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Title of Paper:

Changing the mindset:

going to a position where we have never been

Higher Education in a Correctional Setting



GLOBAL EDUCATION ENTERPRISES



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1. PREAMBLE

I come to this Conference, not as a professional working within the field, or having had a long history of involvement in educational training in correctional services, but as a person with a long history of involvement in education and training which has an equity focus.

For many years, I was a Probation Officer in our local community and from that experience I established the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre which acted as an intervention center for up to six young people at any one time who were facing some form of custody in the state correctional service.

The aim was to provide some education and training which would enable young people to integrate into mainstream education or into the work force. This had mixed success.

It is only in recent years, that I have become interested again, in what happened to the young people within my community who have fallen through the cracks in the educational system.

This was brought home to me fairly sharply, when I had a phone call from a young person who had lived within our community who had already been in a custodial sentence for seven years for manslaughter and was now facing a court sentence for armed robbery.

During the short period between his custodial sentences he had not found the capacity to:

- A) secure accommodation
- B) a job
- C) and a loan

He resorted back to the drug scene from whence he came, a pattern which would be so familiar. As a result I spent many hours with him to look at a long term strategy by which he could reposition himself when he exited from corrections next time so he would be secure and confident to have a meaningful role within the community.

From this simple beginning, I became very much aware of the complexities of securing adequate resourcing and support for prisoners in custodial settings.

I come to this Conference as part of my desire to lift the community profile on the issue of adequacy and resourcing of higher education within Australian prisons.

Associated with any such provision, I am also committed to the ongoing professional development of staff who work within the correctional services. Without an educated and enlightened workforce, I do not believe it is impossible to achieve change.

Essentially, my discussion today is around the following.

1. To identify that prisoners who have the capacity to undertake higher education, a disadvantaged group because of the limits of resources, the constraint of direct online communication and the requirement of various

prison security protocols.

2. That the correction service has within it two cultures.
 - a) the education and training (rehabilitation culture) which seeks to reposition prisoners once they finally exit
 - b) the security culture which as part of its requirement to provide justice to the community because of the offences which have been undertaken.

I am suggesting that ongoing professional training needs the education and training culture to clearly understand the security protocols and what underpins them and the security culture needs a better understanding of what can be achieved through education and training.

2. Current Reviews on Higher Education (a Victorian Perspective)

In 1998, the Victorian Government through the then, Office Training and Further Education (OFTE) undertook a research project entitled, 'To Determine the Issues Concerning the Delivery of Higher Education Courses to Adult Prisoners in Victoria.'

In a series of thirteen recommendations, the Corrections Industry Training Board of Victoria was encouraged to look at ways in which the students who have the capacity to undertake higher education could do so.

This report was followed by, 'Report of the Independent Investigation into the Management and Operations of Victoria's Private Prisons,' Peter Kirby (Chairman) 2000.

The recommendation of the Kirby Report was, 'The Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee, in consultation with the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, develop a consistent policy of higher education provision for adult prisoners. This could include the recognition of tertiary-enrolled adult prisoners as belonging to a category of educationally disadvantaged students, the allocation of university equity funding to provide tutor visits, and the development of standardized pathways to enhance opportunities for prisoners to access higher education.'

3. Some Observations

That governments be asked to prepare a separate budget to enable eligible tertiary prisoners to have access for enhanced pathways for prisoners seeking to either access higher education or to move between TAFE and higher education.

To examine the appropriate profile processes to address inconsistencies which occur in providing adult prisoners with access to education programs which would include:

- removing inconsistencies of treatment in student contact hours.
- examining methods by which potential tertiary students are encouraged into further education.

To formally recognise adult prisoners as disadvantaged in terms of their educational entitlements and opportunities.

To meet with the Australian vice chancellors committee to examine ways by which a consistent policy of higher education provision for adult prisoners is implemented which would include:

- the recognition of tertiary enrolled prisoners as belonging to a category of disadvantaged.
- conduct awareness programs to inform university staff of educational restrictions.
- allocate university equity funding to provide tutor visits.
- develop standardised pathways to enhance opportunities for prisoners to access higher education.

To provide funds to access and implement ‘closed loop’ software that would enable prisoners direct communication access between universities and education centres without breach of security.

This paper recognises that there is a significant amount of work being undertaken by highly qualified and dedicated professionals. It also recognises that the rights of educational access is a sensitive political issue whereby there would be mixed feelings within the community.

This paper does not enter into the current debate on the issue of whether prisons should be privatised or not or what forms of diversionary programs could be put in

place to effect change.

This paper recognises the need for programs to assist prisoners to grow in self-esteem and have a sense of personal well being.

It also believes that the task of education and training within prisons is not simply to rehabilitate prisoners to where they were before they entered into custody but to position them further ahead so they can operate effectively in a new set of social circumstances with an adequate set of training skills and an appropriate view on life.

This paper believes that every prisoner has a right to have access to basic training to ensure at least minimum numeracy and literacy as well as some form of appropriate training usually provided within the TAFE sector.

It is my view that prisoners should be able to be part of a seamless pathway to take them through all the levels of the Australian Qualifications Framework which means that if they are able they should have the capacity to articulate directly into higher education.

There are a variety of factors which make this access more difficult which would include the necessary security arrangements, lack of direct access to resources including books, materials and tutoring support and a culture which may not always give the support that is required for students needing the extra assistance for higher education study.

The major barriers or difficulties deterring students from undertaking tertiary studies include prison culture, lack of funding and cost of books.

The issue of fees needs clarity.

It is noted that Aboriginal (Koori) students gain some financial support via ABSTUDY.

Universities are not always specifically informed on the constraints imposed on prisoners compared to other externally enrolled students.

Universities do not have a consistent policy on higher education delivery to prisons and is largely dependent on a particular university or an individual regarding its level of support given.

The issues as defined in the report include:

- The obligations of TAFE (TAFE is not legally obliged to provide support to tertiary students)
- What support is being provided by TAFE institutes to tertiary enrolled prisoners?

This appears to be a considerable tension as there is the need for sound course guidance for potential tertiary students as well as a range of education related services.

Being in prison also imposes constraints which include the need to have a supervisor when making telephone calls, mail being checked and no access to Email or Internet services. The musters can also prevent access.

What is it costing TAFE institutes?

In the calculations in 1998, it was suggested that the cost of provision of one hour in educational support for an adult prisoner equated to \$2,380.

What are the universities' obligations for adult prisoners undertaking higher education courses?

Universities do not recognise prisoners as a disadvantaged category and do not identify tertiary enrolled prisoners and are not allowed to do so under anti-discrimination laws.

In the OTFE report, the consultant suggested that universities would respond more readily to access and equity arguments, to quality and performance measures, and to enter inter sectoral co-operative ventures than they would to request for funding transfer.

The OTFE report suggested:

- a) The commonwealth would recognise prisoners as being disadvantaged
- b) Universities would become accredited suppliers of university courses for adult prisoners

What training pathways can be developed to enhance the articulation of adult prisoners between TAFE and university?

Any investigation would need to look at:

- Lack of funds for adult prisoners to undertake higher education courses.
- Increased access by adult prisoners to university tutors (visits and computer)
- Enhanced pathways between sectors
- Provision of learning and education related teaching/tutoring to TAFE students.
- Increased awareness of constraints effecting adult prisoners' education process.

4. Staff Development

I am not familiar enough with professional development programs which are undertaken within the nation's correctional services. However, I do believe that it is just as import to give access and opportunity to staff to undertake further study.

I had been more recently appointed to the advisory board of the Australian Institute of Public Safety which has now developed a Bachelor of Arts Degree (Security). Such a degree would provide opportunities for correction staff to extend and develop their understanding of the issues relating to their profession.

5. Conclusion

When I began this work, I came from a position of responding to a specific need for a single individual.

Now I have become more involved in the general policy question and I can see that if we as a community are going to improve public safety and provide a better opportunity for people to re-enter the community then we have to work much harder at providing significant education and training intervention at the point of sentencing and working it through with appropriate study and leave provisions and then provide relevant support for prisoners as they exit.