

From labour to work:

Evaluation + Options for Victoria's Prison Industries

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Overview

1. Questions and method
2. Key findings
3. Outlook and lessons from elsewhere
4. Possible new directions
 - ❑ Challenges
 - ❑ Moving from labour to work: an industry skill centre model
 - ❑ PI Pre-employment/Pre-apprenticeships Pilots Programs (PIPPPS)
5. Conclusion



1. Approach

Questions

- ❑ how do prison industries currently operate?
- ❑ possibilities for improvement?
- ❑ option for action?

Methods: primarily qualitative (+ accounts)

- ❑ desk-based
- ❑ field work: key informants/PI themselves
- ❑ analysis and synthesis



2. Key findings

(i) Objectives

- mixed and changing

(ii) Scale and significance:

- limited cost, huge in life of prisoners

(iii) Labour supply:

- the hardest to manage in Australia



Labour supply (continued)

- key sub-groups
 - disabled – mentally and physically
 - drug damaged
 - long term unemployed/marginalised
 - diverse cultural/linguistic background
 - itinerant, low paid, haphazard employed
 - well educated and competent
 - being reformed
 - rational maximisers
 - young offenders
 - women
- nature of prisoner flow
 - many short sentences
 - spread over a variety of prisons
 - time shared with programs and education



2. Key findings (continued)

- (iv) Definition of productive activity:
- ensuring prisoners are not 'idle'



(v) Activities performed

- **commercial based activities**
 - primarily low skilled work
- **community programs**
- **services**

Defining features:

- **neither work nor commerce as commonly understood**
- **roles poorly defined**
- **resources limited and constrained**

Results in some major achievements

- **income for prisoner and system**
- **tacit learning, especially basic work discipline**

=> prime feature: distraction from idleness – ‘burning time’



2. Key findings (continued)

(vi) Organisational models

- ‘standard’ public sector model of ‘productive’ activity with resulting in saleable output of some kind
 - some organised well, others quite ordinary
 - traditional domains of activity under threat
- different approaches
 - private sector – more rigorous commercial endeavours but ‘cherry picking’
 - Margoneet – integrated vocational services but its still very early days



2. Key findings (continued)

(vii) Assessment of performance

- While nett revenue rising, gross revenue declining and fluctuating more dramatically

- links with others limited
 - within and beyond Corrections Vic (especially programs and education)

- barriers to change
 - fatalism of custodial and TAFE cultures



2. Key findings (continued)

(viii) Inadequacy of data

- for operational purposes
- business development
- research and evaluation

(ix) Major finding:

- current arrangements unsustainable
- more resources needed while prisoners are in system and after



3. Outlook and lessons from else where

What futures are possible?

- evolution of the labour market: two scenarios
 - evolution of prisons/corrections
 - evolution of prison industries



Lessons from other jurisdictions

- All PI face similar problems
- Financial outlook varies
 - Brighter outlook linked to adaptive capacity and commitment to business development
- Key change driver:
 - senior management (eg Qld and NZ)
- No one 'best practice' model
 - need to get seven key issues right



Lessons from other jurisdictions

- Beyond best practice (continued)

- Accept different models and set appropriate priorities
- Importance of Ministerial and SES leadership
- Independence from custodial function critical
- Integrate with education and programs
 - importance of new rostering arrangements
- Resources needed for org and productive capacity
- Accountability vital for innovation
- Future success: work beyond prison, not just in it



4. New directions

(a) Challenges

- economic imperatives and the need for realism
 - (ie opportunity cost)

- the reality of labour supply
 - (need for pre-employment/pre-apprenticeships initiatives)

- PIs only one part of prison system
 - (from residual activity to industry skill centre status)



4. New Directions (continued)

Moving from 'labour' to 'work'
– An industry skill centre model

- blend the best of the prison industry and education practice
- Make this integral, not incidental to prison organisation
- Organise time differently
 - move to a two shift, 12 hour day roster



4. New Directions (continued)

(b) Specific initiatives

- increasing support
 - for prisoners and PI staff
- clarifying and extending roles
 - redefining expectations and outcomes
- further research and data collection priorities
- PI Pre-employment/Pre-apprenticeships Pilots Programs (PIPPPS)



(i) Increasing support

- For prisoners
 - Better case management of flows within and beyond prison
- For PI staff
 - projects (pilots)
 - personnel (advice and support)
 - partnerships (education and social sector)



(ii) Clarifying and Extending Roles

- For prisoners
 - Better mentoring/on-the-job training arrangements
- For Employers
 - Better integration with labour and not just product flows
- For PI Staff
 - Brokers and intermediaries based in a skill centre



(iii) Further research and data collection

- Post PI experiences of ex-offenders
 - Where are they now?
- Prisoner flows within and beyond prison
 - Could they be managed better
- Job opportunities for ex-offenders
 - where are they?
 - The changing nature of 'unskilled work'
- Adequacy and use of data
- Benchmarking amongst PI in different jurisdictions



(iv) Where next? PI Pre-employment/Pre-apprenticeships Pilots Program (PIPPPS)

- What would be funded?
- How would it be funded?
- Who would be funded?
- Who would run it and how?
- How should the pilot proposal be refined?



5. Conclusion

- PIs perform valuable role
- Pointers to the future already in existence
- Guiding ideas for the future:
 - From 'labour' to 'work'
 - From 'burning time' to 'industry skill centre'

