

INDUSTRY SKILLS 360 SERIES – CORRECTIONAL SERVICES WEBINAR

Webinar held: 1 April 2021

Panellists:

Amanda Swords, Chair, Corrections Industry Reference Committee

Ian Tindale, Deputy Chair, Corrections Industry Reference Committee

Karen Thomson, Industry Skills Specialist, AIS

Paul Walsh, CEO, AIS (facilitator)

Q & A with the panel

1. In reference to resilience and mental health skills sets what units are you considering and why aren't specific Correction units being developed?

Karen Thomson: So, with regards to the mental health Skill Set and the units, we've been able to do a little bit of research to look at units from other training packages and I guess the IRC feels that there is sufficient content out there already. That we don't really need to look at developing specific corrections units to be housed in the corrections Training Package. Some of the units we've potentially looked at are either from the (I think it's a HLT unit) some BSB, PUA and a couple of others from other Training Packages. Nothing's been determined yet and I guess that will be up to the TAC to decide once we get going on it. And also, for the IRC to be involved in that and approve the project once we've got approval to commence the project. So, we're not ruling it out, but I don't at this stage, we really don't feel that there is a need to develop and house specific units in our own corrections (the CSC Training Package) And it goes in line with what the movement towards training packages is (to start looking at other units and other Training Packages and don't just keep developing units for the sake of developing them). There's a lot of good content out there and we should really be tapping into that content as well, so if that covers that.

Paul Walsh: Ian or Amanda is there anything that you want to add to that, or you feel that's answered it?

Ian Tindale: No that was well said, exactly right and that reflects what we've been discussing.

Amanda Swords: Yeah, the conversations that we've had, exactly that.

2. Why is there a need for a specific stream to look at Corrections Officers in a court environment?

Ian Tindale: Sure, I'm happy to talk to that one, I think one of the things that's come up in discussion with the IRC is that as jurisdictions have expanded and specific roles have come about, we've got now some officers that work exclusively in either a custodial setting or a community setting. Or in this case we're talking about courts or court cells or just in court

rooms etc, transport units etc. And the electives that they may or may not choose to do in those in order to get a Certificate III, can often vary between jurisdiction to jurisdiction. And there's been some discussion as to whether or not the experience of an officer that works exclusively in a court environment actually well reflects the experience, and the exposure and the environment of working in a full custodial area, and for those that are familiar with it. I mean for example just a cell search is a very good example. One in a custodial setting has offender property and there might be two people in the cell, whereas in a court (the court cells) it's very transient and there's no property et cetera. So, there are some obvious differences there. So, it was looking at the fact that officers that work in these various jurisdictions, how they end up with the same certificate III and there's a bit of a gap between when people then move from one jurisdiction to another or from one area to another. Does the Certificate III in Correctional Practice that they present, that they hold, actually reflect the types of duties and the skill set that they actually can do? So, the IRC is considering at the moment looking at a change as we said in the elective units, so that we can better tailor that. And it also means that it's not about custodial officers in a custodial setting, but it's also recognising the difference in the types of works that that people do in a court or a court transport type situation.

Paul Walsh: Great, thanks very much.

Karen Thomson: I might just add on to that. In one of the Technical Advisory Committees that we have just been running with (I can't remember if it was the trauma or the cognitive impaired one), we had a couple of courts officers (correctional officers) sitting in on those TACs and it was actually raised in a TAC that they didn't feel potentially that some of those units, that are in the Cert III are necessarily specific to them. So that was I guess a reinforcement of what the IRC had been thinking and discussing anyway and then when I went to the IRC meeting and I said it's something interesting that you've raised. That because it has specifically been raised by a person that works in the courts. So, I guess that's how some of these projects do come about, and it actually reinforces that I think that there is that gap, from first-hand knowledge there that somebody has identified that. So, backing that up there. Thank you.

3. A high number of the prison population is comprised of indigenous Australians. Are there any core units working with them?

Karen Thomson: That might be one for Ian or Amanda. It hasn't come up; I believe there are some indigenous units in our training package already.

Ian Tindale: Yeah, there certainly is. So, there is a unit there on working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders and I think there's one as well also for vulnerable offenders. If depending on the category and we are looking at trauma informed care at the moment and cognitive impairment, so we are looking. And so let me just clarify, there are some existing units with regards to Aboriginal, to answer Rajesh's question. And we're also expanding that with regards to if they're core or not, then that's something that industry would need to give some feedback to the IRC on. It's certainly not the IRCs position to demand that, that may or may not be a core, but it is certainly something that the IRC is listening to and there is some work being done in that area.

4. When will the trauma and Cognitively Impaired Offenders units and Skill Sets be available on Training.gov.au?

Karen Thomson: I will answer that one. So as mentioned both projects are currently at the edit and QA phase, so they should be submitted to the department in May for consideration

at the June meeting, pending skills ministers sign off. I would say roughly around about August but again depending on time frames. That sets a rough guide on that process, but they will go up at the June meeting, so depending on the skills ministers sign off and approval with that, and as long as there's no issues with the project, but we don't anticipate any so yeah, it's maybe August I think, fingers crossed.

5. Paul asked how the Corrections Industry can attract more females?

Ian Tindale: That's a good question Paul. Thank you and that's something that has been discussed with the IRC and I think there's probably a number of barriers to entry and whether or not it is a matter of training and what we're looking at in the training in the IRC space or more broadly as the employer. So, some of the barriers that have been discussed is, for example, 12-hour shifts and the ability of to provide childcare and other duties around those 12-hour shifts. The perception of the industry and perhaps what people perceive the industry to be is not the same, and I think everyone on the meeting could probably reflect that one of the first things we tell new people is forget what you see on television. But we need to get people through the door and getting interested in recruitment in your career before that, so I think there's a number of different barriers that we need to look at their Paul and I don't know that there's a simple solution.

Amanda Swards: Can I just make a comment there as well. Several years ago, in Tasmania, we got a dispensation from our state service commissioner to proactively advertise for female staff members and so we went out and did that. We did a lot of advertising around attracting women to the role particularly for a correctional officer because that's where the low numbers lie, within the actual prison environment (not so much in the support service type of area) and our numbers do include (that 31% does include the support service type area and the programs and that sort of stuff). But we found, and this is going back some years ago now, probably (15 or 16, so it is a long time, and I probably did step off the ark) but we just did not get the number of women. We did get a small increase, but we didn't get the number of women that we thought we might get, and we did it over a couple of years. We had an allowance to proactively recruit women and advertise for women specifically for three years and we just didn't get an increase in numbers. So, it appears that the things that Ian mentioned, they're things that probably aren't going to change very much moving forward either. Like the 12-hour shifts and being able to arrange childcare. And corrections isn't that family friendly (in that sense) unless of course more and more flexible work arrangements are able to be put in place where people job share or something like that. And that again is for each jurisdiction to look at. Other jurisdictions may be more successful than what we were but that 30-31% of females, and like said that does include areas like community corrections (where we, in my state in particular appear to have a lot more women in the community corrections area than in the prison area or custodial area) it just doesn't seem to change. And like I said I've been in corrections in particular for 18 years and the number just (it's probably moved a couple of percent up maybe three I think because I remember at one point it was 28) but we're really not getting anywhere near that the number that that you would like to see.

6. If there's another big outbreak of COVID is the Corrections industry better prepared?

Ian Tindale: I'm happy to talk to that one. I think COVID has been a topic of conversation at the IRC and in the TACs over the last 12 months of course. And as I mentioned in my summary at the beginning there was that initial, I won't say panic, but that initial "what are we going to do here" "what's happening". And I think all the jurisdictions have made various decisions, would be it around housing changes having separate isolation areas, quarantine areas and that's occurred in both the prison and in the immigration retention space. So, I think the correction

industry is very well prepared. Feedback from industry is that they're still maintaining some of the things that occurred in prisons, that occurred during COVID, such as the video visits etc that is continuing because the offender population is far more engaged with the visits. They're able to actually get more visits via video than they were face-to-face for their loved ones that were some time away. And also, those prisoners that, as I mentioned, that were getting stood over to try and bring things in, they're finding the video visits far better. So, I think a lot of jurisdictions are still maintaining those things and we're not out of COVID yet. Still, it's all on in everyone's mind and, as you said, what's happening in Queensland is a good reflection that none of us are taking it lightly, so I think the correction industry is very well prepared for another outbreak.

Paul Walsh: Great thanks Ian, so was there anything you wanted to add to that Amanda?

Amanda Swards: No not really. I think if Ian hadn't answered I was going to say I think we're fabulously prepared now based on our learnings from the first couple of (maybe three months) and then just continuing on with some of the stuff that's been implemented even within community corrections (which is where I've been sitting for the last 12 months). There were some changes around seeing offenders having more phone calls and stuff like that, and what our staff in particular found, and I imagine that this would be pretty much across the board, that younger offenders didn't mind using the telephone for the weekly, fortnightly or monthly case management meetings that they had to do because they're used to more digital means than face-to-face interactions. So that's one of the things that moving forward, that it could possibly benefit the industry as well. But I think there's been some really good learnings out of this. Things that we never thought that we could do in the past. Like it was in Tasmania, it was not that common to have video visits or video link visits, or you know skype visits and so now way more common, and as Ian said it provides a platform for loved ones who live several hours away. And in Tasmania you can be up to five hours away from the main prison site. The travelling and that involved for a couple of hours visit is really significant and so this will help offenders with their social resocialisation and reintegration. I'm sure other industries have made some really good leaps forward, but I think we have too, and so I would say that we are really well prepared for another outbreak.

7. How is Corrections Industry adjusting to the way they do things with new technologies?

Ian Tindale: Sure, I think every jurisdiction is handling it differently and of course it also depends on the technology available at the prison as well as the jurisdictional policies and procedures. With regards to that, I think digital online learning has taken off in most jurisdictions, so there's been an increase of that. There's been an increase of offenders being able to do their buy-ups etc through technology, as Amanda said, more community corrections being able to do video chats and phone linkups rather than face-to-face visits at the office. We've seen an increase in medical consultations, a decrease in court transport in some jurisdictions, because things are done by video link etc., And I'm aware of the jurisdictions [that] have come to the IRC and have invested quite heavily in putting in additional AVL link rooms into their facilities in order to do that., And the correctional facilities, but also the courts etc, are putting in, investing in that technology. I think also too rostering and communication etc, is going more and more digital and so we are seeing that the jurisdictions are handling that quite well. Like any new technology there are some teething problems. There are some people that take longer to learn, but it kind of goes to what Amanda mentioned before about the younger offenders being able to pick up the technology and accepting that quite easily. We're finding younger officers and not so much the younger officers, but the officers that are more adept with technology, are quite able to pick up the new technology and move quite rapidly

with that. So, all in all at the IRC meetings I'd say we haven't found a significant delay in that area.

8. You're talking about reviewing Cert III and Cert IV qualifications, yet both had code changes in 2019 and 2020. Do we have to update our materials again as this is onerous for RTO's?

Karen Thomson: I could see that one coming my way. Yes, look agreed, they have had code changes over the last couple of years and definitely acknowledge that it is a very lengthy and detailed process for RTOs to update their material. Unfortunately, we need to follow the rules as well and as Units of Competency change codes or specialisation streams need an update, those code changes need to happen. Essentially with the review of the Cert III and the Cert IV it is something the IRC has discussed in quite a bit of detail in regard to the reviewing of those two at the same time and the fact that they have had recent code changes. They are looking to put in an extension with the Case for Change that when that gets submitted to have an extension to the teach-out period from one to two years for the transition period. So that should assist RTOs in the time frames required to update all their material and things like that. I mean another rationale for reviewing the Cert III and the Cert IV at the same time, it sort of provides that progression or flow of pathways and to make sure that they're aligned. So, and also having that one release, that will be released at the same time which again is minimal destruction. But definitely having that teach out period is certainly something that has been flagged for consideration and the IRC will be putting that forward for consideration with the Case for Change, noting that those qualifications have had some significant changes over consecutive years. So hopefully that helps with the burden and the workload for RTOs to adjust all their material. If that answers that question hopefully, I'll get all these emails afterwards going no, no, no, no.

9. As there are many skills shortages, are these taken into consideration with offender skills training with people that are in custody?

Ian Tindale: Absolutely Paul, there's been a massive focus over the last number of years with regards to offender education and upskilling to provide people who are in prison better opportunities when they get out, so as far as I'm aware all jurisdictions will have various industries and programs available, be them educational or actually trades et cetera. Speaking from my own experience, the jurisdictions that I've worked in certainly have different facilities, will have different options. It might be garbage recycling at one, it might be you know gardening, it may be a heavy industry with regards to welding, might be carpentry etc. But also looking at things some of the dying trades, the librarianship, those sorts of things. I think all jurisdictions also will have certain prisoners that are enrolled in higher education, doing their degrees et cetera, so there is a lot happening in the prisoner education space. With regards to the IRC, we're on the periphery of that, with more about giving our employees the skills that they might need to impart that knowledge or work with the offenders in order to for them to improve their learning capability and opportunities.