing sustainable post-release employment and so assist in keeping offenders outside the criminal justice system. The task is to develop holistic programs within this ‘training to post-release employment’ format that promote a pre- and post-release support structure that will assist offenders to make a successful change in lifestyle.
The focus on employment as a positive factor in successful offender re-integration is a major reason for the unit’s move towards a wider acceptance of VET as a vehicle for addressing the educational needs and requirements of offenders. The traditional inclusion of practical learning within VET aligns with the preferred learning style of many offenders, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous. It underscores the premise that ‘most people learn best through practical, contextual experience’ (Management and Training Organisation Institute 2003a, 2003b) and so supports its applicability to the prison context and the new emphasis on VET that the unit decided to adopt. The decision to accept the veracity of supporting research, in regard to VET and its relevance to the state’s prisoners, led to three major developments: the acceptance that education in prisons should necessarily include an increase in emphasis on vocational training; a concerted effort to move into prison offender work areas where many offenders spent the majority of their workday and where, consequently, contextual learning was best provided; and thirdly, the development of the prison workplace-based Hands-on Learning Program (HOLP).

Although the Hands-on Learning Program is delivered in the prison industry area, the aim of the program is not to achieve accredited vocational competence; rather, it is to increase positive interaction with offenders who have traditionally not re-engaged in the educational process. This program uses a team-teaching mode of delivery that provides offenders who have low levels of educational attainment with contextual numeracy and literacy support while participating in vocational skills-based learning. These offenders are generally reticent about attending prison education centres. This program therefore is delivered in selected prison workshop areas or in vocational skills learning centres located in prison industries. In order to attract participants, different vocational learning areas that may be of interest to offenders are utilised. It is the regular interaction with education staff in areas outside the education centres that facilitates an increase in educational involvement by offenders who have traditionally not participated in education and training.

The program does not concentrate solely on adult basic education; instead it is guided by the premise that, for those ‘most at risk’, it is beneficial for educational re-engagement to be integrated with and taught in the context of vocational training. In this manner, offenders understand how a specific skill is used and have an opportunity to practise it immediately. This approach with the use of meaningful, authentic tasks accelerates learning and improves the ability of students to apply their new knowledge (Imel 2000). This adoption of an integrated contextual learning approach was supported by reports that found effectiveness of training and enhancing of long-term employment prospects would be increased if the programs were multi-modal, well integrated, and helped improve the motivation of offenders to participate (Holzer, Raphael & Stoll 2002). This was subsequently supported by both an American study by Seiter and Kadela (2003) and a Home Office report by Duncan Stewart (2005) that found that literacy and numeracy tuition alone did not significantly impact on reducing recidivism and offenders’ prospects for successful re-integration to the community.
This integrated approach to learning is increasingly becoming a defining feature of the unit’s program. When combined with the wider scope of delivery, it is now enabling the unit to offer training in ‘targeted markets’ of community employment—industry areas that have demonstrated a willingness to accept ex-offenders, offer sustainable work opportunities at favourable wages and are compatible with the aspirations of the offenders involved (Home Builders’ Institute 1999). Although the unit’s responsibility lies with training in prison, its acceptance of the importance of employment placement in targeted areas as a vehicle for successful re-integration has led to an expanded effort into the post-release assessment and support areas. This is reflected in current initiatives, which have been organised so that training participants can secure employment through the industry contacts of the respective vocational training provider. This decision to actively implement initiatives that contain post-release employment placement characterises the unit’s determination to ensure it adheres to research findings, while also trying to create the recommended structure and design for program monitoring and evaluation (Urban Institute 2002).

In order to adhere to these recommendations, the unit has undertaken and participated in a review of the Department of Corrective Services model of VET and prison industries in order to assess whether the system adheres to best-practice models (Jury 2003). It has also conducted research with the University of Western Australia in a review of prison-based education and training funded by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) (Giles et al. 2004), and is negotiating a longitudinal study to review the role that education and training plays in reducing re-offending in Western Australia. Prior to these research initiatives, and in line with recent re-entry research recommendations, the unit developed the concept of Linking Offenders to Services (LOTS), an initiative supported by a committee comprised of representatives from both the Australian Government and state governments and non-government organisations that regularly meets to discuss coordination of offender post-release services.

The emphasis on the importance of post-release employment in research studies comes at a time when this state is situated in a very favourable economic position due to the growth generated by the ‘resources boom’ and the decision to expand and develop the state’s infrastructure. These situations have created well-paying employment opportunities for skilled and semi-skilled workers (Uren & Ord 2005). The unit, due to its earlier decision to expand its scope and to become a participant in the national VET system, is now in a position to facilitate training in areas it has ‘target marketed’ and which are now identified as experiencing skill shortages. The capacity to assist in employment placement of offenders adds impetus to the case that education and training, if allocated sufficient support, can assist in successfully preparing offenders for life post-release. In being able to achieve this, the unit assists the state with some of its most vexing problems—how to address the high rates of criminal re-offending, which costs taxpayers an unacceptable and increasing amount of tax dollars, and the need to secure labour for the state’s growing industries.
Correctional and vocational education and training

Participating as a registered training organisation within the national VET system affords the unit a recognised vehicle for increasing offenders’ prospects for post-release success. It also offers access to a large national forum in which to educate the community about the services it provides. This access to the large ‘mainstream’ education and vocational training network offers correctional education the opportunity to reach a much greater audience than could be achieved by correctional educators if they were restricted to promoting their cause within the criminal justice sector alone.

While the explicit role of correctional educators is to provide educational services to offenders, it also includes an important advocacy role for reform of the criminal justice system itself. Correctional systems are characterised by conflicting and competing interests as they serve different core functions. Rehabilitation, with its focus on the individual offender, post-release welfare and long-term aims and objectives, can be overshadowed within the agenda of large government departments, whose overriding political responsibility lies in maintaining a security apparatus that necessarily has a more ‘immediate’ and internal focus (Coyle 2004). Criminal justice systems are increasingly acknowledging that international research has identified that appropriately supported rehabilitation of offenders can save the community the costs associated with repeat criminal behaviour. The problem, however, remains with implementation at the local prison level, where the support for rehabilitative programs must be realised in practical terms (Callan & Gardner 2005). The solution to the situation may be in the establishment of new measures of a prison’s effectiveness, and an increasing awareness of the programming effect on recidivism. An increasingly informed prison management has the capacity to force a reconsideration of the traditional view that key performance measures for prisons should revolve mainly around the areas of security and containment (Management Training Organisation Institute 2003c).

In line with the Report of the Re-entry Policy Council (Council of State Governments 2005) and the Urban Institute’s (Kachnowski 2005) Employment and offender re-entry that highlight that prison-based programs significantly impact on the post-release lives of offenders, the unit promotes, and is attempting to increase, its provision of accredited community-based work experience programs. The importance of the provision of work experience training is supported by both a Canadian study (John Howard Society 2002), which sees as critical the need for correctional education to be ‘focusing on applicable job market skills’ and an Australian study by Graffam et al. (2004) that recommends ‘targeting employment as one of the key elements to successful lifestyle change’. The importance of specifically targeted employment rather than just general employment placement, the advantage of employment that offers higher wages (Uggen 2000) and the provision of sustainable and legitimate employment opportunities (Bernstein & Houston 2000) are identified as factors that can reduce the chances of re-offending following release from prison. These findings, combined with the benefits provided by work experience, offer the offender the opportunity to commence the mental process of change that will be required.
if they are to adopt a non-criminal lifestyle. These factors form the basis of the unit’s concerted effort to gather administrative and political support for community-based work experience programs.

The introduction of new VET initiatives, similar to all areas that involve change in prison regimes, is a work in progress, an activity characterised by small changes made over a period of time. The varied responsibilities faced by prison management traditionally have meant that changes are not always openly embraced by all sections of the local institution. In order to address these traditionally conflicting priorities, the unit endeavours to influence criminal justice policy so that it reflects the fact that, in order for the correctional system to optimise rehabilitative potential, there must be a concerted effort for the introduction of a ‘normalisation’ of prison life. This viewpoint was influenced by discussions on correctional education in Denmark with William Rentzmann, Danish Director of Prisons and Probation, which were held in Perth in 1999.

The ‘normalisation principle’ itself is a key concept to the management of prisons in Scandinavia. The principle is based on the premise that offenders should retain their civil rights while incarcerated and, since the lives of most of offenders are not much different from those of other members of their community, it is best to include rather than exclude them in normal activities whenever possible (Svensson & Somander 1998). This information helped influence the decision by the unit to become a registered training organisation in 2000. This status not only allowed the unit the capacity to offer offenders the same training as other community-based students, including access to New Apprenticeships (now called Australian Apprenticeships), but it gave the unit itself previously non-existent recognition within both the general education and VET community. Community-based work experience training is the best example of how the normalisation principle is shaping our current training initiatives.

Along with the effort to introduce the European concept of normalisation, the unit also aims to incorporate the ‘egalitarianism’ traditionally associated with the Australian educational system, where educational participation is open and available to those wishing to participate, regardless of age or mode of study (Karmel 2004). This decision to combine normalisation and equality of access principles in order to better reflect community standards has resulted in the general acceptance of correctional education programs in the wider community. This in turn creates the framework for both the implementation of reform of the correctional system and education and employment pathways from prison to the community.

Casuarina Prison

Casuarina Prison, although a maximum security facility, has been one of the more open prisons in regard to implementing new ideas on multi-site education and the integration of prison industry employment and VET. This is mainly due to the progressive nature of the prison administration and the willingness of prison industry staff to participate in facilitating accredited training as part of their duties. While the reliance on the ‘personality factor’ has generally worked in favour of education at Casuarina, personality-driven methods of prison
administration have not traditionally worked in such a positive manner for educational programs in the past (Coyle 2002). The unit works to replace this style of personality-driven administration with the introduction of a system of standards, guidelines and measurable outcomes that will heighten accountability and transparency for the entire prison sector.

As previously mentioned, a key to successful correctional education programming is the ability to successfully adapt and integrate information to meet local conditions. The Casuarina training program has been developed with the use of organisational management program principles, VET research studies and international reports in the correctional education field. The *Not exactly rocket science* (McDonald et al. 2005) report with its review of characteristics of good practice, and the Urban Institute's (2002) correctional education work on 'effective correctional programming characteristics' are examples of research that have informed the direction of the program and the manner in which to approach its development and implementation.

At Casuarina, the prison education centre provides learning opportunities in adult basic, Indigenous and vocational education. Included in the curriculum are information technology, literacy and numeracy, and a range of other units of competency that are of interest or may be required by offenders. There is a substantial need and high demand for basic education, as a very high percentage of offenders require literacy and numeracy assistance. Due to the need for individual tuition, classes are kept small and materials are adapted to assist the students to successfully engage in the learning process. Offenders who study the more practical VET subjects but require tuition in the theoretical components of their course also attend the centre.

In regard to the overarching program, Casuarina prison was the site for a Reframing the Future (national VET practitioners capacity-building program) change-management project in 2004. The positive practical training outcomes of that exercise are now being practised and will continue to be implemented in other areas in the future. The project aimed to introduce a multi-level and cross-team decision-making process to the prison in order to develop and implement a coordinated approach to the introduction of education and training into the industry area of the prison. The cooperation and increased communication engendered by the project have paved the way for some of the correctional system's more innovative training initiatives.

The Casuarina program includes a mandatory accredited occupational safety and health program for all offenders at the prison, alongside food safe training for all offenders who handle food as part of their job. Those offenders who work in the designated prison kitchen participate in health and hygiene training through enrolment in the occupational health and safety training unit from the Hospitality Training Package, with most of these workers registered in an Australian Apprenticeship. The prison is piloting a program that requires prison industry workers to complete a set of three core units from the appropriate training package for their designated workplace as a condition of permanent employment in their respective prison workshop area. This initiative provides an opportunity to increase workshop safety and VET training. Importantly, it also
offers an opening to address individual offenders’ basic education deficiencies, which can be identified when they are undertaking the three core units required for workshop placement.

Casuarina also has a successful woodwork-based Hands-on Learning Program in the Vocational Skills Training Centre. This program and the other Casuarina training initiatives all serve to increase the interaction between education staff and offenders across the prison site, as they break down barriers that have traditionally precluded an offender from addressing his/her educational needs. Very importantly, this distribution of educators across the prison also assists in the development of positive working relationship with prison industry staff.

In relation to Australian Apprenticeships, Casuarina has benefited from the improved communication resulting from the Reframing the Future project: recently Casuarina has been able to organise the introduction of training in residential construction into two work areas in the prison industries. This training is in response to the skill shortages that exist in this area and that are expected to continue for the foreseeable future. The training provider, with community-based industry support, is providing training to meet specific industry needs and then contacting interested employers, who may offer the participants of the course employment post-release. The project, quite significantly, is proving successful in attracting and retaining Indigenous offenders to the course. The project has gained the support of the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, which is providing funding for an expansion of the program to include offenders residing at selected ‘exit’ and regional prisons across the state.

Reframing the Future has also assisted in the development of a partnership between the prison and the unit and involves providing a professional development training program for prison industry-based officers. The unit funds the training, and the prison supplies the workshop replacements while the training is undertaken. The participating officers then assist in the implementation of the offender training initiatives being piloted in prison industries. To date seven officers from the 15 workshops in the prison have completed the training program, while two other officers are still participating in the training.

Integration: The key to success

Part of the entry process for every sentenced prisoner in Western Australia is the development of an ‘individual management plan’, subsequently referred to as the plan. What makes this model unique in Australia is that the education and training component of a plan is conducted by qualified teachers and is integrated into the justice-based prisoner assessment and case management system. Therefore education and training is integrated into the prisoner management regime.

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2 Reframing the Future supports professional development programs for the VET sector staff and change-management programs to support the national training system. Further information is available at <http://www.reframingthefuture.net>.
The plan is vital to the prisoner’s rehabilitation and includes specified and achievable academic and vocational training programs implemented by the unit. Education and training programs are individually tailored to meet prisoners’ individual needs. The plans reflect the vocational desires of prisoners and are geared towards developing the skills that will contribute to their successful re-entry into the community. Training pathways exist between the state’s prisons to ensure that prisoners are able to continue their studies in accordance with their plan as they move between prisons throughout their sentence.

The prison population is characterised by students with lower levels of educational attainment and includes people with disabilities, Indigenous people from cities, rural and remote communities, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, youth at risk, people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and women in all the above categories. The challenge is increased by the fact that many of the student group have multiple disadvantages. These students have also offended to a level which has warranted a custodial sentence, and many often have aspects to their personal backgrounds which compound the barriers to learning and skills development even further.

Although the unit delivers training in the prison environment, its success is based in large part on the holistic approach that takes into account the transition back into the community. Through its innovative program, the unit has taken on the special responsibility of providing prisoners with the opportunity—previously unattainable—for gaining equality of participation and achievement in the VET system. This is the basis for how the unit manages diversity and administers policies on the provision of education services.

The unit contributes to building stronger communities, both economically and socially, through learning and employment. The assistance given to individual prisoners has obvious and material benefits for the wider community, contributing to sustainable outcomes in that it improves prisoner self-esteem and life skills. Prisoners receive nationally recognised qualifications for skills learned in prison that provide opportunities for new directions in life. With better employment opportunities post-release there is an increased likelihood that prisoners will be more financially self-sufficient, rather than relying on welfare and crime.

Partnerships that underpin our model

The unit relies on strong partnerships with a variety of stakeholders, both within prisons and in the wider community. In 1997, management reviewed operational models for prisoner education and training in other Australian jurisdictions. The findings of this review produced a new model that drew on the best aspects from other jurisdictions across Australia. Key features of the unit include: its becoming a registered training organisation; formalising relationships with TAFE colleges into memoranda of understanding and allocations of profile hours from the state; establishing Australian Apprenticeships within the prison system; accessing federal Indigenous education and training monies; and integrating education and training into prisoners’ operations statewide.
TAFE delivery in prisons is focused on accrediting training at certificate II or higher. Lower-level training in access and equity courses and certificate I are predominately delivered through the Department of Corrective Services because it is not constrained by class sizes, nominal hours and fees which can hamper innovation and flexible approaches to engagement of the multi-disadvantaged learner.

Delivery by external registered training organisations also takes place across the state. Delivery at certificate II and above is predominately undertaken by these external providers, which enables prisoners to receive qualifications easily recognised by employers and having no link to a prison environment. Wherever possible one provider will provide delivery for a specific industry area across multiple prison sites. This strategy addresses the need for prisoners to be able to move across prisons throughout their sentences and complete nationally recognised qualifications while doing so. Anecdotal evidence shows that this strategy decreases the need for withdrawal because of transfers, assists with unit completions, and establishes links with external providers who have particular content expertise.

**Within the prison system**

The unit has developed service-level agreements to formalise partnerships between each prison, their respective education centre and the centrally located management of the unit. The service-level agreements outline the proposed delivery of education and vocational training programs at each prison. This ‘operational plan for delivery’ ensures that program provision is in accordance with a mutually agreed schedule. In return prisons agree to have prisoners, facilities and the necessary supervision structures in place to enable delivery to occur. The education service comprises contract staff, permanent education employees, prison industrial officers, TAFE staff and volunteers. The unit endeavours to provide a comprehensive program at each prison to address the needs of prisoners, while adhering to established training pathways across the prison system that make it possible for a prisoner to transfer and continue their studies at a number of sites.

**External agencies**

To assist the re-entry of prisoners back into the community the unit has established a networking forum that is attended by external agencies who provide services to prisoners post-release. A number of organisations were identified as having a brief to assist prisoners during the transitional phase of re-entering the community. The ‘Linking Offenders To Services’ forum, as noted earlier, endeavours to streamline service delivery to prisoners by providing links with services such as accommodation, support groups, further education and financial assistance. This forum provides the framework for the development of a collaborative effort by the Department of Corrective Services, the Department of Education and Training, Centrelink, not-for-profit agencies funded to work with ex-offenders, Job Network agencies, private and public training providers and
other employers across many different industries with the aim of establishing a sustainable future for ex-prisoners returning to the community.

**Employer groups**

Effective partnership arrangements between employer groups, the Department of Education and Training, the Department of Corrective Services and group training agencies have been established to support prisoner re-entry to the world of work post-release. These agencies provide employment linkages for ex-prisoners who have undertaken traineeships, other training or education in prison. This is achieved by placing and supporting ex-offenders into suitable apprenticeships, traineeships or employment. The unit has partnerships with a small number of employers who are willing to recruit ex-prisoners and who are known to understand the issues facing offenders re-entering the workforce. The unit is planning to meet with employer groups to expand the current service and the number of options prisoners have to access the labour market.

**On-the-job training in prison industries**

One of the most innovative ways in which the unit has met prisoners’ needs is the development of the Hands-on Learning Program. This program, provided in the prison industrial workshop areas, has been very successful, especially with Indigenous students who have not been able to progress in a ‘mainstream’ educational setting. This program is a strategy to target those prisoners reluctant to engage in work or training in prison and provides them with a positive vehicle for further engagement in education, training and work. As a result of increased self-esteem and skills acquisition, students in this program are better able to take up more complex prison work.

Vocational training has now become more accepted as an integral component of the prison industry workshops. The Department of Corrective Services and industry in the community recognise that prison industries are real places of work. The unit integrates training into these prison workplaces obviating the need for simulated training environments. In providing the prisoners with real work and real training that meets skills shortages, the unit’s ability to play a role in shaping the direction of prison industries is demonstrated.

An independent evaluation conducted in 2003 confirmed that accurate alignment between prison industries and industry skills shortages is vital. Subsequently, numerous projects have emerged which work with stakeholders (prison administrators, industry managers, industrial officers, prisoners and external employer groups) to promote the skilling of prisoners for employment placement post-release.

It has been necessary for the unit to form working partnerships with industrial staff and prison administrators to successfully incorporate training into everyday prison work. The unit has provided industrial staff with training for the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training and in doing so has reinforced their roles as instructors and trainers in addition to their supervisory
duties. Education and TAFE staff also work closely with these industrial officers to complement their trade skills with VET and Australian Quality Training Framework expertise. Challenges arise when the balance between production and training tips in favour of profit. The unit often finds itself negotiating small gains until the circumstances allow for the balance to be restored.

With the assistance of a Reframing the Future project grant, and the support of the executive administration of a local prison, the unit has implemented a strategy to increase the number of prisoners working in those prison industries which introduced vocational education and training as part of the induction process for their workers. The strategy works towards encouraging prisoners to work in areas where VET is openly provided, and learning is part of the working week routine. It is hoped that this situation will create an impetus for the workshop instructors to participate in accredited training activities that are currently provided informally—because prisoners will choose to work where training is available.

An expected outcome from the Reframing the Future project will be the development of a Department of Corrective Services industry training reference group to assist with future decision-making about vocational training, prison industries and the directions taken by local prison administrators. These decisions will be shaped by labour market skills shortages, the desire to achieve positive community outcomes and the maximising of opportunities for training within the prisons across the state.

Traineeships

Another way in which on-the-job training is successful concerns the partnership forged with the Department of Education and Training. This partnership has involved developing procedures and agreements to facilitate the implementation of a comprehensive Australian Apprenticeships program within prisons.

Through this innovative on-the-job training model, prisoners are successfully re-entering the community as skilled, motivated men and women, prepared and willing to make a real contribution to society. A recent survey of prisoners who completed traineeships in a twelve-month period in 2004–05 and who were released on parole, has shown that 71% were employed in the community, with a further 80% of this group employed in the industry area in which they received training (Sheard 2005).

The unit is actively involved in formal research partnerships with a number of tertiary institutions in order to substantiate its claims that the model assists in reducing re-offending. For example, the Department of Corrective Services has formed a partnership with a meat processing company. This off-site work exposes trainees to the real working conditions of a going commercial concern, while, importantly, allowing them to interact with abattoir staff who may become their co-workers in the future. Abattoirs in Western Australia are short of skilled labour but, now, due to the success of the training program, prisons are able to supply a skilled labour force.
The meat processing industry partnerships are a prime example of how the unit targets training and employment opportunities for prisoners in industries that display a willingness to employ ex-prisoners. The ‘target-marketing’ process is informed by employment research from relevant federal, state and local industry labour market agencies and departments.

Community work projects
The unit has also been successful in integrating training into work activities that occur in a community setting. These activities can include projects carried out in conjunction with local government and not-for-profit organisations. Such activities range from landcare restoration, building and construction projects, and work undertaken for charitable organisations. The projects are of great financial, environmental and social benefit to the local communities in which they are located and they have now become an avenue for vocational training delivery for prisoners. By engaging TAFE in this community-based training delivery, links are established between prisoners, lecturers, TAFE institutes and potential employers. The likelihood of prisoners continuing training with the same provider post-release is increased as a result of the relationships formed.

The unit’s training for prisoners based at the Department of Corrective Service’s work camps is another highly successful innovation benefiting communities. Prisoner work camps are located in regional areas around the state and involve minimum-security prisoners undertaking community work projects that might otherwise not be done because of a lack of labour. This strategy also promotes equity of participation, particularly for Indigenous prisoners.

A key focus for the unit has been the establishment of stronger links with Indigenous community representatives in order to advise education staff on VET delivery needs in regional areas. Each prison has an Indigenous education and training advisory group which aims to contribute to economic growth and job creation in rural and remote Aboriginal communities. The unit is working with communities to target skills training in prisons to build the capacity of both the individual and the community.

Conclusion
The Education and Vocational Training Unit of the Western Australian Department of Corrective Services is in a favourable position to assist offenders to more fully integrate into Australian society. This is due in no small part to its policy of utilising current international research in its attempts to develop an effective correctional education program. Research has made a valuable contribution to the unit’s success. However, the ability of staff to develop constructive working partnerships with local prison administrators and their officers has been equally valuable. The favourable state of the Western Australian labour market, where every individual is required to meet the needs of the growing economy, has opened the door for government consideration of innovative ways in which to better prepare offenders for a contributing role in the community.
The unit has made significant operational improvements in the structure and delivery of education and training in Western Australian prisons. Improvements have been achieved through partnerships with TAFE colleges, enterprises, industry groups and individual communities (particularly in regional Western Australia) to meet the training needs of offenders, particularly as they re-enter the community.

The education program for Western Australian prisons addresses the state’s unacceptably high rate of recidivism and re-imprisonment by giving prisoners support throughout the duration of their sentence of imprisonment and establishing a smooth transition to education and training support after re-entry. It takes the concept of prison industries (where prisoners work within industrial workshops inside the prison) and other programs available to prisoners to a new level by acknowledging and addressing the special needs of this group and integrating the work of community agencies, training providers and employers to achieve the standards required for accredited qualifications.

The program acknowledges that there is a strong correlation between education and skills development, which can lead to long-term, satisfying employment and reduced recidivism rates. It also promotes sustainability by working to break down prejudices of employers and to build relationships between the prisons, employers, relevant government agencies and training providers.

Prison industries can provide onsite vocational training opportunities. Adult basic education services are also available for those in need. These activities benefit the prisoner, the employer and, ultimately, the general community.

The success of the unit’s program is based on effective partnerships with a number of stakeholders. By communicating more effectively with the appropriate agencies, industry representatives and departments, prisoner training can be tailored to reflect industry needs and focus on those industries suffering from skill shortages. By doing so, duplication of services can be identified and eliminated, and other support can be better timed and targeted.

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