

Prisons struggling to fill teacher positions



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March 09, 2020

The NSW Inspector of Custodial Services' report has delivered a damning assessment of the failed privatisation of adult education in NSW prisons.

The report *Programs, Employment and Education Inspection* (February 2020) states: "Staff at most of the inspected correctional centres reported difficulties in the recruitment and retention of sufficient BSI Learning trainers to deliver approved hours of Foundation Skills Programs."

In May 2016 the then-Minister for Corrective Services David Elliot announced the deletion of 138 of the 158 education position in NSW prisons. These 138 highly qualified teachers, Education Officers and Senior Education officer were made redundant.

Federation members campaigned against the decision, but despite widespread community support for the campaign against these job cuts, all but 20 teachers and educators were lost to the prisons by 31 December, 2016.



Federation members were highly critical that the Minister had cut the qualification required to teach in NSW prisons from degree-qualified teachers to Certificate IV trainers taught by private training organisation BSI.

Federation members predicted in 2016 that recruitment and retention of casual trainers would be difficult in the prison system, which requires high security clearance for all staff.

High staff turnover is detrimental to prisoners' education. Other issues identified in this failed model for education delivery include:

- the small number of traineeships
- low enrolments in distance education courses.

Now, under this model, prisoners are not getting the same access to education opportunities to assist their rehabilitation and transition back to society.

Intensive Learning Centres at Nowra, Wellington, Lithgow and Kempsey prisons still have 20 education officers and degree-qualified teachers working with the students. The report specifically identifies the important role these centres play in rehabilitation and recommends increased enrolments in all these facilities.

The report is critical of the loss of library services, a role before the 2016 teacher redundancies were managed by teachers and education officers.

The report states: “The inspection team was concerned about the level of access inmates have to correctional centre libraries. Following the changes to the delivery of education services, no staff member has been assigned formal responsibility for maintaining these libraries and facilitating access for inmates. Often, libraries were disorganised, locked and unattended.”

The union will continue to campaign to have all 158 teaching and education positions reinstated for prisoners’ rehabilitation.