Recidivism and Employment of Virginia Correctional Enterprises Participants Released from State Responsible Incarceration in FY2016 and FY2017

VADOC RESEARCH—EVALUATION UNIT

APRIL 2022

Introduction

A total of 1,043 state responsible (SR) inmates who participated in Virginia Correctional Enterprises (VCE) training were released from incarceration in FY2016 and FY2017 (534 and 509, respectively). VCE provides inmates with workplace training as well as industry and vendor-specific certifications and apprenticeships to support successful reentry. This report assesses the impact of VCE participation on job attainment and recidivism after release from SR incarceration. Results are broken down by demographics, criminal history, crime type, COMPAS risk and substance abuse needs assessment results.

VCE Participant Characteristics

VCE participants released from SR incarceration in FY2016 and FY2017 were similar in composition and had similar total sentence lengths. Among the 534 VCE participants released in FY2016, 58.8% were male and 41.2% were female. Similarly, among the 509 VCE participants released in FY2017, 64.2% were male and 35.8% were female. The racial composition of the VCE participants released in FY2016 was 48.9% Black, 50.6% White, and 0.6% Other while the racial composition of the VCE participants released in FY2017 was 48.7% Black, 50.5% White, and 0.8% Other.
VCE Participant Characteristics (Cont.)

For VCE participants released in FY2016 and FY2017, the average age at release was 41. VCE participants released in FY2016 were sentenced to a median total sentence of 5 years, 6 months (half higher and half lower) while those released in FY2017 were sentenced to a median total sentence of 6 years.

At a re-incarceration rate of 17.6% within three years of release for FY2016 releases and 14.3% for FY2017 releases, VCE program participants' recidivism rate is lower than Virginia's overall recidivism rates for FY2016 and FY2017 releases\(^1\) (23.9% and 22.3%, respectively). VCE participants released in FY2017 had a lower recidivism rate than those released in FY2016 (14.3% and 17.6%, respectively). However, this difference was not statistically different.\(^2\) Additionally, VCE participants released in FY2016 and FY2017 had lower recidivism rates than those from their respective cohorts who spent their entire incarceration term in a VADOC facility (21.0% and 20.4%, respectively).

According to Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) data,\(^3\) 66.7% of the FY2016 releases and 71.1% of FY2017 releases who participated in VCE training during their incarceration term were employed during the follow-up period.\(^4\) Half of the VCE participants released in FY2016 and FY2017 who obtained employment after release did so within one quarter of release with those released in FY2016 averaging 2.4 quarters and those released in FY2017 averaging 1.3 quarters.\(^5\) Among VCE participants released in FY2016, those who were employed sustained employment for approximately 55.4% of the time they were at liberty (57.1% median) and averaged 3 employers during the follow-up (2 median). Similarly, among VCE participants released in FY2017, those who were employed sustained employment for approximately 60.4% of the time they were at liberty (61.5% median) and averaged 3 employers during the follow-up (3 median).

Demographic factors such as gender and age are known predictors of recidivism. The overall recidivism rates differ between males and females released during FY2016 (24.8% and 18.0%, respectively) and FY2017 (23.2% and 16.3%, respectively). Similarly, recidivism rates differed between male and female VCE participants released during FY2016 (21.0% and 12.7%, respectively) and FY2017 (16.2% and 11.0%, respectively). Among VCE participants released in FY2016, those who were under 30 at the time of release had the highest recidivism rate of any age group (24.4%) followed by those between the ages of 30 and 49 (17.5%) whereas those between the ages of 60 and 69 at the time of release had the lowest recidivism rate (9.5%).\(^6\) Similarly, for VCE participants released in FY2017, those who were under 30 at the time of release had the highest recidivism rate of any age group (20.3%) followed by those between the ages of 30 and 49 (14.8%) whereas those between the ages of 60 and 69 at the time of release had the lowest recidivism rate (0.0%).\(^6\)

\(^1\) VADOC Research-Evaluation Unit Recidivism Rates by Key Indicators Report, 2021,2022.
\(^2\) \(p < .05\) was the threshold used to determine the statistical significance of the chi-square (\(\chi^2\)) test.
\(^3\) Employment data from quarters 1 and 2 of FY2016 was not included in data provided by VEC.
\(^4\) Follow up spanned three years following SR incarceration release date for non-recidivists or recidivated date for recidivists.
\(^5\) Time to employment was calculated as the difference between employment quarter and year and release quarter and year.
\(^6\) Fewer than 30 VCE participants were between the ages of 60 and 69 among FY2016 and FY2017 releases.
VCE Participant Characteristics (Cont.)

There were similar rates of employment for male and female VCE participants released in FY2016 (65.9% and 67.7%, respectively) and FY2017 (70.9% and 71.4%, respectively). Black VCE participants released in both FY2016 and FY2017 obtained employment after release at a higher rate than White VCE participants (70.9% and 63.0%, and 79.4% and 63.4%, respectively). VCE participants released in both FY2016 and FY2017 who were under the age of 30 were most likely to acquire employment after release and there was a decreasing trend in employment as release age increased.

Employment, Earnings, and Recidivism

The majority of VCE participants released in FY2016 who obtained employment after release found work in food service (25.3%), in HVAC/construction/contracting/supply companies (20.5%), through staffing or job placement agencies (18.8%), or in “other” employment areas (18.0%). Their average quarterly earnings were $5,076.23 (median of $3,883.39). VCE participants from the FY2016 cohort who obtained employment after release had a lower recidivism rate than those who did not (15.7% and 21.3%, respectively). However, this difference was not significant.7

The majority of VCE participants released in FY2017 who obtained employment after release found work through staffing or job placement agencies (26.0%), in food service (25.4%), in HVAC/construction/contracting/supply companies (13.0%), or in “other” employment areas (20.2%). Their average quarterly earnings were $4,881.30 (median of $4,381.47). VCE participants from the FY2017 cohort who obtained employment after release had a significantly lower recidivism rate than those who did not find employment (12.2% and 19.7%, respectively).7

7p < .05 was the threshold used to determine the statistical significance of the chi-square (χ²) test.
Crime Type
Crime type represents the most serious offense from the release term of incarceration. Among FY2016 releases who participated in VCE training, those whose crime type was drugs had a higher recidivism rate (20.7%) than those with property/public order (19.4%) or violent (14.4%) crime types. Compared to the overall recidivism rates for the FY2016 cohort by crime type, VCE participants’ recidivism rates were lower in every category. VCE participants whose crime type was property/public order were most likely to obtain employment after release (72.2%) followed by those with violent (63.7%) and drug crime types (59.8%).

Among VCE participants released in FY2017, those whose crime type was property/public order had a higher recidivism rate (19.2%) than those with drug (14.9%) or violent (9.4%) crime types. Compared to the overall recidivism rates for the FY2017 cohort by crime type, VCE participants’ recidivism rates were lower in every category. VCE participants whose crime type was drugs were most likely to obtain employment after release (73.4%) followed closely by those with property/public order (72.9%) and violent crime types (68.4%).

Incarceration History
VCE participants released in FY2016 and FY2017 with a greater number of prior SR incarceration terms had a higher risk of recidivism. There were similar rates of employment between VCE participants released in FY2016 and FY2017 with fewer than two prior terms of SR incarceration. VCE participants released in FY2016 with two prior SR terms of
Incarceration History (Cont.)

insecurity had the lowest employment rate between the cohorts whereas VCE participants released in FY2017 with two prior terms of SR incarceration had the highest employment rate between the cohorts.

COMPAS Risk and Substance Abuse Needs Assessment

The COMPAS risk and needs assessment tool is used by the VADOC to determine the risk of general and violent recidivism as well as substance abuse needs. VCE participants released in FY2016 and FY2017 with higher risk of general and violent recidivism had higher recidivism and employment rates, in general.

Among VCE participants released in FY2016 and FY2017, those who scored “Highly Probable” on the substance abuse needs scale had the highest rates of recidivism (19.5% and 19.3%, respectively) compared to those who scored “Probable” (18.0% and 10.2%, respectively) or “Unlikely” (11.7% and 8.7%, respectively). Among VCE participants released in FY2016, those who scored “Highly Probable” or “Probable” were more likely to obtain employment after release than those who scored “Unlikely” (68.8%, 66.2%, and 61.2%, respectively) whereas among VCE participants released in FY2017, the employment rates were similar for those who scored “Unlikely,” “Probable,” and “Highly Probable” (71.7%, 72.7%, and 70.1%, respectively).
Conclusions

VCE participants released in FY2016 and FY2017 achieved similar recidivism and employment rates. VCE participants had lower recidivism rates than Virginia’s overall recidivism rate and high rates of job attainment. These preliminary findings offer additional evidence that VCE participation may support successful reentry by promoting employment and reducing the risk of recidivism.