

Literacy and Numeracy in the Correctional Environment

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For many years prisoners in Queensland Correctional Centres have received support to address their Literacy and Numeracy deficiencies. It is recognised that a high percentage of prisoners entering Correctional Centres have lower literacy/numeracy skills than that of the general population.

Prior to 1996 literacy numeracy support was provided by individual centres engaging educators, either on a paid or voluntary basis to assist prisoners to improve their literacy/numeracy skills. Since 1996, prisoners in all Queensland correctional centres have been provided the opportunity to access support through a structured, centrally organised and managed literacy/numeracy program. This program provides literacy/numeracy education from an accredited curriculum, delivered by contracted, registered literacy/numeracy training providers. The training is provided through the partnership that Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) has established with the Department of Education and Training (DET).

The presentation will provide information relating to the history of the provision of literacy/numeracy education in Queensland correctional centres, an overview of the process for the provision of relevant education and the outcomes/effectiveness of the program. QCS policies and procedures relevant to screening, assessment and the provision of training available to prisoners will also be discussed.

History

The Commission of Review into Corrective Services Queensland was conducted in 1988 by Jim Kennedy (Kennedy, 1988). The report from the review recommended that education programs should be provided to prisoners. The Kennedy Report led to the establishment of the enquiry into the education and training needs of prisoners in Queensland correctional centres in 1990.

The 1990 Byrne review (Byrne, 1990), conducted by Professor Eileen Byrne, Professor of Education, Queensland University, most certainly set the foundation for the current process where prisoners in Queensland correctional centres now have the opportunity to undertake structured vocational education and training (VET), education and literacy/numeracy programs during their incarceration. The Byrne report *Unlocking Minds: From Retribution to Rehabilitation* identified that prisoners in general had lower literacy/numeracy skills than the general community and should be provided with education and training to address the deficiencies. Some 6 years later the 1996 ABS National Literacy Study also identified that the literacy/numeracy levels of prisoners were lower than those in the community. The QCSC was invited to have prisoners from Queensland correctional centres participated in the ABS survey.

The Byrne Review most certainly led to the establishment in 1992 of a working party between the then Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations (DETIR) and the Queensland Corrective Services Commission (QCSC). The working group investigated how prisoners could be provided the opportunity whilst in custody to access nationally accredited VET. The current process for the provision of accredited training, funded through a partnership between DETIR and QCSC commenced in 1995. This partnership, formalised through a memorandum of understanding between the Department of Education and Training (DET) and Queensland Corrective Services (QCS), has endured to this day.

Even though the Byrne Review identified the literacy/numeracy shortcomings of prisoners, the provision of formal literacy and numeracy education was not initially provided through the DET/QCS partnership. However in 1996, following a visit to the correctional centres by a DET Officer, who heard first hand of the low levels of literacy/numeracy skills of prisoners, was literacy/numeracy included in the DET/DCS program.

In 2008 Queensland Corrective Services supported research conducted by Griffith University which investigated the literacy and numeracy levels of people entering Queensland Corrective Services. The report *Literacy Unbarred: Investigated the literacy and numeracy levels of prisoners entering Queensland correctional centres* (Searle, Schluter, Cox 2008) (identified that the majority of prisoners have literacy and numeracy levels below NRS level 3. This report like the others above raises the importance of participation in literacy/numeracy education to enable prisoners to achieve success when undertaking vocational and other programs.

Background

Literacy and numeracy education is now delivered in Queensland correctional centres as a component of the vocational educational and training (VET) program. The VET program has an important role to play within the correctional system as an integral part of the management and rehabilitation of offenders. Through this process prisoners are able to improve their language, literacy and numeracy skills that provides substantial benefits for them in acquiring the necessary skills to:

- undertake further education and vocational training to attain valuable employment skills
- undertake intervention programs to address their offending behaviour and
- participate more actively in the community on release

Accredited VET, including literacy and numeracy education, is delivered in all Queensland custodial centres and focuses on the acquisition of skills that will lead to employment on release. The provision of state wide structured literacy/numeracy education for prisoners, as outlined above commenced in 1996.

Importance of Literacy and Numeracy programs for offenders

Many prisoners have been widely disadvantaged by their inability to access education, training and employment in the community prior to incarceration. In 1999 a review, *A Review into the Delivery of Vocational Education and Training in Queensland Corrections in 1998* (Cox, Carlin, 1999) was conducted to determine the effectiveness of VET and literacy/numeracy training that was delivered in to prisoners in the 1998 program.

The sample of prisoners surveyed (14% of total prisoner population) during the review indicated that:

15.4%	had not completed primary school
10.0%	completed year 8
52.8%	completed either year 9 or year 10
19.3%	completed either year 11 or 12
2.2%	had undertaken tertiary study.

In 2009 the educational standards of prisoners in custody (Prisoner population 11/09), as reported below, have not changed that much since the 1999 review was conducted.

2.4%	had not completed primary school
9.25%	completed year 8
53.94%	completed either year 9 or year 10
22.27%	completed either year 11 or 12
3.51%	had undertaken tertiary study.

Prisoners entering QCS correctional centres also come with similar deficiencies in literacy and numeracy as was the case some ten years ago.

This is supported by the findings of the national literacy survey (ABS, 1996) which also surveyed offenders in custody in Queensland and which indicated that a substantially larger proportion of offenders than people in the wider community, have serious literacy and numeracy needs. Consequently a large proportion of prisoners need significant help to successfully achieve the outcomes of vocational programs they undertake and also to be able to participate effectively in therapeutic intervention programs aimed at addressing offending behavior.

Literacy and numeracy programs therefore have a pivotal role to play in the delivery of vocational education and training and other intervention programs in the correctional environment. The programs provide the opportunity for prisoners to develop the necessary reading, writing and numeracy skills which enable them to successfully participate in the VET and other programs.

Certainly literacy and numeracy programs have been instrumental in creating education and training pathways that lead to meaningful outcomes for prisoners in terms of labour market outcomes. However the 1999 review into the delivery of vocational education and training in Queensland correctional centres demonstrated that the literacy and numeracy program also leads to

an increase in confidence and self esteem and in personal skills, which contribute substantially to the prisoners ability to re-integrate successfully in the community upon release.

QCS Procedures

Education of Offenders Procedure

Literacy/Numeracy

The delivery of education services to prisoners in QCS is governed by the Education procedure. Under this procedure all sentenced prisoners are required to undertake a literacy/numeracy screening to determine if literacy/numeracy deficiencies exist. Should deficiencies be identified, under the current procedure, all prisoners who have a sentence length greater than 12 months must undertake a literacy assessment to determine their specific literacy/numeracy training needs. Prisoners who have a sentence length equal to or less than 12 months may also be assessed if it is deemed that they will benefit by the assessment.

Training to address those needs is then made available. Queensland Corrective Services, in partnership with the Department of Education and Training (DET), provides literacy/numeracy training to prisoners in all custodial centres. Participation in literacy/numeracy training is voluntary.

Screening of prisoners can be conducted using 30729QLD, Course in Pre-Training Indicator and assessed using 39170QLD, Course in Pre-Training Assessment – Vocational literacy and 39171QLD, Course in Pre-Training Assessment – Vocational Numeracy.

Vocational Training

The Education Procedure requires that an Educational and Vocational Needs Assessment (EVNA) is conducted on all prisoners having a sentence length greater than 12 months to determine their employment and vocational training needs. This then contributes to the Offender Management Plan (OMP)

Process for delivery of VET including Literacy and Numeracy in Queensland Correctional Centres

The extent and the curriculum requirements of the training delivered are determined through a central process negotiated between the QCS and DET. The identification of the training to be offered at each location occurs through a consultative process with the correctional centres. Community and prisoner needs are taken into account when training is selected for a particular location. The hours for literacy training are determined according to the population of each correctional centre. In 2009-2010 approximately 16600 teaching hours of literacy/numeracy are to be provided to prisoners in Queensland correctional centres. The hours allocated for the various correctional centres during this period are:

Arthur Gorrie	1400 hrs.
Borallon	1100 hrs.
Brisbane	600 hrs.
Brisbane Womens	1450 hrs.
Capricornia	1280 hrs.
Lotus Glen	1700 hrs.
Maryborough	1600 hrs.
Numinbah	630 hrs.
Palen Creek	1100 hrs.
Townsville Mens	1100 hrs.
Townsville Womens	600 hrs.
Wolston	2000 hrs.
Woodford	2300 hrs.

All VET delivered is accredited which enables participants to acquire nationally recognised and accredited vocational skills. All training comes from Training Packages or nationally accredited training programs. In recent years education administrators and literacy practitioners in corrections have endeavoured to ensure that the process of the delivery of literacy and numeracy training has become more integrated with the delivery of the vocational training and in some instances intervention programs.

Planning for training delivered under this arrangement is such that where possible pathways are established to enable participants to progress from entry level VET skills to higher levels whilst incarcerated. VET in correctional centres is delivered in a very wide range of vocational areas, which include:

Business	Hospitality	Horticulture	Job Seeking/Interview Skills
Small Business	Construction	Furnishing	Information Technology
First Aid	Engineering	ATSI Studies	Sport and Recreation
Cleaning	Laundry	Automotive	Art
Office Admin.	Literacy Ed.	Work Readiness	Textile Fabrication
Rural			

Provision of VET and Literacy/Numeracy

There is a central VET offer that is jointly funded by QCS and DET. In 2008-2009 approximately 200,000 Annual Hours Curriculum (AHC) were delivered in high and low security correctional centres. Training is delivered by both public (TAFE) and private providers who gain contracts through a competitive tendering process jointly administered by DET and QCS. The amount of training is allocated to centres in proportion to the offender population and the types of prisoners housed at the various locations i.e. protection, main stream. Through a consultative process, centre based Education and Vocational

Training Officers participate in the process for the determination of the type of VET to be delivered at the particular location.

In addition to the delivery of the VET a further 16600 hours of literacy education is delivered in Queensland correctional centres. This training is also jointly funded by QCS and DET provide the funding for the delivery of the literacy education. *Literacy/numeracy education provided to prisoners comes from the accredited qualifications listed in Appendix A.*

The training offered in corrections is not designed to compensate for life long poor education but it most certainly does assist prisoners to gain functional literacy/numeracy skills to successfully undertake vocational education and training and programs that address offending behaviour.

Success in vocational training does improve employability and also reduces recidivism rates. An evaluation of the Post release Employment assistance Program conducted in October 2006 by Professor Victor Callen and Dr John Gardner, found that prisoner participation in VET prior to release resulted in a decrease of 6.9 percentage points in the rate of return to the correctional system.

The participation of prisoners in literacy/numeracy training in Queensland compares well against the other states of Australia. The Report on Government Services 2008 shows that the participation rate of prisoners in the Pre Certificate Level 1 category (9.0%) was the second highest of all states and territories, second only to Tasmania.

Outcome of Literacy/Numeracy Education in 2008-2009

The total number of AHC generated - 196 835 AHC

The table in Appendix B provides literacy/numeracy enrolment details of prisoners at the various correctional centre locations in Queensland in 2008-2009.

Total number of participating offenders - 1686

Review into the Delivery of Vocational Education and Training – 1999

In 1998 the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations reviewed its policy in regard to their involvement in the provision of VET and literacy programs for offenders in correctional centres.

The review of the delivery of VET in Queensland Correctional Centres was commissioned by Queensland Corrections (now QCS) partly as a response to a perceived change in policy direction by the Department of Employment and Training. The Review was conducted to determine the quality and the effectiveness of the training delivered and whether the process for the delivery of the training was meeting the needs of the stakeholders. The major external stakeholder was the then Department of Employment, Training and Industrial

Relations (DETIR) which had requested a review to demonstrate the effectiveness (or otherwise) of the delivery of vocational education and training and literacy education in correctional centres.

Stakeholders who participated in the Review were:

- Prisoners
- Education Officers
- Trainers
- Training Providers
- Managers of Offender Development
- Accommodation Managers
- Industry Managers

A sample of 442 offenders were interviewed which was approximately 14% of the offender population in 1998.

Outcomes of the Review

It is evident from analysis of the data obtained that the delivery of vocational education and training and literacy education to offenders in correctional centres was and is very highly valued by offenders, Education Officers, operational staff, industry staff, trainers and training providers.

On the basis of the benefits of the VET program for offenders, QCS and for the community a number of conclusions were drawn. They include:

- the amount of VET, including literacy and numeracy training being delivered in Queensland Correctional centres should be increased substantially to meet the needs of offenders in the system and to accommodate for the increased numbers of offenders being incarcerated
- there should be a greater acknowledgment of the role that VET, including literacy and numeracy training plays as a vital partner in the rehabilitative process of offenders and the management of offenders
- more emphasis should be placed on providing offenders with continuity of VET and a pathway to be able to progress from entry level training to more advanced training when moving through the corrections system
- the provision of appropriate resources is crucial for the effective delivery of VET

Benefits to Prisoners

For many prisoners the VET experience in the corrections environment is the first positive learning experience they have encountered in their lives. The benefits of participation in VET by offenders go beyond the acquisition of industry or enterprise based competencies and skills to improve access to employment.

The four highest responses from offenders in regard to the value of training were that they had achieved: -

- a positive learning experience;
- satisfaction with completing an educational program;
- improvement in their self esteem and
- encouragement to undertake further study.

87 percent of all participants who undertook literacy and/or numeracy education responded that it helped them do other VET and intervention programs. When asked whether the skills they had acquired through VET and literacy education would help them on release, 84% of offenders participating, responded that the skills would help them gain employment and 92% responded that the skills would help them in their personal lives. (Cox, Carlin, 1999).

Reasons given for how they would be helped personally included that they could:

- continue with education and training
- use computer skills at home and for assignments
- administer first aid if necessary;
- write letters and keep in contact by writing;
- now read books, papers and magazines;
- help children with their homework and
- shop more efficiently. (Cox, Carlin, 1999)

Summary

The provision of VET and literacy/numeracy education in correctional centres in Queensland certainly highlights that offenders and staff articulated the very positive benefits of VET, including literacy education, in relation to acquiring skills and competencies, which would facilitate and maintain their access to employment.

It has been clearly identified by offenders who are undertaking vocational training and language, literacy and numeracy education that program being implemented in Queensland Correctional centres is positively influencing the acquisition of those characteristics. The challenge is to build on the momentum and achievements generated to date to ensure that offenders are able to acquire the necessary skills and attitudes for learning, especially literacy and numeracy skills, to be able to participate effectively not only in the education and training system but also in the community when released from custody.

References

Kennedy J, 1988, *The Report of the Commissioner of Review into Corrective Services in Queensland*.

Byrne M., 1990, *Unlocking Minds: From Retribution to Reintegration, A Review of Prisoner Education in Queensland*.

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997, National Literacy Survey.

Cox R., Carlin A., 1999, *Review into the Delivery of Vocational Education and Training in Queensland Corrections*, Queensland Department of Corrective Services.

Callen V.J., Gardner J. 2006 *Evaluation of the Post Release Employment Assistance Program (PREAP), Consultancy Report (Summary Report)*

Searle J., Schluter C., Cox R., 2008, *Literacy Unbarred: Investigating the literacy and numeracy levels of prisoners entering Queensland correctional centres*, Griffith University.

APPENDIX A

Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum

CODE	TITLE
39181QLD	Course in Vocational Numeracy - Contextualised
39180QLD	Course in vocational Literacy - Contextualised
39171QLD	Course in Pre-Training Assessment - Vocational Numeracy
39170QLD	Course in Pre-Training Assessment -Vocational Literacy
39165QLD	Course in Vocational Numeracy 5
39164QLD	Course in Vocational Numeracy 4
39163QLD	Course in Vocational Numeracy 3
39162QLD	Course in Vocational Numeracy 2
39161QLD	Course in Vocational Numeracy 1
39160QLD	Course in Vocational Numeracy - Preliminary
39155QLD	Course in Vocational Literacy 5
39154QLD	Course in Vocational Literacy 4
39153QLD	Course in Vocational Literacy 4
39152QLD	Course in Vocational Literacy 3
39151QLD	Course in Vocational Literacy 2
39150QLD	Course in Vocational Literacy 1
30729QLD	Course in Pre-Training Indicator

APPENDIX B

Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) Prisoner enrolments* in Literacy/Numeracy - 2008-09

Correctional Centres	Enrolments	Women	Men	ATSI Women	ATSI Men
Arthur Gorrie	594	0	578	0	16
Borallon	314	0	272	0	42
Brisbane	491	0	454	0	37
Brisbane Womens	566	488	0	78	0
Capricornia	252	0	218	0	34
Darling Downs	0	0	0	0	0
Helana Jones	241	221	0	20	0
Lotus Glen Secure	463	0	293	0	170
Lotus Glen Open	136	0	80	0	56
Maryborough Secure	361	0	303	0	58
Numinbah	69	18	46	1	4
Palen Creek	35	0	33	0	2
Townsville	616	130	243	163	80
Wolston	412	0	393	0	19
Woodford	916	0	880	0	36
TOTAL	5466	857	3793	262	554

*The figures represent enrolments and not prisoners during each year.
Prisoners have the opportunity to enrol in more than one subject.

Annual Hours Curriculum (AHC) achieved for 2008-2009: 196 835AHC