



ACT DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
& COMMUNITY SAFETY

PRISONER VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING SURVEY

November 2004

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PRISONER SURVEY November 2004

31 Prisoners were interviewed on 17, 23 and 25 November 2004 at Junee, Goulburn and Mannus Correctional Centres, respectively, in NSW. A structured interview was used to guide the survey at Attachment A. All prisoners interviewed were low to medium security classified.

The 31 prisoners constitute 25.6% of the 121 ACT prisoner stock in November 2004.

The data is collated in the Table of Responses at Attachment B. The following analysis can be observed:

Age

The average age of prisoners is 30.9 years.

Year of Last Employment

Year	1982	1989	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Never Employed
Number of prisoners employed	1	1	1	2	2	2	7	8	4	3

The large majority of prisoners, 19 in total, had been employed at some time over the last 2 years. Of the remainder, 2 had not worked for 3 years, 2 had not worked for 4 years and 2 had not worked for 5 years. 1 prisoner had not worked for 22 years and 1 (with a disability) had not worked for 15 years. 3 prisoners had never been employed.

Employed in the last	2 years = 61.2%
	3 years = 6.4%
	4 years = 6.4%
	5 years = 6.4%
	6 years = 3.2%
Unemployed	>15 years= 16.1%

Length of Employment

Length of employment is collated as

	Totals
Less than 1 year	11
1 to 5 years	12
greater than 5 years, and	4
Not applicable.	4

It should be noted that the above are estimated self reports by prisoners and some who stated they had worked for a number of years were referring to intermittent employment in a particular industry rather than consistent employment at one workplace. Some prisoners explained irregular employment was due to interruptions caused by their offending and imprisonment.

Prior Employment

Prisoners were asked what employment they had undertaken prior to their last reported employment. This was to gain an indication of the employability skills.

The following groupings were applied:

School or other study	5
Unemployment	7
Labouring/build industry	5
Hospitality	2
Retail	1
Grounds maintenance	1
Disability	3
Nil prior employment	5
Other	2 (includes security and shearer)

The age of some prisoners who report school or other study as prior employment indicates that they were actually more likely unemployed for a period and/ or incarcerated between schooling and last employment. The large majority, 20 subjects were not employed prior to their last employment. 5 of those reported school or other study. This indicates that 64.5% of prisoners had only held one job or, as in the case of one individual, had been “self employed”.

Education Level

Prisoners reported the following education levels:

Year 10	12
Less than Year 10	11
Greater than Year 10	8

The above results need to be interpreted with caution as they are self-report. It is likely that many of those who claim to have completed Year 10 merely stayed at school until they were legally of age to leave. This is supported by research showing the strong association of criminal behaviour with school failure. (see Andrews and Bonta, 1994)

Six of the 8 prisoners who reported having achieved greater than Year 10, left school at Year 11. Again, this should be interpreted with caution. Year 11 indicates they have not achieved college matriculation but left somewhere in the middle of a Year 10 certificate (if attained) and completion of college or tertiary entry level. This raises the question as to why a steady achiever might ‘drop out’ at this stage of education, or if in fact, some prisoners had delayed leaving school for want of somewhere better to be.

Trade or Other Qualification

38.7% or 12 subjects reported a trade qualification and an additional 2 subjects reported a certificate level qualification in Chainsaw Operation and Cert 1 Information Technology.

9 of the 14 subjects who reported a trade or other qualification were employed in their field at some stage prior to incarceration although of these, 1 had not worked in the trade for 5 years, 1 for 6 years and 1 had not worked at his trade for 22 years. This leaves only 6 of the 14 prisoners who reported a qualification, likely to have maintained their trade skills.

Prison Jobs

74 % or 23 of the prisoners reported having paid employment in the prison. Hours of employment ranged from 3 to 45 hours (as estimated by prisoners) in the following categories:

Industries* General	Laundry	Grounds Maintenance	Clerical	Kitchen	Timber indust	Hygiene (sweeper)	Farm	Build Maintenance
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					(forestry)			
3	1	1	3	6	4	3	1	1

* General Industries include assembly of headphones, metal work and demountable building refits.

Those not employed in prison generally gave reasons that they were due to be transferred or had just arrived after transfer. Two were studying.

While employment in prison may assist in the development of work ethic and, if appropriate training is provided, the development of skills, "There is no evidence work in prison industries enhances employment opportunities post-release,..." (Duffy, F. 2004 Out of Prison Out of Work, Thesis UNSW)

Currently Studying

9 of the subjects, or 29% reported that they were enrolled in a course of study. Courses included:

Lit/numeracy	IT	Hospitality/ Inc comm. kitchen	Engineering	Welding	Building Cert	Small business
1	1	2	1	1	1	2

72.7% or 16 of the 22 prisoners who were not studying were employed in prison industries. The remaining 16.6% (6 subjects) of all prisoners interviewed were neither studying nor employed. Reasons given for no participation were generally that they were waiting to be transferred to another facility or had recently arrived from another prison.

Preferred Study

19.3 %, or 6 prisoners stated they would not be interested in further study. One additional prisoner stated that he was not interested because he couldn't study and cited the reason as dyslexia. When advised that this would not necessarily prevent him from studying and developing vocational skills he stated he might be open to doing something if it were available.

The remaining 77.4% or 24 prisoners stated they would be interested in studying. One prisoner stated he would be willing to study "anything" that might help him attain employment. The other 23 prisoners stated an interest in the following subjects:

Welfare AOD	2
Weld/ Forklift	6
Laundry / Cook	1
IT	1
Building	1
Basic Education lit/num	3
Engineering	1
Labourer Card	1
Y10	2
Y12	1
Marketing	1
Small Business	1
Philosophy	1

Employment Sought

Prisoners were asked what type of employment they would be seeking upon release. Responses were varied as follows:

Retrain / Don't Know /Any	5
Welding	1
Roofing	1
Nil	2
Building Industry / Labour	5
Tattoo Artist	1
Welfare AOD	2
Tiler	1
Church	1
Landscape	1
Car Yard	1
Stores	1
Driver	1
Own Business	1
Recycle / Retail	1
IT	2
Hospitality	3
Exhaust fitter	1

14 of the subjects indicated a choice of employment that was linked to current studies, qualifications or previous employment. That is to say, they stated achievable goals. The remaining 16 subjects could not state what employment they would be seeking; acknowledged the need to retrain or elected positions that they are not presently qualified for and have no experience and no training in.

The view of prisoners to finding employment upon release was overly optimistic. With the exception of two prisoners, all others stated they would have no trouble finding employment upon release. Of the two that did not support this view, one stated that he would not be seeking employment as he would be required to pay child support if he did so and the other stated it would depend if he was using (drugs) or not.

The attitude of prisoners to employment suggests a need for early vocational assessment and realistic case planning as well as early intervention with regard to cognitive distortions.

Profile

The following *very broad* generalisations may be useful:

Our prisoner is likely to be around 30 years of age; has held some employment within the past two years, although this would have been short term and may have been his only paid employment. He stayed at school until Year 10, or until he was legally old enough to leave. It cannot be assumed that he attained his Year 10 Certificate. He may have a trade qualification but probably has not worked in his trade for an extended period, if ever. He is working in the prison although it is

questionable whether he is actually attaining marketable skills. He is unlikely to be studying but would like to further his education. He needs assistance to plan meaningful education that will lead to employment. His expectations about employment post release are totally unrealistic. He probably expects to do what he has always done.