

The Education of Juvenile Offenders in the West

Daryl Carmody
Ministry of Justice - WA

1. Legislation

In Western Australia legislation classifies offenders aged between ten and eighteen as Juvenile Offenders – subject to the 1994 Young Offenders Act. Once past the age of eighteen, offenders are dealt with under the adult justice system according to the 1995 Sentencing Act and the 1995 Sentence Administration Act.

The West Australian Education Act 1928 requires that all children must attend school between the beginning of the year they turn six until the end of the year they turn fifteen. This Act has recently been revised and will become the Education Act 1997. Attendance ages have varied only slightly in the new act. The requirement to provide compulsory education for juvenile offenders until the end of the year they turn fifteen has been expanded in WA to ensure that **all** juvenile offenders in custody attend an education and vocational training program, regardless of age. These programs operate five days per week, fifty-two weeks of the year.
(Our truancy rate in custody is very good!)

2. Juvenile Education Services

Education for juveniles in custody is provided by a specialist unit within the Ministry of Justice – Education and Vocational Training Unit. We are not part of the Education Department of WA nor are we a TAFE college. The Ministry of Justice is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO).

Although primarily in the business of administration of court orders, the Ministry of Justice recognises the unique educational requirements of its juvenile and adult population and provides this educational service. My talk this morning will focus on the structure, operations and education programs provided through the Juvenile Education Services unit of the Ministry of Justice.

3. Staffing (OHP)

The Education and Vocational Training Unit is managed by Anne Gilmour, who has responsibility over adult and juvenile education. I sit under Anne as Coordinator of Juvenile Education Services.

I have management responsibility for staff, budgets and programs within custodial centres and community based offices. Daily management of custodial education is done by our Senior Education Officer and Custodial Education Officer. We also employ two Aboriginal Education Welfare Officers and a Recreation Officer. All of these administrative positions are Ministry of Justice public service items.

Teaching and vocational staff are employed on annual contracts with a limited tenure of two years. They may be seconded from the Education Department or the TAFE sector, come from independent schools or the private school system. We advertise

positions and applicants are required to address selection criteria where we look for experience and skills in education support and remedial teaching, Aboriginal education, youth at risk programs and student centred learning.(IEP's)

Being able to select our own teaching staff and requiring that staff have recent experience within a mainstream education system ensures that our programs are current and accredited.

4. Custodial Centres

Western Australia has one juvenile remand centre – Rangeview, which caters for up to 65 juveniles, and one detention centre – Banksia Hill, which can accommodate 120 juveniles. Both centres are new, purpose built and operate on a unit based management and accommodation system. Education and vocational training is an integral part of the daily operations in both centres.

Rangeview Remand Centre has a throughput of around 2,500 juveniles per year. Education staff at Rangeview consists of two academic teachers and one vocational skills teacher. Class sizes are small - no more than eight students to one teacher. Priority for places in the classrooms goes to the younger students with the older students attending the vocational program. Due to the high turnover of classes, programs are aimed at addressing juveniles' greatest needs of literacy and numeracy skills. Vocational programs tend to be project based with the ability to individually cater for particular needs or programs. Long-term remands are placed on individual education programs linked to realistic, outside educational plans.

The \$31M Banksia Hill Juvenile Detention Centre was opened in 1997 with the theme "An Opportunity for a New Beginning". It is the largest juvenile detention centre of its kind in Australia. The opening of Banksia Hill saw the closing of three smaller centres built in the 1950's and 1960's.

Banksia Hill sits on 16 hectares of land with a single perimeter fence. The largest part of Banksia Hill is the education and vocational training centre. Education Services, as an integral part of the commissioning team, was involved in the design, layout and fit-out of the centre. As such we were able to ensure that the education facilities are comparable to or better than those in any mainstream school or TAFE college.

The education facilities include four academic classrooms, a computer laboratory, library, career education centre, art studio, metals and automotive workshop, wood trades and construction skills workshop, horticulture workshop and grounds, fully equipped training kitchen, a gymnasium and full outdoor sporting facilities including basketball, cricket nets, tennis courts, oval and beach volley ball pit (but no swimming pool!). All classrooms, workshops and staff areas are fibre optic linked to allow the networked computer system to operate. The detainee to computer ratio is approximately 2:1; staff to detainee ratio is 8:1.

5. The Detainees

- The centre has an average population of 80 – 100 detainees, boys and girls.
- The number of girls ranges from 1 or 2 to a maximum of 10.
- Approximately 65 – 70% of detainees are Aboriginal.

The age distribution is shown on the overhead (**OHP 1a**). This is compared to the average literacy achievement level shown in the next graph (**OHP 1b**). From this data you can see that the majority of our population are not suited to the mainstream education system or the TAFE system – at this stage.

6. The Custodial Educational Program

As a registered training organisation we are able to deliver accredited programs. Detainees are individually assessed in their first week of admission to the centre. They spend this first week in the Admission Planning class which doubles as our career education centre. Once an individual education plan is devised with the detainee they are timetabled into the daily education program.

Detainees spend half of each day in an academic classroom and half in a vocational area of interest. The academic teacher provides a broad, individual education program with a major emphasis on literacy and numeracy skills. Detainees may be working on school based curriculum provided by their mainstream school, remedial programs, distance education, university bridging courses, TAFE certificate level courses or the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA). Theoretical vocational modules are also completed in the classrooms.

Vocational teachers deliver accredited modules, rewritten and broken down to small, achievable competencies. Courses and trades currently being taught include metals, automotive, wood, horticulture, commercial cookery, recreation, art, and business and computer studies. These courses are all externally accredited and moderated. Detainees receive certification from external TAFE colleges or schools, rather than being issued with a Banksia Hill certification! We have established very good working relationships with both the Education Department and the local TAFE colleges to support our students.

7. Case Management

All juvenile detainees are individually case-managed throughout their sentence. This involves coordination of education and vocational training objectives and programs, treatment programs and release planning. Education Services is a major player in establishing and maintaining a focus on the development of skills and competencies that will better prepare our young people for life back in their community.

Regular case management meetings are held involving custodial education staff, administrative staff, community based education officers, juvenile justice officers, the detainee and their parents or carers. Plans are evaluated and agreed to, goals and milestone dates are set and consequences discussed.

8. Centrelink

With the introduction of the Common Youth Allowance and the development of the Jobs Network, Education Services got on the front foot in WA and established a clear process and protocol for linking our juvenile custodial offenders into the new Commonwealth employment and social security system. We arranged meetings with Centrelink staff and all of the successful Jobs Network tenderers, J-Pet programs and Literacy and Numeracy providers, very early into the launch of the new system. A set of protocols was drawn up and a pilot program agreed to by DETYA in Canberra, for Centrelink to provide a service to our detainees while still in custody. Our argument is that while we have a captive audience we should completely address all these processes.

We now have a fully integrated process where Centrelink assesses all detainees early in their custodial sentence and again prior to release. We are able to get an indication of their employability and determine their Flex Codes (1,2 or 3). We also coordinate completion of all paperwork for the Youth Allowance, independent accommodation support, study assistance and referrals to J-Pets, Intensive Assistance Providers or Literacy and Numeracy Providers.

Our literacy assessments are fully accredited and we determine the National Reporting System Levels for detainees, towards the end of their sentence. Centrelink uses our assessments to determine whether to refer a detainee on release to a commonwealth Literacy and Numeracy provider or not.

Our protocols agreement allows detainees who are eligible for day release to be entered onto the full Jobs Network and able to access Job Matching and Intensive Employment Assistance, while still in detention.

9. Community Based Education Officers

Another unique service we provide is through the role of Community Based Education Officers working with our juveniles once released from custody and completing community based orders. We employ four teachers as field officers who have the specific role of linking young offenders into appropriate education, employment and vocational training placements. They work within the metropolitan area and each has a caseload of 35 – 40 clients.

Community Based Education Officers prioritize their cases – highest priority being compulsory school aged offenders exiting detention, then compulsory school aged offenders on community orders, then post-compulsory offenders exiting detention followed by post-compulsory offenders on community orders. To clarify the responsibility of the Education Department and Ministry of Justice for school aged offenders, we have established another set of protocols. **(OHP)** Truancy and ensuring that our young offenders are placed into appropriate educational programs is the role of these officers, as well as advocating on their behalf when necessary. We have a very positive relationship with the Education Department, even though they are not always happy when we call with another customer!

The role with post-compulsory school aged offenders is to ensure links with Jobs Network organisations, TAFE colleges, group training providers, universities and any other training or employment providers are maintained. Community Based Education Officers establish these contacts in the last two months of the detainee's custodial sentence or following an initial interview with community order juveniles.

10. Education Management System (Database)

Demonstration of Custodial Education Management Database developed by Education Services with Eric Faber from Donel Software.

11. Questions