

CREATING A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

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Pre 1995 correctional education in Western Australia had a relatively low priority in both the state VET sector and within the Ministry of Justice. Whilst the inherent worth of such programs was acknowledged, the programs were under resourced, minimally staffed, inadequately coordinated, with predominantly non-accredited program delivery which operated in isolation from the state's VET delivery.

This presentation will outline the steps taken by the Education and Vocational Training Unit over the past five years, towards creating a culture of continuous improvement.

What we have tried to achieve needs to be put in the context of our size, operating environment and the changes affecting the Ministry of Justice at this point in time.

- § Currently we have 3000 offenders in custody, spread over this large state from as far north as Broome in the Kimberleys, to Albany in the Great Southern and inland to Kalgoorlie, bordering the central desert.
- § The Education and Vocational Training Unit operates Education Centres in each of the fifteen prisons across the state, employing public service staff (with teaching qualifications) to run centres and contracting out teaching duties.
- § The Ministry of Justice is in the transition stage of a purchaser/provider model with the current construction of our state's first privately built prison, Acacia.

As a government agency we are characterised by an operating environment that sings of 'doing more with less', 'contracting out' and 'improving customer service.' We seem to live and work in a world of accountability and it was clear that a future based on the services set in place 'because it was how we always did it', was not good enough. We are in a climate of social change that requires a keen eye and a fresh approach, listening to what is going on around you and reading the play. Gone is the blinkered, introverted approach to the stale public service with its stale rhetoric. That is a system of social distance.

So a comprehensive Review of Education and Vocational Training In Adult Correctional Facilities was undertaken in 1996/97, by a joint taskforce between the Ministry of Justice and the Western Australian Department of Training. We opened our doors, and let outsiders in to undertake complete audit services. At the conclusion of the Review a list of 18 recommendations were made covering strategic, operational and internal areas for change.

Existing practices were challenged and alternatives trialed. While we needed to be flexible, it was tempered with the realisation that it is necessary to work within a coordinated education and training framework. The Unit has implemented approximately 90% of the Recommendations, which has allayed the concerns from the Department of Training over the quality and viability of prison-based education and training. A systems approach has been created to reduce the scope of error, and increase efficient and effective service delivery.

MAJOR CHANGES

Resource Agreements with TAFE Colleges

Mutually beneficial partnerships or resource agreements have been established with eight TAFE Colleges throughout the state. Prisons are designated campuses of the Colleges and assigned agreed profile hours for delivery. Both Ministry personnel and College staff deliver training to offenders with the generated enrolments following to the Colleges. Consessional enrolment and tuition fees are charged to the Ministry of Justice. The model is inter-actively beneficial to both institutions, and is economically responsible, as far as the expenditure of state funds is concerned.

Registered Training Organisation

The granting of Registered Training Organisation (RTO) status, has meant that accredited Vocational Education and Training (VET) delivery that is recognised throughout Australia is now available to offenders who are preparing to continue their education or are planning to enter the workforce once they are released into the community. For the Ministry of Justice it allows for education staff and suitably qualified prison staff to deliver accredited training across a wide vocational range, in a cost-effective manner. The scope of delivery is focussed on meeting the needs of regional industry and labour market demands, as identified by the State Training Profile. Certification to offenders is awarded by the Ministry of Justice under the Nationally Accredited Training banner and gives no reference to the training being undertaken in a prison environment.

Where ever possible recognition is given to real life work skills acquired “on the job” in prison industry environments.

Training Pathways

Traditionally, offender movement between prisons impacted on successful course completions and negated the positive effects achieved through education and vocational training participation.

An agreed standardised model of course delivery across the state has been developed which incorporates offender need, labour market demands, resources available and operational constraints. The established training pathways, reflect more flexible delivery strategies, incorporating face to face classes, computer-assisted training, external correspondence, self paced and ‘free to air’ satellite delivery.

Initial Assessment and Orientation

In 2000 the state’s first Assessment and Receiving Prison is to be commissioned, where comprehensive Individual Management Plans will be formulated for each offender entering the system. Currently, the Education and Vocational Training Unit screens offenders with an effective sentence of over six months, the opening of the new prison will ensure that all offenders will be targeted for this educational assessment.

A two tiered approach has been formulated. The Initial Assessment and Orientation – Level One Assessment records offenders’ perceptions of themselves, education and vocational histories, educational needs and aspirations, linking closely with training pathways ensuring continuity of decision making and program access. The employment assessment, vocational training induction and combined with educational counselling, will comprise a comprehensive component of the Individual Management Plan.

The Level Two Assessment, is a more in-depth diagnostic literacy and numeracy assessment for targeted offenders requiring educational support. These offenders undertake a ‘Recognition of Current Competency’ skills audit in the Certificate of General Education For Adults.

Standards for Adult and Juvenile Correctional Education Programs

A set of comprehensive standards has been introduced for Western Australian prisons, to establish a framework to evaluate the programs. Our WA model reflects, benchmark standards associated with being a Registered Training Organisation and the standards set by the Correctional Education Association in the United States. We aim to ensure increased opportunities for student success through the provision of professionally delivered quality education and vocational training programs.

Traineeships

In 1997 Traineeships successfully commenced in Western Australian prisons under the New Apprenticeship Scheme. This year the Western Australian Department of Training has allocated 50 offender places, which will be increased to 150 in 2000.

DETYA - Pilot Funding Model

A pilot program is currently being trialed for the first time in Australia. The Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS) under DETYA has allocated bulk funds to the Ministry of Justice to distribute for tutorial assistance to Aboriginal offenders with literacy needs. Individual offenders apply through the Education and Vocational Training Unit for the assistance, and this support is available as they move throughout the prison system.

Twelve Month Operational Plans

Each prison now formulates a 12 month plan for program delivery ensuring that program provision is consistent, reliable and timely according to a mutually agreed plan. This plan takes into account a comprehensive delivery structure including financial resources, TAFE resource agreements, external grants and prison staff delivery. The Superintendents of each prison have input into these service level agreements and this will assist in the prison meeting education and training performance targets.

KEYNOTE ACHIEVEMENTS

- § Student Contact Hours (SCH) has tripled over the passed three years.
- § Equivalent to just over a third of the total financial resources available now come from external sources and since 1996 the resource base has increased by 138%.
- § Two Bandyup Women's Prison vocational projects selected as models of "Best Practice."
- § Education staff is seen as part of the management team of each prison.
- § On average there are 1250 offenders actively engaged in education and vocational training programs around the state on any day, which equates to 39% of the muster.
- § Manager Education and Vocational Training is part of the peak management group of Prison Services (includes Superintendents).

CONCLUSION

It would have been difficult to predict the outcome before we began to implement changes, but what has come out as truly the most important element, is how we now view ourselves, and how the Ministry now views us as a professional Unit. We have the confidence to stand up, side by side with our eastern states' colleagues and be proud to display our achievements. Our opinion is heard and it counts. This confidence is a vital ingredient in striving to create a culture of continuous improvement.