



National Strategy for Vocational Education & Training for Adult Prisoners and Offenders in Australia

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Preface

The Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), as the body responsible for national coordination of vocational education and training (VET), in partnership with the Commonwealth, States and Territories, has developed *Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training* which expresses the collective commitment of Australian governments and industry.

The mission and objectives of the National Strategy for vocational education and training express the aim '*.....to provide individuals with opportunities to optimise their potential.*' As part of the National Strategy for vocational education and training, a number of linked strategies have been developed for equity groups including people with a disability, Indigenous Australians, and now, adult prisoners and offenders.

The *National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training for Adult Prisoners and Offenders in Australia* has been developed through cooperation between ANTA, the Commonwealth, State and Territory vocational education and training authorities, and corrections authorities in the States and Territories.

Acknowledgements:

The contribution of members of the ANTA reference group formed to oversee the project, and the many people from corrections and training authorities who provided information is gratefully acknowledged.

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Introduction

Background to the Strategy

Education has been available to offenders in some form or other across all Australian States and Territories at least since the early 20th century. The right of offenders to access education whilst serving a custodial sentence is enshrined in United Nations principles and formed the basis of standard guidelines formally adopted by all Australian Correctional Ministers in 1989. The administration and resource arrangements for vocational education and training for prisoners and offenders vary between States and Territories. Education and training offered to offenders ranges through adult basic education to full certificate and diploma courses (in addition to higher education, which is not included in this policy).

The 1996 report of the *Inquiry into Education and Training in Correctional Facilities* of the Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee included recommendations that offenders be identified as a discrete group and that a national strategy for vocational education and training for offenders be developed. The report requested the strategy to be developed by the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) in conjunction with State and Territory correctional administrations. The report included a number of other recommendations relating to the continuing development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of vocational education and training for offenders which require continued cooperation between State/Territory corrective services administrations and vocational education and training authorities.

A working party comprising representatives of State/Territory correctional administrations drafted a framework for the strategy in 1997/98. Subsequently, ANTA established a reference group comprising representatives from the Commonwealth and the States and Territories, and the project to complete the strategy commenced in the latter half of 2000.

Vocational Education and Training

Vocational education and training (VET) is an integral part of the education system in Australia, which extends from compulsory schooling through to higher education. Whilst education and training for vocational purposes is the focus of VET, the vocational education and training system also provides basic or general education. Links between basic, VET and higher education must be maintained as part of the education continuum available to offenders, as for the general community.

The vocational education and training system offers recognition and quality control through the National Training Framework under which programs are developed, recognised and maintained. The Australian Recognition Framework, a component of the National Training Framework, provides the quality assured approach to the registration of organisations seeking to deliver and assess vocational education and training and issue qualifications.

Through ANTA, a National strategy for vocational education and training has been agreed by the Commonwealth and State/Territory administrations. Linked to the National Vocational Education and Training Strategy are a number of others, such as those for people with a disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The *National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training For Adult Prisoners and Offenders in Australia* is linked to all other VET strategies.

Rationale for the Strategy

The aim was to develop a national strategy for vocational education and training for adult prisoners and offenders in Australia which clearly articulates objectives, takes account of recent changes and priorities in the vocational education and training sector and can be agreed by both the National Correctional Services Administrators' Conference and ANTA Chief Executive Officers Committee.

As stated in the 1996 Inquiry report:

'Offenders are a diverse population, whose education and training needs reflect that diversity – culturally, developmentally, vocationally. Many of these needs are similar to those of the community at large – including the need for education programs to be accredited and able to lead to employment or further education. However, the prison population exhibits some broad characteristics which have important ramifications for the kinds of educational provision that might best serve their interests'

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The Strategy recognises the diverse backgrounds of adult prisoners and offenders. The factors to be considered when planning, managing, delivering and evaluating vocational education and training for offenders are applicable to all vocational education and training, and include:

- educational level, or previous educational experiences
- cultural background including Indigenous peoples,
- language/literacy/numeracy levels,
- disability,
- geographic location.

In addition to the above, other factors for consideration include:

- age,
- gender,
- sentence type and length,
- offender history,
- employment/unemployment history.

The Strategy seeks the inclusion of vocational education and training in the sentence management plan for all adult offenders.

Responsibility for vocational education and training in corrections

The overall funding of vocational education and training is a shared responsibility between States and Territories, and the Commonwealth Government. Within that framework, the implementation of vocational education and training in corrections is the responsibility of the States and Territories. In the States and Territories, arrangements for vocational education and training for offenders may be the responsibility of either one or a combination of the state training authority and the corrections administration. Further variations exist regarding juvenile offenders. This Strategy recognises the varying arrangements and aims to facilitate a national approach to the implementation of vocational education and training for adult offenders whilst in custody or serving community orders.

Implementation of this Strategy

It is envisaged that at the State and Territory level, training authorities and corrective services administrations will collaborate in the implementation of the National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training for Adult Prisoners and Offenders. State/Territory strategic implementation plans based on the objectives of this Strategy would take account of State/Territory priorities, and include cooperation between administrations and with other agencies as appropriate. However it is acknowledged that as State agencies are accountable to their respective State Ministers and Parliaments, these arrangements, including resourcing responsibility, are matters for each jurisdiction to determine as they see fit.

National initiatives to support the implementation and evaluation of the Strategy could include:

- enhanced data collection based on existing systems (ie. in vocational education and training, AVETMISS) which provide for consistent data collection criteria and methodology in the States and Territories and nationally;
- research and evaluation studies of the outcomes for offenders who have participated in vocational education and training.

The ANTA Annual National Report outlines the major features and achievements of the Australian vocational education and training system nationally and provides some illustrative examples of specific initiatives undertaken by States, Territories and the Commonwealth. Reporting against the National Strategy for VET and related strategies is included in this Report, and State / Territory training authorities should, where possible, choose to report against the *National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training for Adult Prisoners and Offenders*. Bodies such as the ANTA National Research and Evaluation Committee and the Australian Institute of Criminology are potential sources of support for research and evaluation.

Vision

To provide adult prisoners and offenders with educational and vocational pathways which will support their productive contribution to the economic and social life of the community.

The vision will be achieved when:

- **Offenders** have an understanding of vocational education and training options, know they can participate and are able to set realistic goals for their vocational education and training pathways;
- **Vocational Education and Training** is an integral component of offender management and the programs and services provided to offenders;
- **Training providers** and **Correctional services** can access resources and have the skills and knowledge to support offenders in vocational education and training, and are willing to do so;
- **Planners and policy makers:**
 - in vocational education and training access expert advice on offender issues and incorporate offender specific actions at all relevant stages of policy, planning and reporting,
 - in correctional services access expert advice on vocational education and training and incorporate vocational education and training at all relevant stages of policy, planning and reporting.

Focus Areas

The Strategy focuses on four areas which are critical to the continuing development of and support for vocational education and training of offenders. These are relevant to all vocational education and training, and form the objectives of this Strategy:

- **access**
- **participation** and **attainment**
- **employment** and **lifelong learning**
- **accountability**

Objectives

Objective 1:

To improve **access** to vocational education and training for adult prisoners and offenders

1.1 Improve pathways to vocational education and training

- Develop, support and maintain cooperation between prisons, community corrections, pre- and post-release services including employment assistance to improve access, support and placement in appropriate training and employment;
- Promote to correctional systems and agencies the value of vocational education and training as an integral component of the programs provided to offenders;
- Provide improved career counselling arrangements that allow offenders to make informed choices about vocational education and training to support lifelong learning pathways and reintegration into the community on release, including continuation of vocational education and training post-release, with support from appropriate services and agencies;
- Reduce, and where possible, remove disincentives to the participation of offenders in vocational education and training;
- Ensure continuity of vocational education and training when offenders move to another facility;
- Promote recognition of prior learning / recognition of current competency to offenders and the corrections and training systems.

1.2 Provide accessible information

- Equip vocational education and training providers and corrections personnel with the advice and strategies to ensure they provide vocational education and training information that is appropriate and accurate for offenders;
- Develop and disseminate information about vocational education and training options which are appropriate to offenders;
- Promote vocational education and training as an integral part of offender programs to other groups and agencies which work with offenders eg. social and legal services;
- Identify and promote existing subsidies, incentives and services available to support offender participation in vocational education and training.

Objective 2:

To support successful **participation** and **attainment** across a range of fields of study and levels of vocational education and training

2.1 Provide client focused training

- Ensure that vocational education and training offered to offenders is recognised within the training system and industry, using national training packages or accredited curriculum;
- Continually improve the flexibility and responsiveness of vocational education and training programs and services available to offenders;
- Recognise the diverse background and needs of offenders, with respect to both vocational and personal development needs.

2.2 Equip providers of vocational education and training with skills in delivering inclusive training for offenders

- Provide professional development for teachers, trainers and assessors and custodial staff in skills and knowledge to support the inclusion of offenders in vocational education and training;
- Provide professional development for teachers, trainers and assessors in recognition of prior learning / recognition of current competency in the corrections context;
- Ensure appropriately skilled specialist teaching support services are available and adequately resourced to support vocational education and training for offenders;
- Provide learning support to offenders participating in vocational education and training.

Objective 3:

To contribute to the **employment** and **learning pathways** which can support the successful re-integration of offenders in the community

3.1 Develop links between offender education and training and employment opportunities

- Ensure that training for offenders is linked to realistic employment opportunities;
- Promote to employers the positive economic and social outcomes of employing and training offenders who have participated in vocational education and training;
- Establish more effective partnerships across and between government and community agencies and industry to improve employment outcomes and pathways for offenders.

3.2 Support efforts to undertake further education and lifelong learning

- Promote to offenders the pathways for further vocational education and training at all qualification levels;
- Provide professional development for corrections and training personnel to support the positive promotion of vocational education and training to offenders;
- Promote continuity of vocational education and training when offenders move to another corrections facility or security classification.

Objective 4:

To create an **accountable** system that provides equitable vocational education and training outcomes for offenders.

4.1 Provide vocational education and training for offenders within the National Training Framework

- Ensure that education and vocational training for offenders is delivered in accordance with the Australian Recognition Framework.

4.2 Establish resourcing benchmarks for provision of quality vocational education and training to offenders

- Determine responsibility within each jurisdiction for the provision of resources for offender vocational education and training including reporting and monitoring systems;
- Review vocational education and training resource arrangements to explore the identification and implementation of appropriately weighted funding models for delivery to offenders.

4.3 Establish reporting and evaluation measures for the provision of vocational education and training to offenders

- Explore ways to report, measure and evaluate the qualitative and quantitative outcomes of offender participation in vocational education and training, within overall offender management reporting and evaluation.

4.4 Establish the review and evaluation process for the implementation of the strategy for vocational education and training for adult prisoners and offenders

- Develop indicators for review and evaluation, including links to national and State/Territory policy and planning processes for corrections and vocational education and training;
- Develop and implement the review program (including timeline) with links to other national vocational education and training strategies and corrections policy and planning processes.

Principles

The Strategy is based on the principles that:

Recognition of training outcomes for offenders:

- is achieved by ensuring that education and training for offenders is provided within the National Training Framework.

Monitoring and evaluation of training delivery and outcomes for offenders:

- is provided for through the National Training Framework plus effective data collection in both vocational education and training and corrections systems.

Offender management:

- integrates vocational education and training into offender management plans at all security levels, with pathways throughout the term of the sentence and post-release.

Client centred vocational education and training:

- recognises the diverse profiles of offenders including educational and cultural backgrounds, gender, disability;
- provides for pathways to personal development and realistic employment opportunities for offenders.

Training and Learning Support:

- is provided to teachers and trainers, and corrections staff, to assist with meeting the diverse needs of offenders.

Professional development:

- is essential to enable corrections and vocational education and training personnel to meet the objectives of the Strategy.

Context

Offender Profiles

Adult offenders in Australia experience cumulative disadvantage and, relative to the population as a whole, have considerably less opportunity to achieve those things that contribute to their being productive members of the community.

Statistical data for offenders varies between State and Territories. The categories and time frames for collection of data also vary. However, the general profile is consistent. The figures below represent averages drawn across all States and Territories and are included to provide an indication of the level of offender disadvantage:

- the largest age cohort of adult offenders is young (18 - 29) and is increasing despite the decline in this group in the general population;
- most prisoners are likely to have been in prison more than once, and over half will have breached community corrections orders;
- less than one quarter have completed secondary school;
- a large number have limited literacy and/or numeracy, in both native English speaking and NESB populations;
- prior to their current sentence approximately 70% are likely to have been unemployed,
- over 75% are likely to have a drug (or other substance abuse) problem;
- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is greatly over-represented;
- men comprise the great majority of offenders (over 90%), whilst the proportion of female offenders has increased in recent years and the accumulated disadvantages of female offenders are generally more severe than for males;
- intellectual disability is also noticeable especially amongst male offenders;
- at least one quarter of prisoners are likely to be recorded as 'protection' prisoners;
- non-British migrants or visitors and illegal entrants to Australia are in particularly high proportions in some jurisdictions. (NOTE: this excludes detainees in illegal entrant detention centres which are not administered by corrective services and therefore are not covered by this Strategy)

Offenders therefore are likely to be at great risk of failure across a wide spectrum of economic and social activities. The low skill level of most offenders is a significant barrier to successful reintegration into the community. In addition there are structural barriers to their participation in vocational education and training and their access to the labour market. The offender population is increasing in all jurisdictions, placing increased pressure on facilities and services.

Offender management and vocational education and training

Correctional jurisdictions utilise a number of approaches in the overall management of offenders. Vocational education and training is one aspect of offender management. This Strategy seeks to enhance the role of VET in offender management. It aims to remove or at least reduce barriers to participation in vocational education and training by offenders through increased cooperation between corrections and vocational education and training administrations, and with other agencies. The role of support agencies is noted as a key factor in offender management, whilst in custody and after release.

The availability of national training packages means that the VET system now provides for nationally recognised vocational education and training across most industries. Therefore even partial training completed whilst serving corrections orders can be recognised.

Methodology

Early in 2000 ANTA invited the States and Territories, and the Commonwealth (through the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs) to nominate a representative to a Reference Group to advise on the development of the Strategy.

The development of this Strategy was informed by briefing notes and data provided by people consulted during the project, by reference to the previous draft Strategy and to published and unpublished papers from VET and corrections sources. Reference Group members contributed to the development of the Strategy and provided information regarding State/Territory and National policy for and delivery of vocational education and training to offenders. Workshops, teleconferences and individual consultations were held with the Reference Group, State/Territory Training Authority Equity Managers and other corrections and vocational education and training representatives.

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References

Readers are referred to State/Territory corrections administrations and vocational education and training authorities for current information regarding management and delivery of vocational education and training for offenders.

Key vocational education and training references for the development of this Strategy were *A Bridge to the Future - Australia's National Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 1998 - 2003* and supporting papers, as listed below.

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