CORRECTIVE SERVICES NEW SOUTH WALES
INMATE COMPUTER NETWORK

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Introduction
I have written this paper from the perspective of someone who has worked in the NSW correctional system for 20 years in the roles of teacher, centre education manager and now as the Principal of the Adult Education and Vocational Training Institute (AEVTI), the provider of education and vocational training to inmates in NSW Government operated correctional centres. This paper draws upon these years of experience, a strong interest in the expansion of education to inmates through computer technology and a key role in the development of the inmate computer network. The paper references CSNSW documents and data and a 2011 Australian survey into the uptake and use of e-learning in vocational education. It incorporates an international survey on the access and use of computer technology by inmates.

The paper is in four sections:
1. Describes the operation of the inmate computer network, the current use and the recent history of inmate computers in NSW correctional centres.

2. Explores the developments, use and opportunities these new computer technologies bring, including the uptake of e-learning in VET delivery. It outlines a case for prisoner access to these technologies and looks at the dilemma prison authorities face in allowing access.

3. Cites examples from an international survey where prisoners have access to in-cell computers, the internet and email.

4. Looks at CSNSW’s future directions for computer based delivery of services and programs.
The NSW inmate computer network

Background

Inmates in the NSW correctional system have had access to computers for education and other purposes since the late 1980s. Educators in CSNSW have recognised for this period that computer technology is integral to inmate education and that skills in Information Technology (IT) are essential for participation in work, further education and as a life skill in twenty-first century Australia. However, access to this technology for inmates has fallen far short of the level of use in the community.

Developments in IT have occurred rapidly and have far outpaced the general level of understanding of the technologies. In the correctional system, where security is paramount, allowing inmates access to computer technology has been viewed by operational staff with suspicion and has challenged a correctional system focused on security and traditionally adverse to risk.

The provision and management of IT equipment in NSW correctional centres for inmate education was formally the responsibility of local education managers. There was no corporate governance over the provision and management of these assets, which resulted in a fleet of non-standard equipment. There were issues with hardware that often failed and neither met current standards nor the requirements of the IT training package. Computers were either leased at considerable cost or were obsolete computers sourced from donations or from the corporate fleet. Technical support to maintain the computers was limited and more often than not relied upon the expertise of inmates at the centre.

In this period the budget to support inmate computer provision was inadequate. Staff often ‘sourced’ software, which was mostly un-licensed, to load on the computers. Protocols to maintain security were not comprehensive enough to cover the varied set ups at centres. As inmate computer use increased without adequate safeguards there were a number of breaches that drew the attention of the media and the public.

In 2004 a series of incidents involving inmates misusing computers led to the issuing of a Commissioner’s Memorandum which resulted in restricted inmate access to computer facilities. This included banning inmate ownership and use of laptop computers, imposing more stringent supervision of inmate computer access and required secure storage and management of storage media. A steering committee
was established in May 2005 to provide a coordinated and consistent approach to the management of IT facilities for inmates. The committee agreed that computers used for inmate programs would form part of the Department of Corrective Service’s Information Communications and Technology (IC&T) environment thereby complying with appropriate governance and standards. The committee recommended the recycling of the CSNSW superseded fleet as the most effective way of providing computing facilities.

The network
Corrective Services NSW has built a secured inmate computer network connecting correctional centres across the state to a central server. In doing so, CSNSW has invested in a digital future with the capacity to electronically deliver programs and services to inmates and where inmate access to secure communication with the community and their family is a future possibility.

The network currently encompasses 27 correctional centres. There are approximately 1134 computers connected to the network. This results in a ratio of 0.13 computers per inmate or 7.6 inmates per computer. This number includes those computers located within Corrective Service Industries business units for the use of inmate clerks and those computers located in classrooms, libraries and other program areas for inmate education and legal information access.

The network utilizes a ‘thin client’ architecture employing a Citrix Metaframe to lock down PCs and control the delivery of computer applications. Thin client systems separate the storage, application and the client device thereby removing the ability for inmates to effect any changes to the centrally stored system. With the ‘smarts’ moved away from the desktop, all processing then occurs at the centrally or strategically located file servers.

The network has many advances and advantages over the former stand alone inmate computer fleet. Foremost, it is a standardised and managed offender computing environment. Each inmate has a centralised folder where they are able to save documents and which can be accessed from any location on the network. This effectively removes the need to save information to a storage device such as a disc. Nominated staff can access the inmate folder and load documents such as distance education and legal material.
The network has a number of built-in features to ensure inmate compliance and network integrity. Inmates must log in to the system through the use of a password. On-line behaviour can be monitored both in real time and though the auditing of a centralised log file.

Recycled computers
In 2005 a Corrective Services Industry Technology Unit was established at Silverwater Correctional Centre to refurbish end-of-life computers from the CSNSW corporate fleet and some from other Government agencies. The Industry employs up to 12 inmate workers who participate in on and off the job training opportunities.

Computers entering the unit are tested and hard drives are cleaned of data and destroyed. Computers that do not meet the requirements to be upgraded are dismantled and materials are passed on to recycling industries. Computers leaving the unit have been configured to meet the following standards: 80 GB hard drive, Windows XP Pro operating system, a standard suit of programs, new mouse and keyboard and refurbished flat screen monitor. All computers are painted green to differentiate them from staff computers. Inmate computers have a planned two year life cycle.

The industry provides economic and environmental benefits through a reduction in the cost of inmate computers and by decreasing the volume of computers going to landfill. Over 5 years, from 2006 to 2010, 6800 units were received in the industry. Of these 3390 were reused as 'green computers', and 3410 were recycled into material components. This represents 49.85% of computers being reused. Recycling of material saves $22,500 per year in disposal costs and $390,000 per year in lease costs.

Network content
A standard operating environment (SOE) has been developed for the network to support inmates participating in education programs and researching legal matters. The Education SOE includes interactive applications for Indigenous learning, English as a Second Language, Literacy and Numeracy, learning to type, an encyclopaedia and the Microsoft Office suit of programs.

In 2010 CNSW, in partnership with Legal Aid NSW and the NSW Legal Assistance Forum, developed a legal information portal for inmates and located it on the
network. The portal provides a wide range of legal information sources relevant to the needs of prisoners. This material includes a stand alone version of the Legal Aid NSW website, a number of chapters from the Law Handbook, plain language fact sheets on issues including fines, housing, visas and deportation and victims compensation restitution. It also has links to a glossary of legal words, legislation, sentencing tables and information about how to get legal help in prison. The material is organised into topics relevant to inmates, including: police and courts; family law; money matters and visas and deportation.

Computer access and use

Inmate computers are located within education units and libraries. In most centres these facilities can only be accessed by inmates during the operational day when Education staff are present. Under current policy, inmates must be supervised when using a computer. This access is very limited and does not accommodate full time workers or those participating in intensive offence related programs. In 2009/10 maximum security inmates averaged 6.67 out-of-cell hours per day. Minimum security inmates averaged 19.13 hours per day. The average time out of cell across all classifications of NSW prisoners was 11.14 hours per day.

Inmates are not permitted personal computers, nor can they use CSNSW computers in their cells. Inmates studying tertiary level courses via distance mode are extremely disadvantaged as they have limited computer access, no internet to research and no email to contact course advisors and lecturers.

The call for increased access to computer technology for inmates

The digital revolution

The ‘digital revolution’ that has occurred over the past decade is profoundly changing the way human beings communicate, work, interact, transact, educate and recreate. These new technologies have blurred physical boundaries between the home and the workplace, between the workplace and the learning institute; between the private and the public. They have diminished distance and time by providing immediate, direct communication and information over global distances. Education organisations have embraced this technology and e-learning has become an essential tool which is changing the way education and training is delivered. E-learning describes the delivery of learning material through a range of computer devices which use multi-media, it is often interactive and web based.
**E-learning**

A recent Australian survey into the uptake and use of e-learning in vocational education captured information from some 6000 VET students studying at 250 different training organisations. The survey demonstrated that e-learning is integral to VET provision and has changed the way education is delivered. It showed that e-learning has a large role in providing skills for a contemporary workplace and contemporary life. E-learning engages and motivates students to pursue further learning and transfers power to the student in deciding how to manage their learning. Learning resources that have traditionally only been available in the classroom can now be accessed from the home, the workplace or any place where a device can operate. The survey showed:

- **82% of VET students had some e-learning in their course.**
- **Two-thirds of VET students used interactive learning resources on-site as well as off-site.**
- **Over 40% of VET students have experienced e-learning through the use of web-based seminars/presentations, virtual classroom environments (eg Moodle) or web 2.0 technologies (eg blogs, wikis).**
- **60% of VET students report that their e-learning experience has increased their skills and confidence in using technology.**
- **55% of VET students said e-learning helps them to do their current job better, 42% said it helped them to get a better job, and 66% said that they expected improved employment outcomes in the future.**
- **66% of VET students said e-learning activities and e-learning resources were effective in helping them to learn.**

*Australian Flexible Learning Framework - E-Learning Benchmarking Survey 2011*

A key component of this ‘digital revolution’ is the development of the internet by sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Wikipedia. All of these sites have in common a capacity to give power to the citizens to create and share content. People can ‘blog’ and put up ideas, poetry, videos and music. Nick Galvin, journalist and author, claims that "culture has been liberated and democratised allowing those outside the mandated mainstream to have their say". The filter has been deleted and citizens,
everyday people, have the means to put their ideas, their creative output, their political opinions onto the world wide network and communicate directly with millions of others.

The Spring of 2010 saw a demonstration of the power of this media when citizens across a number of Arab countries, used this media to galvanise opposition and overthrow their government. Citizens in these countries had been under the rule of autocrats and did not have the freedom to publicly express opinion against government.

The rapid developments in this range of computer technologies and their increasing use in the workplace, home, education institute and the social stratosphere, threaten to further marginalise inmates. Without the skills in this technology and the learning opportunities these technologies can bring, inmates will not be prepared for full participation in their communities upon release. E-Learning has become integral to the delivery of education and vocational training. Without incorporating e-learning into inmate education, the gap between education and vocational training delivered in the community and in the correctional centre will widen.

The dilemma for prison authorities
In most jurisdictions in the developed world, prison authorities are struggling to provide access to new computer technologies and connect prisoners to relevant information, programs, services and family in the community. The dilemma these authorities are facing is to balance the risk to correctional centre security and community safety in allowing inmates access to computer technologies with the many benefits and efficiencies this technology can bring. These efficiencies include the cost benefit of accessing via the internet a range of programs and services available in the community, while reducing the intensity of face to face delivery in the correctional centre.

Campaigns by prisoner rights advocates, members of the legal profession, education providers and a range of community service providers, are calling for inmates to have better access to computer technology. This includes access to email and the internet to enhance communication between inmates and their families, community and service providers. Maintaining this community and family contact strengthens the likelihood of a successful re-entry into the community and thus reduces the potential for recidivism. The prisoner rights group, Social Action, is campaigning in NSW for a
computer in each cell. They have released a paper, ‘Computers in Cells – Maintaining Community Ties and Reducing Recidivism’.

In recent years there have been a number of highly publicised incidents where an inmate has breached policy in the use of digital media. This has embarrassed prison authorities and resulted in setbacks to the delivery of these technologies to prisoners. In Australia and the UK, a number of prisoners, including some public interest prisoners, put their profiles on Facebook. In the Australian example, photos of the inmate taken in the correctional centre were smuggled out of the Goulburn ‘SuperMax’ and posted on the site. In the UK the prisoners used Facebook to taunt their victims.

Authorities are also having to counter arguments mounted by members of the community and reflected in the media that prisoners receive favourable treatment and have access to programs and facilities that some citizens do not have. In response to the question posed on a February 2011 ABC Radio program ‘Life Matters’, Should prisoners have access to computers in their prison cells, email and the internet? one listener stated “If you have been caught and sent to prison then you have already given up your rights to what is available in society. Having classes in prison is acceptable but computers in the cell is not. Why should a tax payers pay more for this luxury of which some people outside don’t have the access to?” On the provision of safe web access for prisoners in the UK, Prisons Minister, David Hanson, stated in 2011, “I have to balance this against the perceptions that people will have; that perhaps prisoners are getting something my constituents can’t have.”

**Prisoner access to new computer technologies – International examples**

An internet search revealed that inmate access to computer technologies internationally is not standard. There area a number of jurisdictions where inmates have in-cell computer access, a few that have secure internet access and a small number that allow inmates to use email to contact family and friends in the community.

**Access to computers**

All jurisdictions in Australia and most developed countries provide inmates with access to computers, predominantly for education and to access legal material.

**In-cell computer access**
In Australia, Victoria, the ACT, W.A and QLD permit access to computers in-cell, for inmates upon application.

*Internet & email access*

**Australia**
The ACT is the only jurisdiction in Australia that provides inmates with access to the internet.

**Norway**
Norway has been the pioneer in granting prisoners access to in-cell computers, to the internet and email. All prisons in Norway have access to internet though a national network. Education is a legislated right in Norway and, as such, there is acceptance that prisoners should receive the same access to education and training as in the community. Competence in the use of ‘digital tools’ and learning delivered through a digital tool is integral to the curriculum. Digital tools include the internet. A spokesperson stated, "They must be able to access the internet, to help in their education and also so that they know they are still connected to the world."

**Sweden**
Sweden has used the internet to set up virtual classrooms in prisons. This allows prisoners to continue study regardless of where they are located in the system. The system operates through firewalls which create two subnets, one for the teacher which allows unlimited access and one for the student which only allows one address. The student is only able to communicate with the teacher who controls what the student can access.

**USA**
The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) is deploying a new program, The Trust Fund Limited Inmate Computer System (TRULINCS) to provide inmates with some limited computer access, and to include the capability to send and receive emails without having access to the internet. This program is designed in part to assist in the inmate’s eventual release to the community.

**What now? The future for inmate access to computers in CNSW**
CSNSW is committed to utilising computer technology to deliver a range of services and programs to inmates. A steering committee is overseeing the development of the inmate network and is strategically planning for the future use of technology to support inmate program needs. The development is a incremental process in order to
ensure a highly secure environment and to promote an understanding of the benefits which inmate access to these technologies can bring.
Future inmate access to computers falls into 3 areas:

1. Inmate self service transaction through a touch screen kiosk

A prototype of a self service kiosk is operating at Nowra Correctional Centre. It provides inmates with access to program schedules, ‘buy-up’ orders, inmate account balances, classification and general enquiries.

2. The delivery of programs and services through an in-cell terminal

All cells at the newly constructed Nowra Correctional Centre have been hard wired and ready to connect a computer to the network.

3. Integrated services, which includes video visits, inmate email, virtual classrooms and emergency assistance.

An electronic (smart) white board is currently being piloted at the John Morony Correctional Centre. There is current capacity to use this technology to create connected classrooms.

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