

## Vocational education and training for

# adult prisoners and offenders in Australia:

Edited by **Susan Dawe**

## Research readings

This book of research readings provides clear evidence that adult prisoners and offenders who participate in vocational education and training (VET) during their sentence are less likely to re-offend. A reduction in recidivism represents significant cost savings to the community. This book also highlights recent improvements in the delivery of VET for adult prisoners and offenders in Australia. Typically facing multiple social and economic disadvantages, they also require personal assistance to gain employment in the community.

### Contents

The first five chapters of the book examine international and Australian research on the rehabilitation of adult prisoners and offenders. The remaining six chapters update progress by the jurisdictions in implementing the 2001 *National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training for Adult Prisoners and Offenders in Australia*. There are challenges in providing VET in prison but many examples of innovative and good training practices are provided in these chapters.

#### What the research says:

- International research and trends in education and training provision in correctional settings  
*Raymond Chavez & Susan Dawe*
- The role of VET in recidivism in Australia  
*Victor Callan & John Gardner*
- Ex-prisoners and ex-offenders and the employment connection: Assistance plus acceptance  
*Joe Graffam & Lesley Hardcastle*
- The role of education and training in prison to work transitions  
*Margaret Giles, Anh Tram Le, Maria Allan, Catherine Lees, Ann-Claire Larsen & Lyn Bennett*
- Should education and vocational training be compulsory in corrections?  
*Peter de Graaff*

#### Improving VET for adult prisoners and offenders in Australia:

- The provision of VET for adult prisoners in Australia  
*Sian Halliday Wynes*
- Using research to inform practice: Western Australian correctional education  
*Christine Laird, Raymond Chavez & Melanie Zan*
- Throughcare and VET for adult prisoners and offenders within the NSW Department of Corrective Services  
*Karen Banfield, Steve Barlow & David Gould*
- Improving VET for adult prisoners and offenders in Australia  
*Sian Halliday Wynes*
- Improving literacy for adult prisoners and offenders  
*Bernard Meatheringham, Pamela Snow, Martine Powell & Michael Fewster*
- Education and training for Indigenous people in prisons  
*Cyde Miller*

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## Key findings

On June 30 2006, there were 25 800 adult prisoners (20 200 sentenced and 5600 unsentenced) in Australian prisons. In addition, there were 52 200 adult offenders—those sentenced to community-based orders (or on parole from prison), and 862 people on periodic detention.

As at 30 June 2006, there were 117 custodial facilities nationally, including 84 government-operated prisons and seven privately operated prisons. While 75% of adult prisoners were held in secure facilities, 25% were held in open prisons (facilities classified as low security).

To assist ex-prisoners and ex-offenders to return to the community as law-abiding citizens, correctional services deliver (to high risk offenders in particular) learning programs which target the behaviour directly related to the offence, for example, substance abuse or anger management. To date, these programs are not as effective as they might be since 60% of individuals incarcerated have previously been in an adult prison.

Adult prisoners and offenders typically have inadequate literacy skills or school education, and a history of unemployment. Indigenous Australians are ten times more likely to be in prison than non-Indigenous Australians.

The key findings from this research are:

- Recidivism is affected by a range of factors including education level, employment history, substance abuse, social support, physical and mental health, and accommodation. The lack of education and employment skills, and other factors that correlate with recidivism, often result in unemployment.
- Education and training for adult prisoners and offenders can make a significant difference towards successful post-offending employment outcomes, and thus reduce the likelihood of re-offending.
- Employment assistance programs for adult prisoners and offenders can significantly lower the rate of re-offending.
- Irrespective of whether prisoners have a pessimistic or optimistic attitude to life, those prisoners undertaking VET courses expect better labour market futures (such as work, more enjoyable work, and more money) than those undertaking non-vocational courses or prison work alone.
- The willingness of employers in the community to employ those people with a criminal history is critical to successful employment outcomes.
- The integration of education and training with personal support is required for successful transition from prison to the community. This includes one-to-one counselling, and ongoing monitoring and assistance.
- Community-ownership and involvement in the education and training of Indigenous Australian prisoners ensures further education, work opportunities, and community-support services are available after their release from prison.
- VET for Indigenous Australian prisoners and offenders should also incorporate Indigenous identities, culture, knowledge and values, if it is to lead to positive and improved outcomes for individuals.
- In most jurisdictions, only a small percentage of all prisoners are participating in VET, therefore increasing participation rates would most likely reduce re-offending.

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### National Centre for Vocational Education Research

Level 11, 33 King William Street, Adelaide  
PO Box 8288, Station Arcade, SA, 5000

Email: [ncver@ncver.edu.au](mailto:ncver@ncver.edu.au)

Web: <http://www.ncver.edu.au>

Tel: +61 8 8230 8400

Fax: +61 8 8212 3436