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The role of education and training in prison to work transitions

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The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author/project team
and do not necessarily reflect the views of ANTA or NCVER.

Publisher's note

Additional information relating to this research is available in *To train or not to train: The role of education and training in prison to work transitions—Support document*. It can be accessed from NCVER's website <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>.

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ISBN 1 920896 32 5 print edition

1 920896 33 3 web edition

TD/TNC 80.04

Published by NCVER

ABN 87 007 967 311

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Acknowledgements

The project team gratefully acknowledges the comprehensive input of prisoners who agreed to be interviewed for this project.

The project team would like to thank the interview team—Kaleil Merrin, Alison Clifton, Debbie Lien and Lisbeth Sundquist—and the research assistants—Sawami Matsushita and Joanne Tan.

Helpful advice and references were given in the early stages of the project by Professor Anne Worrall, Head of Department of Criminology, Keele University, United Kingdom. Thanks also to staff at the Western Australian Department of Justice, in the five metropolitan prisons at which prisoners were sampled, and from the Education and Vocational Training Unit.

This report is neither approved nor endorsed by the Western Australian Department of Justice and does not necessarily reflect the policies or viewpoints of the Western Australian Department of Justice.

Key messages

- ✧ In Western Australia most prisoners work in commercial or domestic jobs while in prison. About half of all prisoners study to complete basic adult education, schooling, short courses or full qualifications in vocational education and training (VET) or higher education—including postgraduate study. Most of those who study work as well. Some study but do not work, and a handful do not study or work.
- ✧ The differences in work and study patterns result from choices made by prisoners within the constraints of their individual prisoner management plans, prison jobs and course availability, and with regard to their previous work and study backgrounds. As much as possible, programs are tailored to individual needs.
- ✧ Prisoners undertaking VET courses expect better labour market futures (such as work, more enjoyable work and more money) than those who are undertaking non-vocational education courses or work only. Some new projects utilising New Apprenticeships are seen to be agents for change. Prison work on its own, even that involving commercial endeavours, is not seen by prisoners as being an entry to a career outside prison.

Executive summary

The main aim of this project was to examine the education/training and work experiences of prisoners before and during their current term of imprisonment. This project also studied the factors affecting prisoners' decisions to take on education/training or work during their stay in prison, and what prisoners think about their future employment and income opportunities.

Adult prisoners in a number of prisons in Perth were invited to participate in this study. A total of 453 interviews with sentenced prisoners were completed. The types of data collected include personal information (such as age and gender), past work history (such as jobs and hours of work), past education and training experiences (such as highest level of schooling), prison information (such as current sentence length and current offences), and current prison education/training and/or work participation (such as type of training and hours of work). A series of attitudinal questions which comprise an optimism index was also included. The index used is called the 'life orientation test'. A higher score on this index denotes a higher level of optimism.

Prisoners lead busy lives. Many are working in commercial or domestic jobs in the prison system. Some are working and studying. A handful of prisoners are studying but not working. In the Western Australian prison system, these differences result from choices made by prisoners within the constraints of the individual management plans developed when they enter prison, their prison jobs and course availability, and taking into account their work and study backgrounds.

Prison education/training is more than just a 'time filler'. In metropolitan adult prisons in Western Australia, about half of sampled prisoners report their involvement in studies ranging from short courses to complete industry-recognised qualifications at vocational education and training (VET) and higher education levels. Prisoners are able to upgrade their skills, including completing the schooling they did not receive as children, as well as undertaking further studies up to the postgraduate level. Many see their studies as an exit from low-wage employment, particularly those taking up VET and VET-type training courses. They also value the contacts this education and training brings with people from 'outside'.

Most prisoners also engage in work, primarily as a result of the financial incentive of gratuities. However, this work has traditionally been seen as a prison management tool to occupy prisoners during the day rather than for the purpose of up-skilling poorly qualified prisoners. Most of the work prisoners undertake is tied to the maintenance of prisons (for example, cooking, cleaning and gardening). Nevertheless, cleaning and catering are currently two areas of employment growth in Western Australia. Some prison work is commercially based and offers specific skills training with employment potential. This work is in metals, furniture production, meat processing, building and construction and warehousing. Jobs in these industries have been shown to be easily accessible to ex-offenders.

Overall, prison work, even that involving commercial endeavours, is not seen by prisoners as being an entry to a career outside the prison. Studying has more value for prisoners anticipating their post-release labour market futures than prison work, and some new initiatives utilising New Apprenticeships seem to be acting as agents for change. Those prisoners undertaking training, including New Apprenticeships, expect better labour market futures (work, more enjoyable work and more money) than those who are undertaking non-vocational education courses and/or work. Given that many prisoners have poor levels of educational attainment prior to their incarceration,

providing them with tangible, job-focused skills appears to be a useful initiative, and one which appeals to the prisoners themselves. This presages well for the success of such programs.

Summary of findings

This study has found that prisoners who are less likely to be studying:

- ✧ are males
- ✧ are Australian-born
- ✧ attended government secondary schooling and/or
- ✧ have prior prison sentences.

Those prisoners more likely to be studying:

- ✧ have children
- ✧ have education above Year 10
- ✧ have worked in the five years prior to the current prison term
- ✧ have already completed a trade qualification and/or completed another educational qualification.

The study suggests that preferences by violent offenders might change as their release dates came closer.¹ For example, about one-third of violent offenders who are within five years of release are studying.

Prisoners less likely to expect good work prospects following their current training course in prison:

- ✧ are males
- ✧ are working in prison industries
- ✧ are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent
- ✧ have a level of educational attainment beyond Year 10
- ✧ have attended government secondary schools
- ✧ have been in prison previously and/or
- ✧ had an occupation prior to prison of manager/professional/associate professional.

The most serious current offence for this group involved drugs, money or property.

Expectations of good work prospects following training decrease with age, and increase with increasing life orientation test scores and length of current prison term.

Prisoners less likely to expect good work prospects following non-training studies:

- ✧ are males
- ✧ are working in prison industries
- ✧ are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent
- ✧ have highest level of educational attainment beyond Year 10

¹ There is a significant difference between violent (offences against people) and non-violent offenders in terms of their education, training and work choices and how many years remain of their sentence. For example, about one-third of violent offenders who are within five years of their release are studying, compared with 40% of non-violent offenders. About 80% of violent offenders who have more than five years remaining of their current sentence are studying, compared with 50% of non-violent offenders.

- ✧ have attended government secondary schools and/or
- ✧ have prior occupations of manager/professional/associate professional.

Prisoners more likely to expect good work prospects following their non-training studies:

- ✧ have Year 11 or higher educational attainment
- ✧ have the most serious current offence involving drugs, money or property and/or
- ✧ have been in prison before.

In addition, expectations of good work prospects deteriorated with increasing life orientation test scores and improved with age and longer prison terms.

Prisoners less likely to expect good job prospects as a result of working in the prison:

- ✧ are males
- ✧ are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- ✧ have education above Year 10 and/or
- ✧ have the most serious current offence involving drugs, money or property.

Prisoners more likely to expect good job prospects as a result of working in the prison:

- ✧ are those working in prison industries/commercial services
- ✧ have attended government secondary schools
- ✧ have been in prison before and/or
- ✧ have had an occupation in the five years prior to the current prison terms of manager, professional/associate professional.

Moreover, expectations of good work prospects deteriorated with age and increasing life orientation test scores and improved with longer prison terms.

In summary, the results show that males and prisoners of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent are less likely to expect good work prospects irrespective of their in-prison activity. Furthermore, the expectation of good work prospects decreased with increasing life orientation test scores and improved with age and longer prison terms, irrespective of whether they were undertaking training or non-training study or work. However, the sample over-represented prisoners who were female or who had higher levels of educational attainment (Year 11 or above). Indigenous prisoners and those in maximum security prisons were under-represented. No data were collected from regional prisons.

An interesting result is that the life orientation test score is not a significant predictor of the expectation of good work prospects. Expectation is based on other factors and not significantly influenced by a person's tendency to be optimistic or pessimistic.

Other issues were related to the extent to which prisoners take up education and training opportunities, including the availability of course places and their perceptions of their previous education and training experiences. Restrictions on study options, such as access to the internet and telephone, were related to security concerns, and may also affect their ability to study, as would transfer to another prison during the course.

Education and training in Western Australian prisons is undertaken voluntarily. The Western Australian Department of Justice's Education and Vocational Training Unit ensures that courses are made widely available, and also that these courses are rewarding for prisoners and meet their needs. Access to education and training in prisons needs to be flexible and coordinated.

In Western Australia, each prisoner's individual management plan is reviewed periodically—every three to six months—to monitor progress and change if required. Many prisoners regularly

participate in training which they did not contemplate when their individual management plan was first developed. Importantly, the original individual management plan does not preclude a prisoner from being able to participate in education or training, even if they are required to undertake court-mandated courses; for example, in anger management or substance abuse.

When this study was conducted, the allocation of higher gratuities favoured prison work over education and training. The study was unable to show the extent to which this inequity was influencing prisoner choices for education/training and work. The gratuity system is being overhauled in Western Australia, including the removal of the practice noted above. An appraisal of the study/work choice decision after the introduction of a new gratuity system would be a valuable complement to the current study.

One of the difficulties faced by ex-prisoners attempting to break free from the cycles of recidivism and poverty is the stigma of a criminal record. Their employment options are limited to those occupations for which a criminal record is not a recruitment barrier. Issues of broken employment and homelessness can also adversely affect their success in the labour market.

For policy-makers, the chief questions should not be restricted to: 'What can we do for prisoners during incarceration?' but, just as importantly: 'What can be done for ex-offenders struggling to build meaningful lives in the community?' The answers do not lie with correctional authorities alone. Other government agencies, non-government organisations and private industry, should share the responsibility and challenge of building on the beneficial education and training programs undertaken in prisons.

Introduction

Background

Most literature suggests that crime incidence and recidivism are inversely related to the educational attainment and employment of the individual (Batchelder & Pippert 2002; Kling & Krueger 2001; Social Exclusion Unit Great Britain 2002) and, at the aggregate level, to the state of the economy. That is, offenders are more likely to be less educated and/or to have less stable employment histories than non-offenders, and there is more crime, particularly property crime, and recidivism when the economy is doing poorly. Moreover, having a criminal record, including imprisonment, can contribute to poor labour market outcomes, such as unemployment and low wages. This is exacerbated during downturns in economic activity. A variety of studies have estimated reductions in recidivism of 16% to 62% (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants n.d.) by providing quality correctional educational programs in literacy, adult basic education, post-compulsory schooling, vocational education and training (VET) and higher education. Other studies, however, have found that the effects of unemployment and education, among other pecuniary and attitudinal variables, on recidivism were either insignificant or sensitive to specification of the variables (Withers 1984 cited in Worthington, Higgs & Edwards 2000).

Overall, the benefits of reduced recidivism through reduced incarceration costs and lower crime costs are believed to outweigh the costs of the educational programs (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants n.d.); that is, 'a significant part of the social return to education comes in the form of externalities from crime reduction' (Lochner & Moretti 2001). Burgess (2003) has a word of caution for this single-focus approach to the provision of education and training in prisons. Specifically he argues that, in the light of the pursuit of education as a right, targeting recidivism should not be a paramount consideration. By encouraging education as a right and not a privilege, correctional authorities are allowing prisoners more choices and giving, particularly young people, the skills to live their lives with structure and purpose (ANTA 2003). This has impacts beyond the prisoners themselves—'reducing the likelihood that their own children will struggle at school' (Social Exclusion Unit Great Britain 2002).

Clearly the focus of education and training in prisons will influence the type of study programs offered. If the focus is on reduced recidivism and improved labour market outcomes, then the education and training programs are more likely to be vocationally directed. If the focus is on education as a right, then more generalised education programs, such as the adult basic education and literacy and numeracy tuition currently offered, could be needed. A broader view would embrace both foci.

The debate about the focus of education and training in prisons, embodied in the above viewpoints, is unlikely to diminish. Indeed it has been fuelled by antagonists of correctional education who claim that justice for victims is not served by taxpayer-funded prisoner education; rather, improving the human capital and therefore the potential lifetime earnings of offenders is an affront to those who lost their lives or were adversely affected—physically, emotionally and financially—by criminal activity (Greene 1998). Thus, the issue is often not about what type of education and training should be offered in prisons, but whether it should be offered at all.

In Australia since the 1970s, the education/training and work experience of prisoners during their period of incarceration have been increasingly scrutinised. This has been influenced by both the

move from punishment to rehabilitative models of correctional justice, and the rejection of the view that correctional education should not be offered.

Purpose

The costs to the community of property and violent crime are considerable. They include the direct and opportunity costs of crime prevention, incarceration and welfare assistance. Research suggests that crime, particularly property crime, will reduce if the cycle of poverty, engendered by poor education and low-wage employment, is broken. Helping prisoners to obtain qualifications, skills and work experience are considered keys to breaking this cycle.

The aim of this project is to determine the factors influencing participation in education, training and work experience inside prisons, and the value that prisoners place on these activities. This value is framed in terms of prisoners' perceptions of their improved labour market prospects.

Research questions

Five research questions were designed to accommodate the study purpose. The first of these is 'Do prisoners value the opportunity to undertake education/training/work?' Previous studies have also attempted to identify this value. For example, Batchelder and Pippert (2002) attempted to gauge the value of education/training and work from responses from a sample of prisoners to their prospective choices. Bearing Point (2003) sought the same information using self-assessments of skill levels by a sample of prisoners. The present study looked at value from two points of view. The first of these was in terms of the (then) current choices. The second viewpoint was in terms of expected labour market outcomes.

The second research question followed from the first question. That is, given that study and work are valued differently by prisoners, what factors may be driving this difference. Both the Batchelder and Pippert (2002) and Bearing Point (2003) studies identified important predictors of choice, but did not identify the relative contributions of these predictors. The present study used multivariate techniques to examine the relative importance of a number of prisoner characteristics, including socio-demographic background, prior work and education histories and prison work and study activities, as predictors of choice.

The third research question intended to ascertain the importance of future labour market outcomes as predictors of work/choice. Using follow-up data, the Three States Recidivism study (Steurer, Smith & Tracey 2001) found that respondents who did not participate in education programs fared better in terms of post-release employment than program participants. This result appeared to be counter-intuitive. However, they also found, as expected, that program participants who did find employment after release from prison had higher wages than non-participants. The present study did not include the collection of post-release data. Instead, it examined prisoners' expectations of their future labour market activity. Because of the endogeneity of the expectations responses, these could not be used as predictor variables in the examination of factors affecting work/study choice.

The issue of prisoners' work/study choice is addressed in the fourth research question: 'What is the probability that a prisoner will choose participation in education/training/work over non-participation. This question recognises that, in the Western Australian prison system, participation in education/training/work is voluntary. This is also the case in Victorian prisons (Bearing Point 2003), but not in some prisons in the United States where work or basic adult literacy and numeracy studies are mandated (Batchelder & Pippert 2002). In the presence of mandated activities, examination of study versus work choices is therefore biased. In the present study, neither work nor study is mandated, although some behaviour management programs are mandated during sentencing.

As with study and work opportunities outside prison, work/study choices in Western Australian prisons are tempered by the availability of courses and jobs. For example, a prisoner may prefer to begin a horticulture training class, but because his incarceration commences after the start of the class intake, he will need to wait until the next class starts. In the interim, he may choose to do short courses, such as forklift driving and brick-paving, which have earlier starting dates. He may also undertake no studies but work in the gardens. Importantly, no prisoner in Western Australian prisons is coerced into joining an activity (work or study). Whether they work and/or study is their choice.

A final research question asked is: 'What non-labour market outcomes do prisoners value?' In the United States, Steurer, Smith and Tracey (2001) considered outcomes such as re-arrest, re-conviction and re-incarceration. However, this study was able to access data for ex-prisoners from employment and education agencies and parole officers, rather than from the ex-prisoners themselves. Without similar or follow-up access or linking of records to determine recidivism, the present study was unable to determine these post-release attributes of interviewed prisoners.

Methodology

A key feature of the methodology for the present study was 453 interviews with sentenced prisoners at five male and female metropolitan adult prisons. Survey information included education and work backgrounds, education and training courses and work undertaken in prison, and labour market expectations.

This study is unique in two respects. First, prisoners themselves were asked about their expectations for future employment and earnings. Second, the interview included questions from the 'life orientation test' of Scheier and Carver (1985). This test provides a summary measure of optimism, with a higher score indicating a greater propensity for optimism. The inclusion of the life orientation test in the survey instrument was intended to provide, in the analysis, a control for prisoners' labour market expectations. Further detail of the test, its use in other studies and the technical details of this study are contained in the support document (see *To train or not to train: The role of education and training in prison to work transitions—Support document* at <http://www.ncver.edu.au>).

The survey and its conduct conformed to the Western Australian Department of Justice Research Committee and the University of Western Australia Ethics Committee requirements. Further detail on these, the interview process and survey instrument (questionnaire) are given in the support document. However, this sample does not reflect the profile of the metropolitan prison population in the following ways (Chavez 2004b):

- ✧ the over-representation of female prisoners in the sample by approximately 13% (21% of interviewed prisoners compared with 8% of the adult prison population)
- ✧ the under-representation of Indigenous Australian prisoners (21% compared with 35%)
- ✧ the over-representation of prisoners in the completion of Year 11 and above categories by double the percentage (31% compared with 17%)
- ✧ the lack of any regional prison data being included (27% of the total prison population with 61% being Indigenous Australians)
- ✧ only a 13% response rate at the only male maximum security prison.

A database was constructed from the 453 completed questionnaires. While many questions were pre-coded, open-ended questions required the development of code lists during the encoding process. Encoding, logic and validity checks were performed prior to the data analyses. The database was then interrogated to provide descriptive statistics and empirical modelling.

Australian and international studies of correctional education and employment

A number of Australian and overseas studies have examined the prior education, training and work experience of prisoners. The main finding from studies between 1992 and 2002 is that a large proportion of the prison population has had minimal schooling and limited prior work experience. In terms of prior levels of educational attainment, a Western Australia study in 2001 of 140 female prisoners (Western Australian Department of Justice 2002b) reported that 60% of inmates had completed Year 10, although this figure masked the disparity in rates between Indigenous (42%) and non-Indigenous (72%) prisoners. In the United Kingdom, a 1998 study of 567 women (Hamlyn & Lewis 2000) of female adult and juvenile prisoners found that 74% had left high school at 15 or 16 (equivalent to Year 10 in Western Australia), 37% had some form of further education, and 3% were studying at the time of sentencing. In addition, 31% of black and 18% of white respondents had been on some form of government training scheme.

A 1992 United States study of 1147 inmates (Haigler et al. 1994) in 80 federal and state prisons found that 40% had no high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) certificate, 35% had completed nine to 12 years of schooling, 17% had the General Educational Development certificate and 20% had some post-secondary education. A New Zealand study of 5780 prisoners in 2001 found that around three-quarters of male and female prisoners had left school without educational qualifications (New Zealand Department of Corrections 2003).

In terms of employment, the study of women's prisons in Western Australia (Western Australian Department of Justice 2002b) found that 71% of female prisoners were not employed immediately prior to incarceration, although only one-quarter had never had any work experience (51% Indigenous and 7% non-Indigenous) prisoners. Similarly in the United Kingdom, about 70% of female adult and juvenile prisoners had no employment immediately prior to incarceration, although 44% did work at some time in the 12 months prior to prison (Hamlyn & Lewis 2000). In the United States, 85% of male and female prisoners had worked prior to incarceration (Haigler et al. 1994). The difference in the figures reflects, to some extent, the lower labour force participation rates of women.

Many prisoners undertake education/training and work during their prison sentence. However, this may reflect mandatory prison policies (not the case in Western Australia) or active encouragement by prison staff rather than individuals' desires for education and jobs. The evidence on education/training and work by prisoners is mixed. For example, Hamlyn and Lewis (2000) found that 74% of female adult and juvenile prisoners in the United Kingdom prisons were doing paid work and 54% had taken at least one educational/vocational course during their incarceration. Haigler et al. (1994) found that almost 70% of their United States prisoner sample were working, and over 60% were involved in education/training. The extent of education/training and work by prisoners in New Zealand prisons was considerably less—around one-third of male and female prisoners were working and about one-fifth were studying. It is unclear from the New Zealand study whether there was an ethnicity bias. Finally, a 2002 study of Hong Kong prisons found that about 90% of inmates were working in either prison (commercial) industries or prison duties (service industries).

It is not clear from any of these studies whether the participation rates reflect mandated policies, particularly in the case of high education/training and work participation rates or supply constraints in the case of low rates. Also unclear is the extent to which prevailing prison management practices coerce prisoners into particular education and training programs or jobs.

The following discussion summarises a selection of studies whose purpose, methodology and outcomes most closely inform these features of the present study.

Victoria: Bearing Point (2003)

A review of education and training provision in Victorian prisons was undertaken in 2002. One of the activities undertaken in the review was a comprehensive education and training needs analysis of prisoners, with education and training defined as ‘any educative process or experience that results in the acquisition or enhancement of skills, knowledge and behaviours that are observable and susceptible to assessment’ (Bearing Point 2003). This needs analysis was based on a survey administered in all Victorian prisons in the second semester 2002. The response rate ranged from 8.2% to 78.4% across these prisons. The sample of 949 male and female prisoners was reported as being representative of the prison population at the time, although a numerical comparison and statistical tests of significance were not provided in the report. The survey instrument collected basic demographic information, educational history, educational aspirations, and training undertaken and desired. It also asked prisoners to report their perceptions of their literacy (reading and writing) and numeracy skill levels.

The sample had a slightly higher proportion of females than in the prison population at that time (9.6% compared with 7.7%), slightly more in older age groups (for example, 8.2% in the 45–49 years age group compared with 7.1%), a smaller proportion were born outside Australia (22.0% compared with 24.2%), and a slightly larger proportion of Indigenous prisoners (5.1% compared with 4.6%). The study argued that the sample was sufficiently representative of the prisoner population for the findings to be generalised. However, the differences did not appear to be tested for statistical significance. Hence, there is a possibility that the differences, as with the present study, while numerically small, might bias the findings.

Forty per cent of the sample had not completed Year 10, with almost 20% having completed Year 12. The report comments that the older prisoners have better educational attainment than younger prisoners. However, as middle-aged prisoners are over-represented in the sample relative to younger-aged and older-aged prisoners, this result may be driven by sample bias. If, as hypothesised, older prisoners are less likely to have secondary education, but older prisoners in the sample are more educated, then the hypothesis is not necessarily disproved. In the present study, respondents tended to be better educated. That is, the sample is under-represented, with prisoners with low levels of educational attainment. This could also be the case with the Victorian sample.

While the Victorian study highlighted administrative issues related to the delivery of education and training within a correctional management constraint, it also found that prisoners’ attitudes to education were key drivers in their willingness to participate in education and training. Other factors included age and length of prison sentence. Younger (25 years and under) and older (65 years and over) prisoners were less likely to be studying, and prisoners on longer sentences were more likely to be studying. These results pertain to bivariate analysis; no attempt was made in the study to determine the relative importance of age and sentence length to participation in educational programs using multivariate techniques. Other variables such as gender (although perceived skill levels by gender were summarised), prior highest education level, and prior labour market experience were not tested for their marginal contribution to the choice of participation in education and training.

The focus of the analysis of participation in the Victorian study was prisoners’ self-perceptions of their need for skill improvement. Attention was also paid to the inability of some prisoners to access skill improvement programs they believed they should be doing. Difficulties related to prerequisites and prison management were not raised in the report, nor does the report utilise any validity tests for the accuracy of prisoner perceptions about their skill levels and needs. In the present project, actual qualifications and prior levels of educational attainment were requested, and the link between these and skill levels was assumed. This was considered a more accurate reflection of the prisoner

skill profile than asking prisoners themselves, many of whom would have trouble, given their literacy disadvantage, in responding accurately or objectively to questions about their skill levels.

In the Victorian study, prisoners were asked whether they had wanted to study but were unable to enrol (54%), and whether they had started studies but were unable to complete (11% due to moving prisons and 6% due to discontinued courses). The study appears to be suggesting that there is some latent demand for which the existing correctional education system is remiss. The background to the derivation of these self-report details is not given. However, there is some doubt about whether willingness to participate is a true reflection of the demand for prison education. Recognition of their poor basic skill levels and the benefits of improved basic, interpersonal and computing skills do not automatically translate into willingness to study. For example, the gratuity system in place at the time of the surveys for the present study in Western Australian adult metropolitan prisons favoured work over study. That is, more higher-level gratuities were available for work rather than for undertaking education and training. Moreover, prisoners could not progress up the gratuity scale if away from the workplace attending courses.

The new gratuity system in Western Australian prisons removes the inequity by ensuring that prisoners who are studying or who are providing training assistance to fellow prisoners are not disadvantaged. They will be able to progress up the gratuity scale. The underlying philosophy of the new gratuity scale is the integration of work and study, particularly generic and trade-specific skills training. In this way, the amount of training a prisoner chooses will not be influenced by the availability or otherwise of gratuities. Moreover, the encouragement to study will add more interesting activities to an environment, which is not, by its nature, very stimulating.

Recommendations from the Victorian study were heavily supportive of the narrow 'more education, less crime' school of thought. Statements highlighting the study's perceived vision for correctional education and training included 'the primary purpose for education and training in prisons should be to reduce re-offending and to assist prisoners to gain employment' (p.99) and 'the primary focus of the education assessment should be on those criminogenic factors that influence prisoner re-offending that can be positively impacted on by access to education' (p.100). The education needs assessment targets prisoners at the start of their sentence.

One issue that will impact on the success of the Bearing Point recommendations for education and training in Victorian prisons is whether the study programs will be mandated or voluntary. That is, can prisoners choose whether or not to pursue the skill upgrading that is suggested on the basis of the education needs assessment? Lack of ownership of the decision to participate in education and training can militate against the successful acquisition of new skills and course completion. Compliance with the study program, given the correctional environment, might be difficult and there may be problems with the charter of prisoners' rights. If not mandated, might there be some coercion, overt or covert, anyway? The Victorian study does not address these issues. In Western Australian prisons, the study component of each prisoner's individual management plan is developed using information provided by the prisoner, including their own preference for study. This is monitored periodically as the prison sentence progresses.

United States: Steurer, Smith and Tracey (2001)

In the United States, a major study of recidivism was undertaken in 1997–98. Its purpose was to examine the impact of prison education on the recidivism and employment behaviour of ex-offenders; that is, 'is there any value in education for the incarcerated?' (Steurer, Smith & Tracey 2001, p.9). Unlike the Victorian study, this review has tested differences between program participants and non-participants over a number of characteristics.

The sample of 3170 inmates at Maryland, Minnesota and Ohio prisons was selected from those about to be released. The data for this Three State Recidivism study were collated from a number of pre- and post-release surveys of inmates, and their parole/release officers, and supplemented with

educational and employment data from relevant agencies. The release cohort was tracked for a three-year period following release. Characteristics of the participants and non-participants differed to some extent. For example, 38.9% of participants had schooling below Year 11 compared with 25.3% of non-participants. More participants had a family history of incarceration (57.4% compared with 51.7%).

The *a priori* hypotheses of the study were that prisoners who did undertake education and training would have lower rates of re-arrest, re-conviction and re-incarceration, would commit fewer crimes if they did re-offend, would have better parole compliance and participation in pro-social activities, and would have higher rates of employment and wages compared with non-participants.

The results of the data analyses for this United States study confirmed that re-arrest, re-conviction and re-incarceration rates were lower for participants compared with non-participants. This result was statistically significant at the 1% level. This is despite participants being at higher risk of being recidivists compared with non-participants. There was no significant difference between participants and non-participants with regard to type of re-arrest offences or employment rates. Participants had higher wages than non-participants, with this difference being statistically significant at the 1% level only for the first year post release. Non-participants had a slightly higher rate of post-release legal employment but this result was not statistically significant. The review concluded that correctional education does make a difference to recidivism and other post-release behaviours, and ‘investments in correctional education programs have been confirmed as a wise and informed public policy’ (Steurer, Smith & Tracey 2001, p.49).

United States: Batchelder and Pippert (2002)

Another United States study with similar objectives to the present study—examining factors affecting inmate choices between work and education—surveyed 196 inmates (11.7% females) in three prisons (female maximum/medium/minimum-security and male maximum-security and male medium-security prisons) using structured and open-ended interviews was that undertaken by Batchelder and Pippert (2002). The ages of the prisoners in the study ranged from 16 to 61 years, with an average of 30.6 years; half had prior prison terms and the average length of sentence was about three years. The sample was tested for representativeness of the prison population. Accordingly, there were differences in terms of offence and ethnicity in the women’s prison and in terms of age and ethnicity in the male medium-security prison.

In assessing the choice between education and work, this United States study noted that the choice is complicated by the fact that, unlike work, study in prisons does not attract prison pay or gratuities. This issue was raised earlier in the discussion of the Victorian study; that is, prisoners who study in lieu of work are disadvantaged. Batchelder and Pippert (2002, p.276) argue that ‘within the prison environment, money [is] power and that its greater utility [is] for the purpose of purchasing drugs’. This endogeneity complicates modelling of the study/work choice.

This United States study differs from the present study in relation to the design of the survey instrument. In the former study, inmates were asked to choose between the importance of the type of work or pay received for that work, between working or studying, and between working more or fewer hours per day. Statistical tests of significant differences were undertaken and the results were linked to some extent to the (then) current study/work activities of inmates. The results included that:

- ✧ Compared with women, men choose type of work over pay received.
- ✧ Compared with violent offenders, non-violent offenders preferred study rather than work.
- ✧ Compared with those aged 21 to 35 years, both younger (under 21 years) and older (over 35 years) preferred to work more rather than fewer hours.
- ✧ Compared with non-violent offenders, violent offenders preferred to work more hours.

The study concluded that those who thought type of work was more important than pay received for that work (63.7%) had longer-term goals for life outside prison. Recommendations included better matching of limited study places with inmates who are most likely to benefit from study, a recommendation which reflected a concern with under-funded education and training programs in these prisons. Reference was also made to the fact that half of the prison population was undertaking neither study or work, and that the staff cost of supervising such 'idle' inmates was far greater than for supervising work/study periods.

Correctional education and training policy framework in Australia

To some extent, the developments in prison education in Western Australian prisons outlined in the next chapter mirror education developments in other jurisdictions. By the 1970s in particular, governments began making 'a variety of sincere efforts, in a very unsympathetic climate, to place education in prisons on a proper footing' (Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee 1996, p.1)

In 1996, the Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee reported on its nation-wide appraisal of the education and training of people in adult and juvenile correctional facilities in the context of the National Training Reform Agenda. Importantly, the committee was entrusted 'to establish guidelines and principles for the participation of adults and juveniles in custody in education and accredited vocational training, and for their access to the range of lifelong learning opportunities available to the community at large' (1996, p.ii).

A key recommendation of Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee was for education units to 'adopt a modular approach to education and training with special emphasis on courses of ten to twelve weeks duration so that short term prisoners should not be disadvantaged' (Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee 1996, p.vii). Further recommendations related to the facilitation of access to learning by equity groups (in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and women). Changes beyond the auspices of correctional facilities were also mooted. These changes include modifications to eligibility criteria for Austudy and for labour market programs targeted at the long-term unemployed. Special mention was made of the need to encourage the completion of apprenticeships and traineeships by offenders.

Following the Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee recommendations, a framework for a national strategy for vocational education and training for adult prisoners and offenders was adopted (ANTA 2001). The vision for the strategy is stated as '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' (ANTA 2001, p.3).

The main foci of the strategy are access, participation and attainment, employment and lifelong learning and accountability. Objectives such as ensuring continuity of studies for prisoners moving between prisons, providing learning support, ensuring that training is linked to realistic employment opportunities and ensuring that education and training are provided within the national training framework are paramount in this national strategy. Importantly, the strategy seeks better cooperation between prisons, VET providers and other stakeholders at both custody and immediate post-release stages.

The difficulties of achieving the outcomes of accredited courses inside prisons are various. For example, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) framework applies to post-secondary learning with inherent assumptions about prior satisfactory completion of compulsory education (in Western Australia, to Year 10). For prison populations, this assumption is spurious, with many prisoners not completing the compulsory years of schooling or, for those who do, falling short of the expected literacy and numeracy outcomes. As shown in tables S7 and S9 in the support document, two-thirds of interviewed prisoners had their highest level of education at Year 10 or

below, and 4.4% did not attend secondary school. Dormer reports that ANTA, through the Australian Qualifications Framework, has recognised this issue:

Recent innovations include the recognition of the basic literacy, numeracy and communications studies as core to any curriculum developed; this has been particularly important for correctional education where it is recognised that the profile of offenders highlights low education levels and poor school achievement. (Dormer 2003, p.3)

While commentators on the labour market and the wider community assert the importance of education/training and work experience, the recognition of the opportunities afforded by such investment in human capital by the prisoners themselves is not clear. For example, there are suggestions that attendance at education courses inside prison 'is mainly as a boredom release, not to gain anything specific' (Cook 1990, p.97), or is a means to keeping prisoners occupied (Batchelder & Pippert 2002; Social Exclusion Unit Great Britain 2002) or 'contributes to the ease with which a correctional facility is run' (Batchelder & Pippert 2002, p.269). However, this finding has been challenged by prison authorities, criminal justice researchers and VET providers.

Improving opportunities for participation in education, particularly VET, in Australia is seen as a way of addressing inequity in the community. Particular disadvantaged groups have been identified as women, Indigenous people, people with disabilities, those with English as a second language, people with inadequate literacy and numeracy skills, and people from rural and remote areas, as well as prison inmates (Noonan 2003). The difficulties for achieving equity within prisons relate to the purpose and ramifications of incarceration for the individual, the difficulties of maintaining security, and mental and physical health issues for inmates (including behaviour management needs). Noonan (2003) argues that these difficulties pose challenges for both learners and custodial staff in prisons. They are also a challenge to prison authorities and justice administrators. That is, it is not a simple matter of allowing education/training and work to be available on site. Recognition needs to be given to other factors in the prisoners' backgrounds, such as their offences, their substance abuse history and their sense of their future.

Correctional education, training and work in Western Australian prisons

Most prisons have combinations of work, study and behaviour management programs available to remand and sentenced inmates. These are intended to provide inmates with life- and employment-related skills as well as a daily structure. There are also community benefits. Sociologists also argue that education is about empowerment (Reuss 1999).

These positive outcomes are particularly commendable in the light of difficulties faced by ex-offenders returning to their communities. While their intentions might include employment, home ownership and other rights, ex-offenders are often returning to communities that are hostile in both open and covert ways to these endeavours. While issues related to labour market outcomes are the specific concern of this study, other issues are outside its scope and will only be referred to where relevant to the discussion of employment opportunities.

Since 1902 when the first professional educator to teach adults in prisons was appointed, correctional education in Western Australian metropolitan and regional prisons has had diverse offerings—adult basic education, post-compulsory schooling, VET and higher education. In recent times, while the attainment of literacy and numeracy competencies is offered to many prisoners, the acquisition of skills to gain and maintain employment in the community is also considered important. Moreover, ‘prison educators work long and hard to ensure that individual prisoner needs are met and optimum educational advantage is gained through the incarceration period’ (Western Australian Department of Justice 2002a).

In the late 1990s, the Western Australian Department of Justice became a registered training organisation trading under the name Auswest Specialist Education and Training Services. A review of education and training in Western Australian prisons undertaken in 1997 led to a new operational framework for education and training delivery. The Department of Justice’s Education and Vocational Training Unit has a strategic and operational management role within this framework. Specifically, the objective of the Education and Vocational Training Unit is ‘to enable and encourage all offenders to acquire further skills and knowledge in the areas of academic, vocational and personal development in order to develop the skills necessary to participate as constructive members of the community’ (Chavez 2004a). This role of the Education and Vocational Training Unit is specific to the public prison system throughout Western Australia and covers all levels of prisons—minimum, medium and maximum. Thus, education and training in prisons is intended to assist prisoners who wish to re-engage in education, add to their existing qualifications or acquire new occupational skills.

In 2003, Western Australian prisons for adult offenders offered nationally accredited training. Some of the training is provided by Auswest Specialist Education and Training Services which is ‘nationally recognised’ and allows offenders to receive certification that is not openly stamped ‘Department of Justice’. The introduction by ANTA of the Australian Qualifications Framework ensured that accredited courses had portability across the states and territories. This also meant that accredited courses inside Australian prisons had recognition outside prison. In its capacity as a registered training organisation, Auswest Specialist Education and Training Services has forged mutually beneficial partnerships with technical and further education (TAFE) colleges to deliver training to offenders. Other courses are delivered by Department of Justice staff, other registered training organisations or private providers under subcontract to Department of Justice. Course is a broad term, inclusive of all education and training programs. These may be short half-day sessions

resulting in certificates for attendance, as well as structured VET and higher education study programs requiring passing minimum competencies. There are many difficulties with attempting to classify these courses. For example, some courses lead to ANTA-recognised qualifications; others are less formally endorsed although all have national recognition.

Some courses involve a series of units (as in VET) or modules (as in the certificate of General Education for Adults). In the evolving language of training, courses such as first aid and forklift have now been labelled units within certificates.

Unit content is determined within the nationally endorsed training packages which contain the curriculum in their respective trade areas. Nominal training hours are set by the state Department of Education and Training. However, if the unit of study requires hired equipment, then a shorter delivery period is more cost-efficient. Hence the total hours stay the same. For example, 30 hours of instruction may be delivered as 6 hours per day for 5 days instead of 3 hours per week for 10 weeks. The Education and Vocational Training Unit may supplement content and/or increase hours to meet the learning needs of enrolled offenders. Other educational courses are also delivered with regard to national curriculum guidelines. The unit itself offers two self-improvement courses under the Western Australian Department of Education and Training guidelines. These are New Opportunities for Women and Gaining Access to Training and Education. Other similar special education or bridging courses offered by the Department of Education and Training are scheduled to be phased out as the training packages become all-inclusive.

Difficulties related to the achievement of accredited courses inside prisons include class size limits, waiting lists for modules, and articulation of modules within courses or across courses. These problems have parallels in the post-secondary education sector outside prisons. Moreover, the course accreditation process is ongoing and may result in changes to qualifications, components of a qualification, module names etc. For some prisoners, attaining competencies towards a particular qualification occurs in a piecemeal fashion reliant on the provision of modules, and availability of places, and the stability of their term of incarceration. In Western Australian prisons, these difficulties are minimised by close case management by the Education and Vocational Training Unit.

In Western Australian prisons, each prisoner has an individual management plan. This covers sentencing and parole requirements, as well as study and/or work choices. On admission to the prison, prison staff discuss with prisoners the current availability of jobs and courses. Decisions about work and education/training made during these discussions are then included in the individual management plan. The plans are reviewed every three to six months. If necessary, changes are made to the plan and many prisoners who did not initially participate in education and training take up this option in later reviews. The original plan does not preclude later participation in training. For example, if an offender wishes to participate in a warehousing training certificate but it is not specified on his individual management plan, then he is not barred from participating in it. In this instance, his individual management plan is amended accordingly. Necessarily, prior work and study history inform prisoners' choices. For example, a prisoner who has had a previous prison term during which he worked in the kitchens might prefer to do that work again. A prisoner keen to do a university degree will need to gain admission through the usual competitive process, which includes having the prerequisites. As with work/study choices outside prison, labour demand and student places impose constraints.

Activity rates differ across prisons due to features of specific prisons. Minimum-security prisons tend to have lots of activity, both work and study. These are 'exit' prisons which tend to have better behaved prisoners and prisoners who are starting to reconnect with their community. In maximum-security prisons, prisoners in punishment are removed from the general prison population and their access to work and study is suspended. Prisons which accept newly sentenced prisoners may have a number of prisoners waiting for courses to start or for jobs to become vacant.

In Western Australian prisons, all prisoners are screened to determine their standard of literacy via an educational history appraisal as soon as practicable once incarcerated. In the metropolitan area, this

screening is undertaken, for men, at the state's dedicated remand receivals and assessment centre and, for women, at the main women's prison. The assessment procedure is comprehensive, tailoring treatment, work and study programs for all prisoners, both sentenced and remand, within the system.

Correctional education in Western Australian prisons follows a two-semester/four-term outline for the annual academic year. However, within this framework, the education centres in prisons offer flexible study options which include full-time, part-time and short courses. The centres also facilitate learning by prisoners:

- ✧ who are enrolled as external students in higher education institutions or theological colleges
 - ✧ who are studying at primary or secondary school level through the School of Isolated and Distance Education
 - ✧ who are studying through other public or private nationally recognised educational institutions.
- (Chavez 2004a)

In correctional education in Western Australian prisons, prisoner 'trainees' may be undertaking full courses leading to qualification certification or modules/subjects which result in attainment of one or more competencies. Some in-prison courses may be prerequisites. In addition, many courses may encompass compulsory or post-compulsory schooling modules/subjects.

An individual management plan can specify that a prisoner has to undertake a court-mandated substance abuse course and an anger management training course, but these courses do not necessarily have to limit access to education and training, as they are shorter-term courses. The Education and Vocational Training Unit has a long history of coordinating education and training with other programs. However, there are instances where education access is restricted during the early part of a sentence as treatment programs commence. For example, an offender in a six-month sex offender treatment program (a small percentage of serious offenders must attend this training) will have limited educational access for the term of the course due to the isolation that is part of that behavioural training.

The Education and Vocational Training Unit endeavours to ensure that courses facilitate useful education pathways, both between custodial facilities and into the community. Ensuring national recognition and/or accreditation of courses provides the benefit of portability of educational attainment to a traditionally transient population. Also, in order to target the employability of offenders after release, the Education and Vocational Training Unit utilises information from the Western Australian State Training Profile (up-to-date analyses of labour demand by occupation, region and industry), the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, industry training bodies and other local and regional employment, training and equity stakeholders. The information is used to draw up an annual curriculum, with a particular emphasis on skill-based training for likely niches in the job market. In recent years, this targeting has applied to training in meat processing, building and construction, and hospitality trades.

Prisoner sample attributes

In this chapter, the characteristics of the interviewed prisoners are discussed. Tables S1 to S21 and figures S1 and S2 can be found in the support document *To train or not to train: The role of education and training in prison to work transitions—Support document* at <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>.

Socio-demographic characteristics

Before examining the characteristics of the sample of interviewed prisoners, a comparison of this sample with the prison population is necessary. This will shed light on the extent of the selectivity bias in the sample and confirm the need for caution in drawing conclusions from the data analyses. The sample is biased towards the inclusion of minimum security male prisoners.

Seventy-nine per cent of the interviewed prisoners are males with 21% females (see table S1). Across all Western Australian adult prisons at the time of the survey, the proportions of males and females are about 92% and 8% respectively. The higher proportion of female prisoners in the sample is due mostly to the low response rate at the maximum security male prison at Casuarina. In the total Western Australian population, the proportion of females is 50.0% (ABS 2003b).

The majority of the interviewed prisoners are aged between 26 and 40 years (52.1%), followed by age group 41 and above (24.7%), and age group 18 to 25 years (23.2%). This gives a mean age of 34.4 years. Across all Western Australian adult prisons, 53.9% of sentenced prisoners are aged 25 to 39 years (Western Australian Department of Justice 2002b). In the total Western Australian population, the mean age is 36.5 years (ABS 2003b).

Among the interviewed prisoners, 50.3% reported that they do not have a spouse or partner. This compares with 65.4% of all adult prisoners without partners (unmarried, divorced, separated) (Western Australian Department of Justice 2002b). More than three-quarters of interviewed prisoners were born in Australia, but only 21% of interviewed prisoners reported being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This compares with 35.0% of all adult prisoners at the time of the survey being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Most interviewed prisoners have at least one sibling. From the total interviewed prisoners, the majority have fathers who are working (36.0%) and mothers who are not working (47.0%). About two-thirds of interviewed prisoners have at least one child. Other characteristics of the sample of interviewed prisoners are also shown in table S1.

Prior employment characteristics

Employment history is an important determinant of future labour market experience. This is the 'inertia effect' modelled by Nakamura and Nakamura (1985) in their examination of labour supply decisions. They found that an individual will have the same work behaviour from one year to the next unless circumstances change. These circumstances include the offered wage rate, the presence, number and age of children, technology, and local labour market conditions. Moreover, a change in labour force status would require a substantial shift in circumstances the more committed the individual is to their current labour force status. That is, an individual is more likely to continue working or not working, the stronger is his/her attachment to the state of work or non-work respectively in the previous year. Thus, in their model, the probability of work in the current year is

a function of hours and wages in the previous year, changes in their circumstances, other characteristics such as age, and the strength of commitment to the state of non-work. Also, an individual with a history of steady employment is more likely to find and maintain employment in the future. An individual who experienced considerable periods of unemployment would have more difficulty in finding regular work in the future. The strength of commitment to the labour force could itself be a function of the accumulation or erosion of human capital. In the first example, the individual is maintaining or improving his/her skills by being employed. In the second example, the individual is probably losing skills or productivity by being out of work (Norris 2000).

Parental labour force experience can also influence an individual's labour force status (Dunn & Holtz-Eakin 2000; Hout & Rosen 1999; Huang 2000; O'Brien & Jones 1999; Rubenstein & Tsiddon 1999; Taylor 1996). For example, children of parents with stable employment histories are more likely to seek the same. Conversely, children of unemployed parents are more likely to be unemployed. Parents' self-employment experiences can influence an individual's choice of self-employment. These effects may be direct (for example, the effect of role modelling), or indirect (for example through income and education effects).

In the case of prisoners, this issue is of utmost importance. Sentence lengths for interviewed prisoners in this study range from under one month to 30 years. Twenty-six (5.7%) of interviewed prisoners gave sentence lengths over 17 years which is the maximum period of incarceration (life sentence of twenty years minus a parole period) for Western Australian sentenced prisoners. Given the self-reporting nature of the interviews, it is possible that some interviewed prisoners were responding to the length of sentence question in terms of non-parole periods and others in relation to the statutes. It is also possible that the sentence length reported is the sum of two or more terms of incarceration, irrespective of whether these are concurrent. Most of these sentences were reported by prisoners whose most serious offences were related to drugs or against people. Figure S1 shows the distribution of sentence lengths by gender. The modal category for both male and female interviewed prisoners is 13 to 60 months.

Most interviewed prisoners are aged under 40 years (shown in figure S2), giving them the potential to re-enter the workforce on their release. Without gainful employment or education/training in prison, these prisoners would be less attractive applicants for jobs. This is compounded by the effect of criminal records on recruiting practices. Holzer, Raphael and Stoll (2002, p.44) in their study of the labour market for ex-offenders concluded that 'we can say with some certainty that employer demand limits the job prospects facing ex-offenders in the labor market, in addition to the many other disadvantages and difficulties they face'.

Almost four-fifths of interviewed prisoners were in employment in the five years prior to their incarceration. This includes employment in Community Development Employment Projects in Indigenous communities and work for the dole. To some extent this high employment rate creates an unrealistic picture of the employment history of prisoners. Active labour market involvement at the time of imprisonment is reported to be much less.

The types of work interviewed prisoners had immediately prior to starting their sentences are shown in table S2. Most of those with jobs worked as manual labourers (40.5%); 12.0% were self-employed or had their own businesses and many worked in service industries (19.8%). Few were managers or supervisors (3.6%). Interviewed female prisoners with prior work had manual labour jobs, such as cleaner, labourer and factory worker; hospitality jobs, such as waitress, kitchen hand and bartender; and other jobs such as secretary, beautician, dancer, sex worker, consultant and teacher. Interviewed male prisoners had manual jobs such as cleaner, labourer, trade assistant, deckhand, driver, fisherman, station/farm hand, rigger, factory worker and gardener; hospitality jobs such as kitchen hand, chef, baker and concierge, and other jobs such as nursery hand, security officer, teacher, artist, courier, technical support person and musician.

This table also shows that, in the five years before coming to prison, 95 prisoners had no paid work. Of these, 54 prisoners stated that they were unemployed (some due to no need to work/wealthy or

being temporarily sick or injured). Of these, 42.6% were actively looking for work and most said they were registered with or part of the Job Network (see Kelly et al. 1999 for information about the Job Network). Of 19 prisoners who were full-time parents in the five years before coming to prison, five were looking for work with four of these also registered with or part of the Job Network. A further two prisoners were full-time students in the five years before coming to prison, and the remaining 20 prisoners who were not in paid work in that period were either retired or permanently unable to work or unsure of their pre-prison labour force status.

Table S3 shows that, of interviewed prisoners with prior employment, one-fifth of the men had worked part-time compared with half the women. This corresponds to current rates of part-time employment for men and women of 14.0% and 45.0% respectively (ABS 2003a). The proportions of interviewed prisoners without employment in the five years before incarceration are 37.9% and 15.9% for interviewed female and male prisoners aged 18 to 64 years respectively.

Table S4 shows that 37.2% of interviewed prisoners who had paid work in the five years before incarceration worked some overtime. To a large extent this reflects the industries in which they worked. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data show that, in 2002, overtime for full-time adult, non-managerial employees ranged from 38.4% of employees in the transport and storage industry to 3.0% in education, with an average across all industries of 21.5%. The amount of overtime in 2002 varied from 5.9 hours per week in the mining industry to under one hour per week in the hospitality, finance and insurance, property and business, government administration and defence, education and health and community services industries (ABS 2002).

About one-quarter of interviewed prisoners received payment arrangements other than wage/salary, including six interviewed prisoners who received other payment arrangements on top of their paid wage/salary. By referring to table S5, most interviewed prisoners with prior jobs received gross hourly wages of at least the minimum wage (72.6%). The benchmark minimum wage at November 2003 was \$11.35. This is higher than the minimum wages applying to those interviewed prisoners whose prior work experience predated 2003. However, half of interviewed prisoners had sentences that started in 2003 and a further one-fifth had sentences starting in 2002. Under a third had sentences starting prior to 2002. Hence an applicable minimum wage range of \$11.01 to \$12.00 per hour is appropriate to use as a benchmark.

Table S6, shows that about 80% of interviewed prisoners had periods of unemployment immediately prior to, or at some point in their working lives.

As discussed earlier, there is some support for the influence of parents' labour market activity on an individual's employment. Table S6 shows that most interviewed prisoners had been employed at some time in the five years prior to their current sentence. Of these, about one-quarter had no prior experience of unemployment. For prisoners who were not working in the five years before incarceration, most had parents who were not working at the time of the interview.

Prior education

Tables S7 to S12 show the education backgrounds of interviewed prisoners. Two-thirds of interviewed prisoners had a highest level of education at Year 10 or below. This compares with 83.0% of all adult prisoners (Western Australian Department of Justice 2002b). This suggests that survey respondents are slightly better educated than non-respondents. However, this could also reflect the bias in the sample toward minimum security male prisoners. Of those who studied beyond Year 12, the most common field of study was humanities. Most interviewed prisoners (79.5%) attended government secondary schools, with 4.4% not attending secondary school.

Many interviewed prisoners had post-school qualifications in VET (33.6%) or other educational courses (55.8%). Of those with VET qualifications, about one-quarter had completed these during the current or a previous prison term. Examples of these qualifications include meat processors ticket, cleaning, horticulture and welders' ticket. About 70% of those with other educational

qualifications had completed these during the current or a previous prison term. Examples of these are first aid, introduction to computing, English and mathematics, cognitive skills and small business management.

Table S12 shows that about half of interviewed prisoners had started but not completed educational studies. Most (71.7%) intend to complete these either during the current prison sentence (65.9%) or after leaving prison (34.1%). Females are more likely to complete within the current prison term (75.0%), compared with males (62.2%). Most prisoners who choose to undertake education/training, have their courses tailored to fit their sentence length. The vast majority of units delivered are completed in ten weeks (the length of a term of study) or less (short courses). For the 62 prisoners who do not intend to complete their studies, reasons included financial (3.2%), course/subject/institution (11.3%), work-related (3.2%), personal/family (8.1%) and other (74.2%).

Forty-six prisoners did not intend to complete their studies for reasons such as:

- ✧ 'not interested' (about one-third)
- ✧ 'wants to do something else' (about one-fifth)
- ✧ 'not something he enjoys doing'/'it's boring' (about 10%)
- ✧ unable to finish due to no place in the course, course funding cuts
- ✧ losing an apprenticeship due to business closure (apprenticeships started but stalled outside prison).

One comment referred to the conflict between training and other education, with a trade instructor being reluctant to allow trainees time off to undertake other non-trade studies. Other comments referred to age and convictions being deterrents to employment post-completion, thus reducing the incentive to complete.

Sentence characteristics

Table S13 shows summaries of sentence characteristics. Thus about 20% of interviewed prisoners had sentence lengths of a year or less. This compares with about half of all prisoners with sentence lengths under one year (Western Australian Department of Justice 2002b). The discrepancy is partially due to the sample bias referred to earlier and the inclusion of remand prisoners in the Department of Justice figures.

About half of interviewed prisoners (48.3%) had started their sentence in the survey year, and about half (52.5%) had had previous prison terms. Of those who had previous periods of incarceration, 58.4% had between two and five separate prison terms.

The questionnaire asked prisoners what they considered their most serious offence to be. They were to choose from five broad categories. The self-reporting nature of the interviews precluded more accurately identifying these offences in terms of standards such as the Australian Standards Offence Classification and its predecessor, the Australian National Classification of Offences. The intent of the question was to categorise prisoners into two groups: those who committed offences to do with supplementing their income ('economic crimes') and those whose offences could be labelled 'non-economic crimes'. The underlying hypothesis is that the former group may have poor employment records, educational attainment and skill levels.

Using this offence classification, then 17.2% of interviewed prisoners reported that their most serious offence involved drugs. Offences against people accounted for nearly half the sample (45.5%). This was the same for both females and males in the sample. Gender differences can be found in regard to drug offences (12.6% females compared with 18.4% males) and money/property offences (24.2% females compared with 19.3% males).

Prisoner education/training and work

The Department of Justice sets training priorities on advice from the Western Australian State Training Strategy, the Western Australian Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and Western Australian industry training councils. However, most prisoners in Western Australian prisons have access to 'fee free' nationally recognised vocational education and training, including traineeships, irrespective of Department of Justice priorities. Prisoners can also access other educational programs available in the state, elsewhere in Australia, or even overseas. This may be at their own expense if the program is not covered by 'fee free' or 'Higher Education Contribution Scheme' type subsidies.

Prisoners who are foreign nationals can participate in Auswest Specialist Education and Training Services but not Commonwealth-funded study programs and they must pay overseas student charges for participation in TAFE, traineeships, higher education and external (School of Isolated and Distance Education) courses. Prisoners with physical and/or mental disabilities are assisted as required and this is recognised in their individual management plans. Prisoners in hospital can study if physically capable and prisoners with psychological problems are assessed on an individual basis after consultation with the appropriate teaching staff. Prisoners who are temporarily 'in punishment' cannot participate in classes or access computers and books or other reading material.

Flexibility of delivery and a focus on being client-centred are two key goals of the current VET system in Australia. Higher education is also moving towards such goals. Many short courses are available in Western Australian prisons to ensure that those prisoners with relatively short prison sentences are not disadvantaged in their access to education/training. The Department of Justice reports that many prisoners prefer shorter intense courses and that the majority of prisoners prefer the practical hands-on style of learning (Chavez 2004b). Also, Department of Justice provides literacy and numeracy training in the workplace because prisoners learn better when these skills are contextually based.

Table S14 shows some characteristics of interviewed prisoners who are working and/or undertaking education/training in prison. For the purposes of the choice of model estimations, those interviewed prisoners who are undertaking education/training courses as well as doing prison work are categorised as in education/training. Those interviewed prisoners doing prison work, either domestic or commercial services, but are not undertaking any studies are classified as in work. This split is used here also.

Slightly more interviewed prisoners undertake education/training (50.3%) than are in work (46.8%). About 3% are not in work or education/training. Eighty-nine per cent of those doing education/training also have prison jobs.

There is a statistically significant difference at the 10% level between the proportions of men and women working or undertaking education/training. Thus about one-third of interviewed female prisoners are working compared with half of the interviewed male prisoners. About 60% of interviewed female prisoners are undertaking education/training compared with about half of the interviewed male prisoners. There is no statistically significant difference between interviewed prisoners in work or education/training in terms of age. However, for the younger and older age groups, proportionately fewer interviewed prisoners are working in prison jobs (41.9% and 44.6% respectively) than are in education/training (54.3% and 55.4% respectively). For the middle-age group, proportionately more are in work (50.0%) compared with education/training (46.2%).

Slightly fewer interviewed prisoners with spouse/partner are in work (47.8%), compared with being in education/training (49.6%). A similar pattern applies to those without a spouse/partner, with 46.1% in work and 50.9% in education/training. These differences are not statistically significant. Proportionately more interviewed prisoners with children are in education/training (51.0%) compared with those in work (46.6%). For those without children, 49.0% are in education/training and 47.1% are in work, but these differences are not statistically significant.

Interviewed prisoners who were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander were more likely to be in work (49.5%) than in education/training (45.3%). The reverse holds for interviewed prisoners who were non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, with 46.2% in work and 51.5% in education/training. A higher proportion of interviewed prisoners who were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander were doing no work or education/training (5.3%) compared with those who were non-Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (2.2%). However, these differences are not statistically significant. About half of Australian-born interviewed prisoners are in prison jobs and half in education/training. For those interviewed prisoners with overseas countries of birth (n=98), a larger proportion are undertaking education/training (56.1%) compared with those in work (41.8%). This result is not statistically significant.

About 54% of interviewed prisoners with prison jobs have served prior terms of imprisonment compared with about 59% of interviewed prisoners undertaking some form of education/training. This difference is statistically significant at the 1% level. Those with longer sentences (more than five years) are more likely to be undertaking education/training (56.5%), compared with those in work (41.2%). Those with shorter sentences (one year or less) are more likely to be in work (53.5%) than in education/training (40.7%). Also those with sentences of a year or less are less likely to be undertaking education/training or work. These results are statistically significant at the 5% level.

Interviewed prisoners with some employment in the five years prior to the current prison term were more likely to be in education/training (52.8%) than in work (44.7%). Those not in employment in the five years prior to the current term are more likely to be doing prison work (56.0%) than undertaking education/training (40.0%). This difference is statistically significant at the 1% level.

The proportions of interviewed prisoners in work or education/training do not appear to differ by labour force status of either their father or mother. Moreover, parental occupation does not appear to influence whether an interviewed prisoner is doing prison work or education/training. In this instance the highest (Australian Standard Classification of Occupations hierarchical classification) of the occupations for both parents' current or usual work is used to define parental occupation.

Less than half of interviewed prisoners who are working in commercial services in the prisons are also undertaking education/training courses. For those who are working in domestic services (laundry, kitchen etc.), about half are also studying. Of those who are not working in either commercial or domestic services in the prisons, two-thirds are studying. All prisoners undertake an accredited occupational health and safety unit prior to commencing work. This generic competency is complemented by specific risk and safety training in the workplace.

One of the factors influencing prisoners choosing between working and education/training is believed to be the difference in the distribution of available gratuities for study and work. Interviewed prisoners who were employed in commercial or domestic work in prisons were paid weekly gratuities (then) ranging from \$49 at level 1 to about \$16 at level 5. With no other income as a rule, the availability of gratuities is a powerful incentive for prisoners to engage in work. The modal gratuity level is 2 and this is paid to 37.8% of the 413 prisoners who receive gratuities.

The gratuities system was overhauled in early 2004. The new system still has five levels, with revised weekly rates of \$15.75 for level 5 to \$50.05 for level 1. New daily rates of \$2.25 for level 5 to \$7.15 for level 1 have been introduced. Moreover, the distribution of available gratuities now applies to both study and work.

Table S15 shows that interviewed prisoners who work have working hours ranging from one to 70 hours in the top two gratuity levels with a median of 30 hours. Fewer hours are worked by those on low gratuity levels, with medians of 24 and 25 hours for gratuity levels 3 and below, respectively. Only 5.5% of interviewed prisoners are studying and not working. This subset of prisoners is undertaking a variety of certificate and diploma courses. One is doing an undergraduate degree. Fields of study include computing/information technology, small business management, English and mathematics (Years 11 and 12), art and psychology.

Whether interviewed prisoners are working and/or studying or doing neither differs by prison. This result is statistically significant. For example, at the minimum-security male prisons, less than 2% are neither working nor studying. At the maximum-security male prison, over 10% are neither working nor studying. Maximum-security prisons traditionally house prison system hospitals, psychiatric services, special high-security units, protection prisoners serving longer sentences and special sex offender treatment programs. Some of the ‘inactive’ interviewed prisoners are in this category.

One of the concerns held by prison authorities and criminal justice researchers is the meaningfulness of employment and education/training opportunities within prisons. In this project, specific attention was paid to obtaining feedback from prisoners on their expectations for their lives post prison. In the questionnaire, interviewed prisoners are asked three sets of questions. These relate to whether they are currently doing any work, training or education in prison. For those who responded affirmatively to any of these questions, further questions are asked detailing their jobs (if they answered ‘yes’ to prison work) or studies (if they answered ‘yes’ to prison training and/or prison education). Each of the three sets of questions concludes with a final group of questions beginning with: ‘Once released from prison, do you think this work experience/training/education will lead to any work?’ and ending, for those who answered ‘yes’ with a multiple-response question on expected type of work—‘full-time work’, ‘part-time work’, ‘casual work’, ‘more money than the job you had before prison’ and ‘a more enjoyable job than you had before prison’. This multiple-response question and the preceding question on any work/training/education were used to create a new ordinal variable with four categories—‘no work’, ‘work’, ‘work and more money’ and ‘work, more money and more enjoyable work’. For the purposes of the following multivariate analyses, the latter three categories have been aggregated to a single category labelled ‘good work prospects’.

Table 1 summarises the responses. It appears that 79.5% of prisoners who are undertaking training courses, such as traineeships, believe that they have good work prospects. This compares with 26.0% of those in work and 58.2% undertaking educational courses. This difference is statistically significant at the 5% significance level. Two reasons for the relative ‘success’ of training courses are as follows. First, prisoners undertaking traineeships usually receive visits from ‘outside’ lecturers on a regular basis (fortnightly or five times a year as a minimum) and this interaction and encouragement may assist in the more positive outlook of these prisoners. Second, prisoners know that they are enrolled in the same units and achieving similar results as outside trainees.

Table 1: Future work expectations

Prison activity ¹	No work on release	Good work prospects ²				
		I	II	III	Total	Total
Work	148	35	4	13	52	200
Training	24	55	9	29	93	117
Education	38	33	10	10	53	91
Total³	210	123	23	52	198	408

Notes: 1 As some prisoners were undertaking two or more activities, for the purposes of this analysis, the activities were ordered so that any prisoner undertaking any training course was included under ‘training’; any prisoner undertaking an educational course but no training course was included under ‘education’. In both cases, prisoners might also be working. Any prisoner who was working but not doing any training or education courses was included under ‘work’.

2 I = work; II = work and more money; III = work, more money and more enjoyable work.

3 Excludes 13 prisoners who were not doing any work training or education at the time of the interview and a further 32 whose expectations were missing.

Other issues related to undertaking education and training

While the interview process was intended only to obtain information for the questionnaire, often prisoner respondents offered other information pertinent to this study. For example, many prisoners appeared to be unfamiliar with the exact course names or qualifications. This is not uncommon as accreditation processes and hence course name and content changes are continual in the post-secondary education system. As a result, the study imposed some definitions for analysis

purposes. Course refers to one or more units/modules of study that result in recognition for attendance and/or an acquired level of competency. 'Qualification' in VET refers to the completion of certificates I, II, III and IV or other accredited courses. In higher education, qualification refers to the completion of undergraduate or postgraduate accredited courses. In either case, qualification implies certification pursuant to 'successful completion of a course in recognition of having achieved particular knowledge, skills or competencies' (ANTA 2004). Education/training refers to structured learning that may or may not lead to a qualification but involves at least one course.

Another issue noted by prisoners was recognition for course completion (for example, certificates) from the prison, the department or the course provider. Some prisoners were unclear about the process for achieving recognition of their completed courses. Also, some prisoners were unaware that the Department of Justice ensured that certification did not state that courses were completed within a Department of Justice program or at a particular correctional facility. Some prisoners were concerned that their sentence would finish prior to the completion of their studies and that there would be difficulty in completing courses outside the institution. For example, if a prisoner had a one-year sentence and was studying a certificate III TAFE course (two years), they might worry about being able to complete the certificate on the outside. Alternatively, some prisoners were concerned that prison transfers would militate against the successful completion of courses. Similarly, some prisoners were unaware of the possibilities for articulation of courses; for example, pre-vocational education courses leading to traineeships and upper secondary schooling leading to VET or higher education enrolments. In fact, the Department of Justice does provide help in these areas during the sentence and prior to release.

Like TAFE and university courses available outside correctional institutions, there are often limits on the number of places in prison-based courses. As with any educational provider, the Department of Justice offers a variety of education/training courses, but not all at the same time, and with due attention to cost-effectiveness. For example, some courses are sometimes not offered, due to minimum numbers not being reached.

Some higher education external courses require internet access. While prisoners are permitted computers in their cells and can access the shared computers in the education centres, which have high usage, they are not permitted direct internet access. This restriction also applies to mobile phones. Unmonitored communication with the outside community is not allowed due to security concerns. There would appear to be no practical solution to this problem at present.

A common concern expressed by many prisoners is that completed courses and work experience are not useful if criminal records affect their chances of being recruited. This issue is being addressed by the Education and Vocational Training Unit in its approaches to prospective employers and industry groups in considering ex-prisoner labour. Indeed, the Education and Vocational Training Unit has a number of employers in metropolitan and regional areas who are prepared to employ ex-prisoners with recent skill attainment in areas of high labour demand.

There are significant barriers to prisoners continuing their studies after release. These include conflicts with job and accommodation-seeking needs and family time (Social Exclusion Unit Great Britain 2002). The Senate Committee on Employment, Education and Training (1996) found that successful participation of adults in education and training requires programs to be:

... voluntary, empowering and culturally affirming, self-directed, needs-based, offering negotiated curriculum and assessment procedures, providing flexible timetabling, adapted to individual learning styles/preferences and resource-based and multimode. The corrections environment ... could hardly be further from accommodating these requirements.

(Senate Employment Education and Training References Committee 1996, p.15)

The ensuing recommendation of the Senate committee, and subsequently adopted by ANTA in its national strategy (ANTA 2001) is for the culture of prisons to be supportive of learning. To some extent this is happening, as prison management embraces the rehabilitative model. However, one of the limitations continues to be prison security. The strategy's requirements will be more easily met

within minimum security or exit prisons. The big challenge is for the requirement to be targeted within maximum security facilities.

Maximum-security prisoners are given the opportunity to access education and training courses. However, their involvement in special programs impacts on their availability for study and work. Some of these prisoners are unable, due to their medical or psychological condition at the time, to participate, but this can be reviewed once their situation stabilises.

Younger, particularly Indigenous, prisoners may have had no prior experience of adult education, and their recollection of their school days may be less than encouraging. Hence these prisoners may be initially reluctant to study.

Many prisoners suffer depression which can interfere with their study choices or progress. This can happen when they are first sentenced and realise the immediate impacts of incarceration on their lives. It can also emerge during long sentences as marriages fail, children and other family members stop visiting, and family crises, such as illness or death, occur. Prisoners have been found to be less healthy due to their pre-prison lifestyles. Colds and influenza viruses spread quickly through prison populations due to the nature of prison housing and activities. Education staff attempt to accommodate all these factors when encouraging prisoners to continue with study. Study participation rates reflect these situations.

Factors affecting choice of education/training and work

Few interviewed prisoners (n=13) were undertaking neither education/training nor work at the time of the survey. Most were undertaking some study and/or were employed in domestic or commercial services within the prison system. Thus the multivariate model was based on choice between education/training and work. A logistic regression technique was applied. Five models were estimated, with regressors related to personal characteristics (age, gender, partner status, children, race, parental employment status, life orientation test index), past education experience (highest level of educational attainment, type of secondary school, prior completion of trade or other educational qualifications), past employment experience (prior paid work, Australian Standard of Classification of Occupations for prior paid work) and prison characteristics (prior prison experience, type of crime). The dependent variable takes the value 1 if the interviewed prisoner is undertaking education/training and 0 otherwise. The estimates for these five models are shown in table S20, which can be found in the support document *To train or not to train: The role of education and training in prison to work transitions—Support document* at <<http://www.ncver.edu.au>>.

Model 1 includes predominantly personal background characteristics plus three variables related to the current prison term and a variable on prior work history. Model 2 excludes some of the personal background characteristics and includes occupation information in lieu of the prior work history variable from model 1. Both models 1 and 2 include indigeneity as a characteristic, whereas models 3, 4 and 5 use Australian-born. Models 3 and 4 drop the age terms, the optimism score and the type of crime variable. In model 4, variables related to prior qualifications are included. The exclusion and inclusion of the variables in the five models were based on bivariate results of likely predictors in a multivariate model, together with results of early multivariate model estimations.

The following discussion refers to the parsimonious model, model 5. It is inclusive of all relevant contributing factors available in the data, and excludes insignificant data. This model explains 10.0% of the variation in choice between education/training and work. This suggests that unobservable characteristics better explain the education/training versus work choice of interviewed prisoners. These characteristics may be related to prison management, education centre facilities, work availability and prisoner case management.

Referring to the model 5 estimates (table S20, column 6):

- ✧ Males, Australian-born, those with government secondary schooling and/or those having prior prison sentences are less likely to choose education/training relative to work.
- ✧ Those with children, with education above Year 10, who worked in the five years prior to the current prison term, who had already completed a trade qualification and/or who had completed any other educational qualification were more likely to be studying.
- ✧ The probability of choosing education/training relative to choosing work increases slightly the longer the prisoner's sentence.
- ✧ Prisoners under 44 years are less likely to be studying relative to working.
- ✧ Prisoners over 44 years are more likely to be studying.

The study suggested that preferences by violent offenders might change as their release dates came closer. There is a significant difference between violent (offences against people) and non-violent offenders in terms of their education, training and work choices and how long they have to go in

their sentence. For example, about one-third of violent offenders who are within five years of their release are studying compared with 40% of non-violent offenders. About 80% of violent offenders who have more than five years remaining of their current sentence are studying compared with 50% of non-violent offenders.

There are two hypotheses. One hypothesis is that as they move closer to the end of their sentence, prisoners may want to accumulate funds which, at the time of survey, could only be obtained through prison work. The second hypothesis is that, towards the end of the sentence, longer-term prisoners are mindful of the erosion of human capital that has occurred during their absence from the labour market. Thus they attempt to acquire some formal learning that might help in job placement when they are released.

The present study tests for this possibility by alternating ‘remaining length of sentence’ and ‘total length of sentence’ in the multivariate models.

Factors affecting labour market expectations

As mentioned, interviewed prisoners undertaking training and other education courses were grouped together due to some of the difficulties with course labelling. In this section, expectations are modelled in relation to the three ungrouped prison activities—work, training and education. This reflects how the questions on expectations were developed from the responses to involvement in the three prison activities separately. Table S21, which can be found in the support document *To train or not to train: The role of education and training in prison to work transitions—Support document* at <http://www.ncver.edu.au>, shows the estimates for the three models.

Table S21, column 1 gives the estimates from a logistic regression model of factors affecting the expectation of good work prospects by those interviewed prisoners who are working but not studying in prison (n=212). The dependent variable takes the value 1 if good job prospects (defined earlier) are expected and the value 0 otherwise. The model explains 13.7% of the expectation of good work prospects by prisoners who are working but not studying.

- ✧ Males, those of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, those with Year 11 or higher levels of educational attainment and/or those whose most serious offence relates to drugs, money or property are less likely to expect good job prospects as a result of working in the prison.
- ✧ Those working in prison industries/commercial services, who attended government secondary schools, who had been in prison before and/or whose occupation in the five years prior to the current prison terms were managers, professionals or associate professionals were more likely to expect good job prospects as a result of working in the prison.
- ✧ Moreover, expectations of good work prospects deteriorated with age and increasing life orientation test scores and improved with longer prison terms.

The estimates of the model of factors affecting the expectation of good work prospects by those interviewed prisoners who are undertaking training courses in prison (n=129) are given in table S21, column 2. This model explains 39.3% of the expectation of good work prospects by prisoners undertaking training courses.

- ✧ Males, those working in prison industries, those of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, those with their highest level of educational attainment beyond Year 10, those attending government secondary schools, those with most serious offence for the current prison sentence involving drugs, money or property, those who had been in prison previously and/or those whose occupation prior to prison was manager/professional/associate professional are less likely to expect good work prospects following their current training course in prison.
- ✧ Expectations of good work prospects decrease with age, and increase with life orientation test scores and length of current prison term.

The final set of estimates shown in table S21, column 3 are for factors affecting the expectation of good work prospects for those undertaking education studies other than training (n=99). Here the model explains 14.9% of the expectation of good work prospects.

- ✧ Males, those working in prison industries, those of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, those who attended government secondary schools and/or those with prior occupations of manager/professional/associate professional are less likely to expect good work prospects following these studies.

- ✧ Those with Year 11 or higher educational attainment, whose most serious crime involved drugs, money or property and/or those who had been in prison before are more likely to expect good work prospects following their other educational studies.
- ✧ Expectations of good work prospects increase with age and length of prison term and decrease with life orientation test scores.

An interesting result is that, in all three models, the life orientation test score is not a statistically significant predictor of the expectation of good work prospects. Expectation is thus based on other factors and does not appear to be influenced by a person's tendency to be optimistic.

Conclusions

The literature covering prisoner education, training and work confirms that many prisoners have poor levels of educational attainment and limited prior work experience. While some studies examined the choice made by prisoners between study and work, none has attempted to examine the relevant contributing factors using multivariate techniques as does the present study. These studies also failed to clarify the issue of improved labour market outcomes from the perspective of prisoner expectations of post-release outcomes. Again, this is an important feature of the present study.

Prison life is, of necessity, both routine and scrutinised. In past decades for which the punishment model of internment prevailed, there was a tendency for prison authorities to view prison education and training as a ‘time filler’—it enabled oversight (prisoners were located at particular places) and the routine of class attendance simplified staff rosters. In metropolitan adult prisons in Western Australia, prisoners’ involvement in education and training is about more than just filling time. Prisoners want to upgrade their skills, including completing the schooling they did not receive as children, or undertaking further studies up to the postgraduate level. Many see their studies as an exit from low-wage employment, particularly those taking up training courses. Some view study as a practical means for satisfying requirements for early parole, conjugal visits and child access.

Most prisoners also engage in work, primarily due to the financial incentive of gratuities. As with education and training, this work has traditionally been seen as a prison management tool to occupy prisoners during the day rather than for the purpose of up-skilling poorly qualified prisoners. However, in Western Australian prisons all work now has a training component, particularly in terms of literacy, numeracy and occupational health and safety. While this work, including commercial endeavours, may not be seen by prisoners as being an entry to a career outside the prison, there is labour market relevance to these inputs. For example, some new projects using New Apprenticeships seem to be agents for change.

As the correctional system in Western Australia focuses more on rehabilitation and the provision of skills designed to assist the offender to be self-sufficient, education and training participation levels will continue to increase. The change to a new gratuity system which reduces the bias towards work in lieu of study should also encourage prisoners’ participation in education and training. In addition, the provision of vocational education and training to offenders is expanding into areas where training was not delivered previously—work camps, community work and work experience.

Implications

Given that many prisoners have poor levels of educational attainment prior to their incarceration, providing them with tangible, job-focused skills through vocational education and training, appears to be appealing to the prisoners themselves. Many prisoners anticipate that employment after release will be at higher wages as well as being more enjoyable. This presages well for the success of such programs.

For non-vocational courses and work duties to provide similar expectations requires two things. First, work needs to include skills training more explicitly linked to the outside labour market. At present in Western Australian prisons, all work incorporates occupational health and safety as well

as literacy and numeracy skills components. It is entirely feasible that these offerings be expanded into specific labour market skills. For example, kitchen work could incorporate catering training. Second, non-vocational courses could include other generic skills training, such as team work, which is also linked to labour market possibilities. Importantly, prisoners undertaking these courses and/or work duties need to be aware of the value of these endeavours, in terms of labour market opportunities and lifestyle choices.

One of the difficulties faced by ex-prisoners attempting to break free from the cycles of recidivism and poverty is the stigma of a criminal record. This is a key concern of many prisoners. However, the Department of Justice is attempting to build industry and employer networks that will allow trained ex-prisoners to achieve their employment goals. These attempts have to date been successful.

There are also the issues of broken employment and homelessness that militate against success in the labour market. Lack of stability in people's private lives can affect employment stability, re-entry into employment and health. Many ex-prisoners find that support from family and friends is withdrawn during their period of incarceration and that they commence parole with no fixed abode and fractured or depleted social capital (through loss of networks). These impact on employment opportunities, as a large proportion of jobs are found through social networks. Around one in five jobs (in 1996) was obtained through information from friends and relatives (ABS 2001). Periods of incarceration and homelessness send signals to employers on important 'soft skills', such as trustworthiness and reliability, and this can diminish employment prospects for ex-prisoners. Moreover, returning to the labour market with a gap in their employment record also signals a decay of human capital (for a review of barriers to employment, see Singley 2004).

For policy-makers, the chief questions should not be restricted to: 'What can we do for prisoners during incarceration?' but, just as importantly: 'What can be done for ex-offenders struggling to build meaningful lives in the community?'. The answers do not lie with correctional authorities alone. Other government agencies, non-government organisations and private industry should share the responsibility and challenge of building on the beneficial education and training programs undertaken in prisons. The costs to the community of crime and incarceration are large and the opportunity costs in this world of stretching the taxpayers' dollars are considerable. It is therefore incumbent on the community and its leadership to find the ways and means to improve the opportunities for all citizens to live productive lives.

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ISBN I 920896 32 5 print edition
ISBN I 920896 33 3 web edition