

## **Investigation of reporting and evaluation mechanisms for vocational education and training outcomes for adult prisoners in Australia**

**Jane Bartier**  
Director, Charrette

**John Vandyke**  
Director, TeKnowledge IT Consulting

### **The policy context**

The *National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training for Adult Prisoners and Offenders in Australia* provides a national approach to the implementation of vocational education and training (VET) for adult inmates and offenders whilst in custody or serving community orders.

The Strategy was initiated as a result of the 1996 report of the *Inquiry into Education and Training in Correctional Facilities* of the Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee. The content of the Strategy has been revised over the past two years oversighted by a Reference Group of Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) and States and Territories representatives.

Objectives 4.3 and 4.4 of the Strategy relate to establishing mechanisms and processes for data collection and reporting and evaluating national VET outcomes for inmates and offenders. These objectives were chosen as the initial location for investigation.

Jane Bartier, Director, Charrette and John Vandyke, Director, TeKnowledge IT Consulting undertook this project which began in May this year and produced a final report in September.

### **Correctional setting**

It has been recognised for some time that vocational education and training takes on some unique attributes when placed in the correctional context. In the course of this review, the consultants asked various participants to identify some of these special qualities.

The investigation revealed a number of attributes of the prison context that influence management, modelling and outcome assessment. In particular a correctional setting for VET:

- provides a range of educational opportunities, including face to face, distance, and on the job opportunities
- provides accredited vocational education and training through a range of RTOs, including corrections-based and third party providers
- ranges from being seen and considered as part of the core business of the prison to being vulnerable to other prison activity
- has regular and often volatile prisoner (and therefore student) movements
- operates within, is impacted by, and is responsive to both prison and prisoner management decisions

- is qualitatively different from the broader VET marketplace in a number of key ways, including:
- constrained availability of curriculum due in part to restricted movement of prisoners
- constrained opportunities for and availability of work experience outside the classroom environment, even more so than in the broader vocational education and training context
- a student population that is both demographically different from and physically isolated from the broader VET student population
- differing motivations for engagement in the VET programme to those usually expected in the broader community.

## Scope of investigation

This investigation project, managed by the NSW Department of Education and Training, aimed to:

- Describe how a national data collection system might be established for monitoring, reporting and evaluating vocational education and training outcomes for adult prisoners in Australia.
- Gather information about the current data collection, monitoring, reporting and evaluation systems in each state and territory

The project definition became:

The investigation will cover adult custodial prisoners in public and private residential correctional facilities, undertaking units of competency, modules and courses that may form part or all of an endorsed Australian Qualifications Training Framework (AQTF) qualification and would be the subject of AVETMISS data collection in the broader VET context.

These refinements amount to a target group of adult prisoners (those over 18 years of age) within a custodial setting (including remand and sentenced). The issue of resource utilisation and financial commitments to VET for prisoners were specifically excluded from the scope of the project.

Vocational education and training is, in this instance, defined as any course, programme, module/unit of competency that fell within the rules and guidelines of the AQTF and was recorded on the National Training Information Service ([www.ntis.gov.au](http://www.ntis.gov.au)).

This definition:

- includes basic education, literacy and language provision, many licenses as well as industry specific training. It embraces a nationally regulated and recognised system of vocational education and training delivery and development
- excludes schools curricula, university courses, therapeutic programmes or community education options.

Subsequently, the project team investigated:

- The development of an accountable and appropriate national system that provides equitable and consistent qualitative and quantitative data collection
- How current national and state/territory data collection services can be built upon to support the development of a national data collection system.
- The resource implications of such a national system.

## Approach

In order to identify the reporting requirements, the project team developed a whole of lifecycle process model that identified stages in prisoners' engagement with VET, from admission/reception to post release. This model was developed following extensive consultations with all states/territories.

Performance indicators were identified for each stage of the process model, and reporting and data requirements were derived from these. Gaps were identified between current information collection protocols and the proposed model, and recommendations were developed to assist in bridging these gaps.

The study investigated the availability of data in the following broad categories:

- participation/enrolment in VET
- participation in VET by people from specified equity groups, including prisoners from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) background, women, prisoners with a disability and prisoners from a non English speaking background
- units<sup>1</sup>/modules/qualifications undertaken
- results achieved from VET programs (for example successful completion, certification)
- employment-related outcomes
- re-offence related outcomes
- other outcomes.

The study also examined the availability of data to allow analysis within these broad categories, and also to:

- facilitate cross tabulations between the above
- allow the derivation of historical perspectives on the above
- distinguish trends and issues on a state/territory basis.

## Purpose of the collection

The following list reflects the priority applications agreed to by the Steering Committee. These potential applications of the data collection are closely connected with each other, and are not intended to be mutually exclusive:

- support the development of policy for VET for adult prisoners, provide input into the development of strategy for VET for adult prisoners, assist with planning for service development and delivery, and offer support for decision making by government and relevant authorities
- raise the profile of VET for adult prisoners in both correctional and vocational educational authorities, and with government
- provide information to help guide decision making with respect to funding and resourcing of VET for prisoners
- identify and promote the application of good practice in VET for adult prisoners
- identify and analyse the outcomes achieved from VET provision for adult prisoners
- achieve progress towards standardisation of measures and agreed definitions across jurisdictions for VET for adult prisoners

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the use of the term "unit" should be taken to mean "unit of competency" unless otherwise indicated.

- enhance linkages and cooperation both between authorities within jurisdictions and between agencies across state boundaries
- improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the data collection process to ensure that resource demands at the state/territory level are minimised
- support the evaluation of programme outcomes and differing approaches to VET for adult prisoners
- pursue positive outcomes for adult prisoners from VET.

In regard to ‘good practice’, it was determined that there was no practical way to collect information about management methodologies for VET for prisoners as part of a data collection. Therefore it has been recommended that issues of good practice should be investigated on a case-by-case basis, dependent on performance information derived from the proposed reporting model.

### **Conceptual framework**

A key focus of the project has been the development of the Conceptual Process Model as a framework for the analysis and review of reporting and evaluation mechanisms. The Process Model will assist in supporting the *National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training for Adult Prisoners and Offenders in Australia* by providing a conceptual model within which to discuss issues concerning outcomes, outputs, inputs and resourcing.

The proposed framework provides an organised and co-ordinated approach to defining data collection points across the key stages as a prisoner engages with VET.

The framework adds to the understanding of the practices and responsibilities of the two jurisdictions involved (vocational education and corrections) in approaching the National Strategy but also provides an opportunity for the role of other players to be considered (such as Parole, Centrelink, and other service providers).

Principles underpinning the framework include:

- the prisoner is the focus, within an overall process context
- facilitates capturing collection points of information
- provides an opportunity to effect consistency of reportable outcomes
- provides an analysis tool to assist in considering current practices/good practices
- provides an analysis tool to help identify state/territory programs and projects
- facilitates the analysis of gaps.

The process model was presented during the project as a hypothetical model designed to be challenged and enhanced. The model should evolve over time to reflect developing understanding of the VET for prisoners process, which in turn will facilitate refinement of the reporting requirements.

It is intended that the framework presented in this Process Model will support not only reliable and consistent quantitative reporting, but also qualitative research opportunities.

This Process Model has been built using a two-phased approach. A “top down” analysis was undertaken by locating the prisoner and their points of interaction with VET both within and beyond the prison context. The Process Model provides a vantage point from which to review and understand activity, inputs, outputs and the overall outcomes.

Having defined the overall process in some detail, the data and reporting solutions required to support management of the process can be identified.

At the same time, a “bottom up” perspective has been developed from the State and Territory information provided on current activity, as well as from views expressed with regard to desired outcomes. The top down model has been refined and expanded as a result of these consultations.

This two-way approach results in the development of a robust and comprehensive model for managing information about VET for prisoners. The model provides a mechanism to allow participants to become clearer about the flow of work and critical measurement points within the process. As a spin off benefit, the model can help to identify overlap, gaps and opportunities for alignment across the states and territories. The different approaches taken by the states and territories, when mapped against the Process Model, informed the final recommendations of the review.

The Process Model is a whole of lifecycle view of activity associated with the intersection between prisoners and VET. The model is presented as a linear process, with the commencement of one activity logically following on from the completion of another, although it is recognised that often stages will be omitted or appear in a different sequence, or overlap or merge. The content of the stages is more important to this review than whether the stages appear in the sequence presented. The absence of a stage in practice, or the truncation or joining of two stages, may indicate differences in policy and procedures, or other factors at play. However, each stage of the Process Model is represented in some form or another in at least one state or territory.

## **Definition of terms**

Before we describe the Process Model, it is important that we clarify the use of some common terminology. The words “input”, “output” and “outcome” will have the following meaning in the discussion of the Process Model:

- input – any resource (financial, human or other) that is required to allow the stage or process to proceed to completion<sup>2</sup>
- output – any result of the stage or process that either requires monitoring or is an input to another process
- outcome – any result of the operation of the process as a whole.

It is recognised that different management perspectives may take in only a part of the overall process as described hereunder. From these perspectives, some of the components that we have identified here as outputs may in fact appear to be outcomes. However, the scope of this review covers the whole of VET for prisoners, not just some stages in the process.

It is also recognised that outcomes may be further classified as follows:

- Desired Outcomes
- Unanticipated and Unplanned Outcomes.

Whilst the focus of this review is on Desired Outcomes from VET for prisoners, we understand that performance management is the science of managing the utilisation of inputs to achieve required outputs that maximise the achievement of desired outcomes

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<sup>2</sup> Note that financial and human resource inputs were outside the scope of this project.

whilst minimising the negative impact of unplanned or unanticipated outcomes. Statistical collections are not the optimal vehicle for assessment of unanticipated and unplanned outcomes. Recommendations were made to assist with the identification and investigation of unanticipated and unplanned outcomes.

## **Stages of VET for prisoners process**

The following stages of the Process Model have been defined:

- Admission/Reception
- Needs Assessment and Planning
- Enrolment Pending
- Enrolment
- Completion
- Needs Assessment and Plan Review
- Release

It was challenging to identify terminology to describe these stages that is not compromised by inconsistent usage.

The following paragraphs present a working definition of these stages:

### **1. Admission/Reception**

- stage commences with admission/reception of the prisoner to prison
- stage ends with the commencement of VET Needs Assessment and Plan (NAP)
- admission is a stage prior to the commencement of specific VET activity
- there are no VET inputs to this stage
- the only VET output from this stage is the commencement of VET Needs Assessment and Plan
- suggested performance measures include:
  - elapsed time from date of admission/reception to commencement of NAP
  - percentage of admissions where prisoner is still incarcerated after three months and no NAP has been commenced.

### **2. Needs Assessment and Planning<sup>3</sup>**

stage commences with the beginning of VET Needs Assessment and Plan

- stage ends with the completion of VET needs assessment and enrolment plan
- inputs to this stage include standardised tools for NAP, assessor resource (personnel)<sup>4</sup>, VET programme
- outputs from this stage include completed NAP, indicating that VET is required/agreed to, or not
- suggested Performance Measurement Options:
  - availability and utilisation of standardised NAP Tools, per admission/reception<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Needs Assessment and Plan referred to here relates specifically to VET needs. This assessment and planning process is to be part of the broader prisoner assessment and case planning framework in each state/territory.

<sup>4</sup> This requirement is recorded here for the sake of completeness. It is outside the scope of this project and was not developed further in the Project Report.

<sup>5</sup> This indicator may reduce in significance over time, as the use of standardised NAPs becomes more prevalent.

- availability and utilisation of VET programme, per admission<sup>6</sup>
- elapsed time from date of admission/reception to completion of NAP
- NAP Completion Rates (percentage of prisoners where prisoner is still incarcerated after three months<sup>7</sup> and a NAP is completed within three months of admission/reception)
- NAP Agreement Rates (percentage of prisoners where the NAP is agreed by the prisoner)
- NAP Rejection Rates (percentage of prisoners where a NAP is not agreed by the prisoner).

### 3. Enrolment Pending

- commences with the finalisation of a VET Needs Assessment Plan indicating that VET is required/agreed to
- ends with enrolment<sup>8</sup> in scheduled VET courses
- inputs to this stage include:
  - completed and agreed NAP
  - available relevant scheduled training
  - resources to complete enrolment (personnel and funding)
- outputs from this stage include enrolment in one or more units/modules
- suggested Performance Measurement Options:
  - elapsed time from completion of NAP to enrolment in first unit/module/course.

### 4. Enrolment

- commences with the beginning of training/education in a unit/module
- ends with the finalisation of attendance at training/education in a unit/module
- inputs to this stage include:
  - funds to procure training/education
  - enrolment in one or more units/modules/courses
- outputs from this stage include completed participation in units/modules/courses
- suggested Performance Measurement Options:
  - number and percentage of prisoner population enrolled in Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Certificate I–Advanced Diploma qualifications

### 5. Completion

- commences with the completion of enrolment activity
- ends with the issue of a result/certification
- inputs to this stage include completed participation in an enrolled unit/module/course
- outputs from this stage include award of a result/qualification

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<sup>6</sup> This indicator may reduce in significance over time, as the availability of VET programs becomes more universal.

<sup>7</sup> Individual states/territories may elect to set different performance criteria for this indicator. A national standard would not be considered until this criterion was to be reported nationally, and may be different to the three month period suggested here.

<sup>8</sup> Note that “enrolment” is defined here as it is in the AVETMISS documentation. Enrolment requires not just the commitment to and documentary enrolment in the unit/module, but also the commencement of studies. The “Enrolment Pending” stage thus provides a potential set of measures that will contribute to an assessment of unmet demand.

- suggested Performance Measurement Options:
  - number and percentage of units/modules successfully completed over units/modules enrolled in
  - number and percentage of prisoners who successfully complete units/modules
  - number of qualifications awarded at AQF Certificate I to Advanced Diploma levels qualification levels
  - number and percentage of units not completed due to transfer to another correctional facility, or release from custody
  - number and percentage of units not completed due to failure to achieve competency requirements

## 6. NAP Review

- commences with:
- an existing completion of the initial NAP
- ends with release from custody
- inputs to this stage include NAP
  - elapsed time since the completion of the NAP
- outputs from this stage include:
  - a progress assessment
  - an updated NAP, or
  - A reconfirmed NAP
- suggested Performance Measurement Options:
  - number and percentage of reviews completed within twelve months of agreed NAP
  - number and percentage of NAP targets reviewed as achieved within twelve months of NAP.

## 7. Release

- commences with the release of a prisoner from custody
- ends with re-admission to custody, or two years after date of release (or some other agreed limit), whichever is the earlier
- inputs to this stage include
  - released prisoner
  - post release component of NAP
- outputs from this stage include:
  - re-admission or
  - successful completion of qualification
  - successful attainment of employment
  - successful retention of employment
  - successful completion of further education/qualification
  - successful addition to community skills
- suggested Performance Measurement Options:
  - number and percentage of prisoners released with successfully completed units/modules
  - number and percentage of prisoners released with successfully completed qualifications at AQF Certificate I to Advanced Diploma levels
  - number and percentage of released prisoners with successfully completed units/modules who re-enrol post release within two years

- number and percentage of released prisoners with successfully completed units/modules who subsequently complete their qualification at AQF Certificate I to Advanced Diploma levels
- number and percentage of prisoners with completed units/modules who are in paid employment one year after release, compared to the overall population of released prisoners
- number and percentage of released prisoners with completed units/modules responding to the national Student Outcomes Survey, who are in paid employment at the survey date
- number and percentage of prisoners with completed units/modules who are in further education one year after release, compared to the overall population of released prisoners
- number and percentage of prisoners with completed units/modules or qualifications who re-offend within two years of release, compared to the overall population of released prisoners
- number and percentage of prisoners with completed units/modules or qualifications who contribute to building skills in a particular community.

### **Desired outcomes**

Desired outcomes from the VET for Prisoners Process can be gathered under broad headings, as follows:

- employability outcomes
- successful completion of units/modules and qualifications
- further education post release
- employment outcomes
- successful paid employment post release
- continued employment post release
- outcomes related to re-offence
- reduction in re-offence following successful completion of VET units/modules and qualifications
- outcomes related to community capacity building
- contribution to building of skills in particular communities.

These outcomes map directly to two of the stages of the Process Model above – namely completion and release. Some of the outputs of these stages then directly represent the outcomes for the process as a whole; some of the performance measures can therefore be used to measure these outcomes. The relevant performance measures are listed hereunder, under the relevant outcome headings.

### **Employability outcomes**

From the Completion Phase:

- number and percentage of units/modules successfully completed over units/modules/courses enrolled in
- number and percentage of prisoners who successfully complete units/modules
- number of qualifications awarded at AQF Certificate I to Advanced Diploma levels

From the Release Phase:

- number and percentage of prisoners released with successfully completed units/modules

- number and percentage of prisoners released with successfully completed qualifications at AQF Certificate I to Advanced Diploma levels
- number and percentage of released prisoners with successfully completed units/modules who re-enrol post release within two years
- number and percentage of released prisoners with successfully completed units/modules who subsequently complete their qualification at AQF Certificate I to Advanced Diploma levels.

### **Employment outcomes**

From the Release Phase:

- number and percentage of prisoners with completed units/modules who are in paid employment one year after release, compared to the overall population of released prisoners
- number and percentage of prisoners with completed units/ modules who are in further education one year after release, compared to the overall population of released prisoners
- number and percentage of released prisoners with completed units, modules responding to the national Student Outcomes Survey, who are in paid employment at the survey date.

### **Outcomes related to re-offence**

From the Release Phase:

- number and percentage of prisoners with completed units/modules or qualifications who re-offend within two years of release, compared to the overall population of released prisoners.

### **Outcomes related to community capacity building**

From the Release Phase:

- number and percentage of prisoners with completed units/ modules or qualifications from specified community types who return to live in those communities.

### **Reporting flexibility and options**

It is expected that the following reporting flexibility and options will be required:

- the ability to report at the national, state/territory, regional and facility levels
- the ability to report by equity group and by other demographic grouping
- the ability to report by other factors, including length of sentence and nature of offence
- the ability to report on an annual basis
- the ability to report historically across multiple years
- the ability to cross-tabulate by each of these attributes.

### **Release phase outcomes**

There are well-recognised issues associated with the measurement of outcomes for prisoners post release. Whilst the existence of national data collections for the VET population as a whole provides some opportunities to bridge the post-release information gap, there is no universal panacea.

## **Employment outcomes**

The need to measure employment outcomes post release brings with it a number of significant challenges.

In some jurisdictions, the connection between the corrections system and the ex-prisoner extend well beyond the date of release, through parole programmes and/or post release case management services designed to assist with re-integration into the community. In some circumstances, it is feasible to track and collect information about the ex-prisoners' employment status. Whether this information is collected in a form that would facilitate its matching with training records is uncertain.

However, post-release case management of this type is by no means a universal approach across the states/territories, or even within individual jurisdictions. It was beyond the scope of the review to recommend adoption of a more rigorous post-release services programme. We therefore sought to present alternatives for tracking employment outcomes that might offer a less costly and more practical solution, whilst still delivering useful information on employment outcomes related to VET for prisoners.

## **Further education outcomes**

As discussed above, post release case management strategies have a potential role to play in providing access to information about an ex-prisoner's involvement in further education.

The use of national VET data collections, such as those based around AVETMISS, can also provide access to a broader range of information on particular participants and their ongoing engagement in VET and achievements. However, such collections rely on the ability to accurately and repeatedly match information about individual students across training providers and reporting periods. Where even fundamental identifying information, such as the name of the student, may be changed between enrolments, the reliability of this matching process can be compromised.

## **Gap analysis**

The strategy adopted for this project was to look for opportunities to leverage existing information collections and reporting protocols. This strategy has been adopted in order to capitalise on existing investments in the corrections/education systems as much as possible, and to facilitate early delivery of results.

However, our research indicates that, notwithstanding this strategy, there are significant gaps in information collection, reporting capacity and local procedures both across and within jurisdictions that will need to be addressed in order to progress the strategy. The gap analysis derives from the reporting definitions presented in the above information, and draws upon the results of detailed consultations with the states/territories. This gap analysis in turn drove the recommendations from this study, and informed the recommended implementation strategy.

Some of the gaps relate to national issues impacting on all states/territories and other stakeholders. Others impact only on one or a few states/territories. It was not the purpose

of this investigation to disclose specific gaps relating to individual jurisdictions. Instead, it was recommended that individual states/territories undertake their own reviews to assess their status with respect to the Gap Analysis.

### **National gaps (impacting all States/Territories)**

The following identified gaps will apply to all states/territories:

- corrections RTOs not included in the AVETMISS Collection Process
- no identification of corrections enrolments in AVETMISS data
- limited understanding of AVETMISS in corrections and education
- misalignment of National Reporting Periods
- misalignment of National Reporting Frameworks Data Strategies
- AVETMISS Data Element and Data Definition issues
- inconsistent approaches to Needs Assessment and Planning<sup>9</sup>
- inconsistent approaches to post release engagement

### **Gaps in individual States/Territories**

Some states/territories will also evidence the following gaps:

- lack of AVETMISS Compliant Information Systems
- lack of standardised and mandated Needs Assessment and Planning
- lack of understanding of AVETMISS in corrections
- lack of Post Release Case Management
- corrections systems to link to AVETMISS records via Client identifier

### **Conclusion**

At the commencement of this study, some concern was expressed that it may be difficult to penetrate the complexities of the VET for prisoners process, the different approaches and policies in place in the states/territories, and the varying priorities assigned to vocational education and training in both educational and correctional jurisdictions. It was also felt that a lack of standardise data collection and reporting arrangements might impede the achievement of the project's goals, and therefore the progress of the National Strategy.

In the end, the consultants found not only a level of consistency in approaches (reflected in the relatively ready acceptance of the conceptual process model), but also a high level of consistency in the issues and challenges faced by the various jurisdictions. Whilst there are unique challenges that will need to be addressed in each state/territory, this foundation of agreement, coupled with the commitment demonstrated by all stakeholders and the availability of a core framework of national data standards (in the AVETMISS standard) together auger well for the establishment of at least a basic national reporting system in coming years, which can be built on into the future. The specific recommendations of the report (which will be discussed in the conference presentation) provide a roadmap for the implementation programme ahead.

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<sup>9</sup> Note that this requirement for Needs Assessment and Planning goes beyond the provision of the current needs assessment embedded in National Training Packages. Any national approach to Needs Assessment and Planning for prisoners must be cognisant of and consistent with the Training Package approach.