



# Education Committee

## Oral evidence: [Prison Education](#), HC 1007

Tuesday 20 April 2021

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Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Fleur Anderson; Apsana Begum; Jonathan Gullis; Tom Hunt; Kim Johnson; David Johnston; Ian Mearns; David Simmonds; Christian Wakeford.

Questions 1 - 55

### Witnesses

I: Dame Sally Coates DBE; Rod Clark, former Chief Executive Officer, Prisoners' Education Trust, and panel member, Coates Review; and Peter Stanford, Director, Longford Trust, and panel member, Coates Review.

Written evidence from witnesses:

– [Add names of witnesses and hyperlink to submissions]



## Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dame Sally Coates DBE, Rod Clark and Peter Stanford.

Q1 **Chair:** Good morning, everyone. Thank you for coming to our first session on prison education. It is a very important inquiry that we are just beginning. For the benefit of the tape and for those watching on the internet, could I please ask the witnesses to introduce themselves? I will go from my left to right, so Dame Sally.

**Dame Sally Coates:** Good morning, Dame Sally Coates.

**Chair:** Your title and why you are here?

**Dame Sally Coates:** Sorry, thank you, yes. Dame Sally Coates—*[Interruption.]* I am Director of Secondary Education for United Learning.

**Chair:** Thank you. Can we check the internet connection with Dame Sally? Rod, please.

**Rod Clark:** Rod Clark. I am very recently retired Chief Executive of Prisoners' Education Trust, a charity that works in prison education.

**Peter Stanford:** Hello, everyone. I am Peter Stanford. I am the Director of the Longford Trust. We support young serving and ex-prisoners to go to university.

Q2 **Chair:** Thank you very much. The latest annual report by Ofsted reveals two-thirds of inspections show poor management of the quality of education, skills and work in the custodial estate. Just nine of the 32 institutions inspected were judged to be good or outstanding, which is a pretty depressing figure. Dame Sally, can I start with you? You led a serious review of prison education in 2016. For those watching and for our inquiry, can you give a very brief overview of your findings and the recommendations and how much of it has been implemented by the Government?

**Dame Sally Coates:** Yes, I did lead a review in 2016 and, as you probably know, I have been involved all my working life in mainstream education. When I led the review, I had no experience whatsoever of prison education, apart from some pupils who I had taught who had been in youth custody and visiting them. So, I went into it with completely fresh eyes and I went into it with the eyes of somebody working in mainstream education, with the standards, rigour and expectations that you would want to have in mainstream education. I had a very skilled and expert panel working with me, many of whom had been involved in prisons and prison education.

I have to say that it was one of the most inspirational but also depressing periods of my life when I led the review. I was appalled by what I saw in some prisons, in terms of the standards of expectation and education and what went on in classrooms. I was pretty disappointed by the standards



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of teaching and expertise. Another thing that really concerned me was the lack of status of education within prisons.

My findings were that there was a lot to be done and a huge culture shift had to happen because if prisons are for the purpose of punishment and rehabilitation, certainly the latter was not really happening through education, skills and training. I appreciated totally the amount of challenges that Prison Governors have, where life and death, security and so on are obviously top priorities, but I do think that if we are ever going to change the amount of reoffending that happens in our country, education has to be taken a lot more seriously. Prisoners have to be equipped to be able to enter the workforce and be confident members of society when they leave prison. What was happening in prisons was not preparing them for that at all.

Our main findings were that a lot of things had to change. Our recommendations were—and I am going to concentrate on four main areas—first, governors had very little autonomy and, as far as I could see, no accountability in terms of education. We felt that had to change dramatically. Education should be managed by the Prison Governor. He or she should be able to hire or fire staff, hold staff to account for what happened in classrooms, and standards of education.

At the time—and it still is happening—there were external providers and they happened alongside whatever else happened in prisons, but the governor and the staff seemed to have very little interaction with them. In a few cases, the governor did not even know the name of the head of learning and skills in the prison. I do not even know if they would recognise them. Education was very much second class and happened but nobody really bothered about it. Staff were not held to account and it had very low status.

The next thing I want to go on to is that there was no accountability because there was no data. That was the other thing that really hit me in the face was the lack of data. In schools we are used to loads of data; everything is measured. In prison, it seems that education and progress is not measured or was not measured at all. Prisoners were generally not given baseline assessments. They were then not put on personalised learning plans and their progress was not updated.

We recommended very strongly that there should be baseline assessments, particularly in maths and English. Every prisoner should be given a learning plan and, as they went along that plan, it should be updated. Prisoners are also very mobile. They get moved between prisons and we felt that that learning plan should travel with them and the data concerning them should travel with them. What was happening was that a prisoner would start a course, then be moved and then have to restart the course. None of what had happened to them in the prison they had been in was recognised or that course did not exist in the prison they were moved to. It was extremely frustrating.



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Prisons need to be much richer in data. If we are going to make governors autonomous, they also need to be accountable. On that point, they also need to be paid more, I think, so that the levels of responsibility are recognised as well. So, autonomy, accountability and data—

**Chair:** I have to move on, but can you sum up, please?

**Dame Sally Coates:** I would say basically culture has to shift dramatically in prisons. Everybody needs to value education and it needs to be at the heart of what happens in prisons. Giving people laptops would be great, but it is not a panacea if education is not valued.

Q3 **Chair:** Could I ask the other two witnesses, perhaps slightly more briefly, please—I know that you had to talk about your report, Dame Sally—to give a state of play in prison education today, as concisely as you can?

**Peter Stanford:** The Longford Trust works with people wanting to go on to higher education, ie degree-level education. Most of the serving prisoners who do that will do it through Open University courses. The particular circumstances we are in at the moment with Covid have shown up the weakness of that. In order to do any form of distance learning, every other student at the Open University, for instance, would have some digital access. It is all done on paper in prisons. It has proved very difficult in Covid, particularly because a lot of the paperwork would be done in the education department. If you are locked in your cell for 23 hours a day, it makes that very difficult. That side of education has really been struggling. It has shown up the need for digital support.

The other thing we would say is that there are some positive signs in terms of development of partnerships between universities and prisons, particularly with open prisons where prisoners have started going out on day release. That has all stopped during lockdown and, again, the universities have said very reasonably to the rest of their students, “You can do this online”. It has caused terrible problems at prisons. The digital issue is one we raised in the report. It is still an enormously important issue.

The second issue that was raised in the report—again, an enormously important issue—is how you access those Open University courses. At the moment there is a six-year rule. If you still have more than six years of your sentence to serve, you cannot access a student loan. If you think of people turning up with eight years to serve, they go to education, they say, “Stupid me, I should have stuck with education, I really needed to keep going with it. Can I restart it?” Education teams say, “Yes, great, you can do Open University. Actually, can you just go back to your cell for two years and come back after two years and we will be able to help you then?” We fund some of that, but we can only fund a small part of it. The six-year rule needs to be adjusted with governor flexibility.

**Chair:** Thank you. That is very helpful. Rod.



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**Rod Clark:** I very much endorse those points that Peter has made. It has been very striking since lockdown just how disadvantaged prison learners have been compared to every other sector in society, where remote virtual learning has been the absolute bedrock of provision.

The other thing that the lockdown has done is it has held back any real embedding of the changes that were made in the spring of 2019 when, following Dame Sally's report and the education and employment White Paper, for example, there were moves to bring in a new contracting structure. There has been very little sign that that has made very much progress. Picking up on Dame Sally's points about data, we really have not seen any statistics published since the previous contracting regime, OLASS, the Offender Learning and Skills Service contracts.

There has not been as much visible progress as we would like. Covid has played a large part in that, but there is still a big hole in our understanding of what is going on in prisons.

Q4 **Chair:** Thank you. The City & Guilds Group have suggested that unlocking what they call the skills potential of the UK's prison population could put £500 million a year back to the economy in lowering reoffending rates alone. Is that a figure that you recognise? Have you done an analysis on if there was a proper education service in our prisons what difference it would make to reoffending rates? Dame Sally, I will come to you.

**Dame Sally Coates:** I will go to Rod on that.

**Rod Clark:** The estimate for cost of reoffending each and every year is put at something like £15 billion every year as the cost to society. You do not have to make very much difference to that to have an excellent return on investment.

The other thing that the data does show very clearly is that education does make a difference to prisoners' lives and it does reduce reoffending. Certainly, if you just look at the data in terms of the people who are helped by the charity that I have come from—Prisoners' Education Trust—Ministry of Justice statistics show that the rates of reoffending for the people who we help are lower than a matched comparison group. The same is true even of the mainstream education.

There is a huge potential for education making a difference to people's chances of success after they leave prison. Anecdotal evidence, speaking to prisoners, all of that bears that out. Certainly, where we have had economists look at those results, they have shown very clearly the very strong rate of return on investment in education in prison.

**Peter Stanford:** Chair, could I add very quickly to those figures? The Longford Trust has worked with about 400 or 500 people over the years. Of those, 85% have graduated and gone on to get degrees and jobs, degree-level jobs. Only 4% of them have ended up going back to prison.



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If you think of the general reoffending rate, which is around 50%—it gets higher for slightly younger people—you can see it. We all know the value of education anyway, which is why we send our children off to university. The value of education can really transform lives. We all know it. It is about making it work.

**Q5 Chair:** Finally, before I pass to my colleagues, we know that 42% of prisoners have been excluded from school. The Local Government Association suggests that black children are twice as likely and mixed heritage children are 50% more likely to be excluded from school than their white counterparts. How do you break the exclusion to prison pipeline, particularly for those children who are more likely to be excluded?

**Dame Sally Coates:** You are absolutely right, it is kind of a pipeline from exclusion to prison, very depressingly. I think that the way of breaking that is by putting more money in earlier in the system rather than spending money by the time they get to prison. I cannot remember how much prison costs, but it costs a lot of money per year, far more probably than most of our elite independent schools. I would say vastly improve alternative provision, make it far more able to change people and to specifically look at their needs, and perhaps put more money into mainstream education, when children do appear to be on the brink of permanent exclusion, so we can bring in more support, more expertise, to prevent the permanent exclusion.

I don't think you can say we will ever be able to prevent permanent exclusion for some children, but when we are on the point of permanent exclusion or when they are permanently excluded, that is when we need to put money in, at that point rather than wait for them to just carry on on that escalator to prison, which is basically what happens and you cannot do anything to stop it. I see children and I feel like they are standing on the cliff and I cannot stop them falling over because I cannot afford the expertise that I need or there is not the provision that I think they need for them to go to. Alternative provision is very mixed and very inconsistent. It needs to be of a much higher standard and a much higher status for the people who work in it.

**Q6 Chair:** Thank you. Rod or Peter, did you want to say something on this?

**Rod Clark:** No. I would just very much endorse doing whatever you can to prevent people getting into prison, and school exclusion is one of the ways in which people are exposed to greater dangers of being drawn into crime.

**Peter Stanford:** I agree with everything that has been said. All I would add to that is, once people get in prison, when we have failed in that sense once they are in prison, what we have to do is start engaging them with education there. We cannot place more obstacles in the way. We need to enable them to harness the power of education to change their lives at that stage. Often you see this lightbulb moment, particularly with



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young men in their early 20s, when they suddenly realise that they should have put more effort into education and all the things that have got in the way, and they want to go back to it. When that moment happens, when they walk into the education department and say, "I want to do this", we need to be able to make that possible.

**Q7 Chair:** Just before I pass to Kim, I should have said at the beginning that I am a member of the new *Times* commission on education, and I believe that you are, Dame Sally, as well, is that correct?

**Dame Sally Coates:** Yes, and very much looking forward to it, Robert.

**Chair:** Thank you. I just have to register that. I am going to pass to Kim Johnson now, who has been waiting.

**Q8 Kim Johnson:** Good morning, panel. What would you say about the new arrangements that have been given to Prison Governors for the control and flexibility to shape their education provision in line with their local requirements? Can I start with Rod, please?

**Rod Clark:** As Dame Sally has already indicated, the idea of governor autonomy, the governor being able to control what happens in education in their prison, was a key plank of her recommendations. Certainly, the Department thought very hard about how to set about trying to make that happen, but there were changes in the leadership at the Ministry of Justice. Michael Gove—for whom this was very much a central way of taking things forward, and that was the context in which Dame Sally's report was produced—moved on. The way that the changes were implemented I think it is probably true to say fell a long way short of the vision that might have been about independent prisons very much with their own control, very much the academisation model that has applied in the schools sector.

The contracts for prison education were let in lots, so they covered a wide geographical area. It was not necessarily the case that the individual governor even wanted the contractor that had ended up taking on that prison to have that contract. Because of the difficulty of there being insufficient contracting resource across the Department, the contracts had to be quite large and centrally controlled and so they are quite contained.

There were efforts made to give extra flexibility through a Dynamic Purchasing System to give some margin so that the governor could have a little bit more autonomy. They were certainly involved in preparing the requirements specification around what was needed in each prison, but it is all still operating with really quite a strong central framework of control for how the contracts work. Certainly, if you speak to the providers themselves, as well as the staff within the Prison Service, there is a feeling of frustration that it is pretty constrained at the moment and pretty difficult to be as flexible as you might like.



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Of course, what happened was that, prior to the recontracting, there were four main providers under the old Offender Learning and Skills Service contracts. Those exact same four providers won all the lots under the new Prison Education Framework contracts, and although some of the prisons have moved around a bit, the landscape looks remarkably similar. The continuity with what is happening now is much stronger than any sense that there has been progress and change.

**Q9 Kim Johnson:** Dame Sally, there were 31 recommendations in your report, and Rod has just alluded to the fact that this was just one of them. How many of those 31 recommendations have been implemented, do you know?

**Dame Sally Coates:** I could not tell you exactly how many. I would say the spirit of many of my recommendations has been addressed. As Rod said, there is a small amount of money. There is flexibility for governors. We did go out to recontract, although it was the same four providers. There is a new data system but we have not seen any results as far as I can see. On the culture change, we now have unlocked prison staff who are graduates coming in with a mindset of valuing education. That was one of my recommendations: that we should start a graduate scheme similar to Teach First in prisons. I would not like to say numerically how many of them, but I would say probably very few have been carried out in full but some in part.

**Q10 Kim Johnson:** Also, £125 million for providers and we have already alluded to the fact that the quality of education is dire. Do you think this provides a quality service and value for money?

**Dame Sally Coates:** Sorry, could you repeat the question, £125 million provided to?

**Kim Johnson:** £125 million provided or allocated to the four providers to deliver prison education. We have already heard that the quality is dire, so I wanted to know whether you believe that that provided value for money.

**Dame Sally Coates:** No is the straight answer to that. I don't. I think that it needs to be dramatically rethought. That is not anything against the providers, most of whom are trying to do a really good job. It is just the way the governance and the system works.

**Q11 Kim Johnson:** Thank you, Dame Sally. Peter, do you have anything further to add in terms of the autonomy of Prison Governors and education?

**Peter Stanford:** One of the things that I had hoped would happen is that governors, by having autonomy and access to extra funds, might be able to encourage level 3 learning, basically A-level and upwards, because very little of that happens. The reason it was not happening before was because it was not part of the contract, so the providers did not get paid for doing it. They still do not get paid for doing it. Some of them do it,



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and I am just slightly nervous when you said the standards are dire. In some prisons the standards are quite good. There are some individual education officers and individual education teams who go the extra mile.

If you are running a system whereby people are incentivised to deliver things, the things they are incentivised to deliver are the level 1 and level 2, which is great. What we discovered when we were doing our report, and it is still the situation, is you will go into a prison education department and you will meet people and they will say, "I have done level 2 maths three times but I have just moved to a new prison and it is the only thing they can offer me, so I am doing it again". That is a very bad use of £125 million.

**Q12 Chair:** You said some of it was good, but I mentioned at the beginning Ofsted and two-thirds of inspections showing poor management. Only nine out of 32 institutions inspected were judged to be good or outstanding. That is pretty poor.

**Peter Stanford:** It is absolutely pretty poor, but I think what should happen is that if Ofsted delivers a bad verdict—Dame Sally knows this much better than I do in schools—something happens. What seems to happen in prisons is they can stack up bad Ofsted report after bad Ofsted report after bad Ofsted report and nothing changes. It gets back to that culture question: is education so important that if it is failing in your prison it reflects on the whole management and reflects on the governor? At the moment, I do not think it does.

**Q13 Kim Johnson:** Could the panel could say whether prison education was any better or worse in either private or state-run prisons? Does anybody want to come in on that one?

**Rod Clark:** What you sometimes see is that private prisons have more flexibility in how they deploy their resources. Some of them deliver through the Prison Education Framework contracts—the same contractual structures as in the public sector prisons—but some of them do not. There, sometimes you can see more creativity and more imagination. There are good private prisons and there are less good ones, just as there are good public sector prisons and less good public sector prisons. Indeed, as HMIP inspections have shown, some of the private prisons have been at pretty unacceptable standards at times.

The key question to ask is: what is it that enables that flexibility and that ability to take advantage of opportunities, to make use of the services of charities like Prisoners' Education Trust or the Longford Trust, for example? What is it that gives them that flexibility and that ability to make the change and can you make that more widely available? The governance of how you manage education in prisons is something that has not been solved by the new contracts. It still seems too much like you are running arm's length contracts in these public sector prisons instead of it being a partnership between the educationalists and the prison management.



Q14 **Kim Johnson:** Thanks, Rod. Do any other panellists want to contribute on that point? No. Can I move on?

**Peter Stanford:** Only to say broadly that I agree.

Q15 **Kim Johnson:** Thank you, Peter. I want to move on to my next question. The Chair has already mentioned that there is an overrepresentation of black people in the criminal justice system. I want to know how well you think they access prison education. How are individual prisoner progress and outcomes measured in terms of educational attainment and preparing for employment? Can I start with Peter, please?

**Peter Stanford:** In terms of measuring and preparing for employment, like a lot of things around education, that tends to vary from prison to prison. Again, you see very good examples of it and you see very bad examples. Because we move people around prisons so much, we could do with having a general standard.

In terms of accessing education, one of the things that we debated when we were working with Dame Sally on her report was whether education should be called education. I think that a lot of people who have gone through school and had a bad experience of school somehow are not really very interested in accessing something that is called “education” on the door. They think that is not something for them. There is a lot of work to be done on encouraging people to go there. Whether that splits particularly into different racial groups I don’t know the figures, but certainly the figures in terms of exclusion would suggest there may be a link there.

What we need to do more of is incentivise people to go to education. At one stage it was called learning and skills. It can be by something quite simple. Prisoners are paid very small amounts of money for working in the gardens, working in the laundry or going to education. It used to be that education was paid less, but there is some progress there. Now it is paid the same. It would seem to me that, given that we know as a society—and it is why we run schools and universities—that education helps people, perhaps we could incentivise education more to get more people to go there.

Q16 **Kim Johnson:** Rod, do you have anything to contribute?

**Rod Clark:** On the numbers point, I would reiterate the point that, since the introduction of new contracts, there is a data-free zone in terms of publicly available figures about what is happening, including on issues like diversity and protected characteristics.

What I can say is that the Prisoners’ Education Trust has looked very closely at our own data about the prisoners that we help. Broadly speaking, we are helping equivalent breakdowns in racial diversity compared to the prison population, but disproportionality in the criminal justice system and in the prison system is such a big issue it is something that ought to be given very close scrutiny. It is something that one would



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want to see there being much more transparency and publicly available data about.

**Q17 Kim Johnson:** Dame Sally, you mentioned before about the correlation between school exclusions and the pipeline into education. Do you have anything further to add to what Peter and Rod have already said?

**Dame Sally Coates:** Unfortunately, Kim, there is just no data. It would be very good to look at different groups who are accessing education and what their achievement is. We do not even really know the baseline of prisoners. What is our prison population? You get figures like 90% have literacy levels of an 11 year-old. Well, I don't know whether they do. That is a very old piece of data. Who knows what the level of attainment is?

Obviously, David Lammy did a really good review into the percentage of young black men, in particular, in prison and the way the criminal justice system happened. I do think that what happens is that for some reason some children get involved in criminal activity when they are young, when they are at school. They get very disaffected. They get bored. They do not attend and eventually they may be permanently excluded. Then they go to prisons and they sit in their cells or they go to classrooms that are very uninspirational, with teachers who do not particularly sometimes have any resources other than worksheets and they do not want to be involved in that either. In their eyes, it goes from a poor experience of education to, if they can access education in prison, another poor experience.

What my report really tried to get at was that education needs to be at the heart of prisons. It needs to be on the wings. It needs to be in the workshops. It needs to be equipping people to lead fulfilling lives. It does not need to be sitting in stuffy classrooms with bits of worksheet and paper and nothing. That is never going to get people who have already dropped out of the system back into it. It needs to be approached in a different way and prison officers are at the heart of that.

**Kim Johnson:** Sadly, a lot of David Lammy's recommendations have not been implemented, like so many reports, but we will talk about that another time. Thank you, Chair, they are all my questions.

**Chair:** I am not sure if Caroline is on, but I will bring her in later. Can I bring in Fleur Anderson then, please?

**Q18 Fleur Anderson:** Good morning, panel. I have a couple more questions to talk more about the Prison Education Framework and these contracting mechanisms and the nub of what improvements we could make to those contracting mechanisms to make sure that the system does deliver on the things that were in your review, Dame Sally, and that you are talking about, Rod and Peter. First, how suitable are the new contracting mechanisms for securing specialist providers and for using, for example, local further education colleges or different partners to meet the wide range of individual learning needs for prisoners and, therefore, offer a more interesting range of courses? That is the first question.



**Dame Sally Coates:** Can I go to Rod for that, please?

**Rod Clark:** The main contracting mechanism that operates in prison is called the Prison Education Framework contract, and that is the contract that has those big four providers. It is under those contracts that the core subjects are delivered: English, maths, ICT, ESOL. They are the main providers within the prison. Depending upon what is being contracted for in that individual prison, that can then extend to a number of other areas, including vocational training of various sorts.

Within the structure, though, what the prison also has is the ability to contract using what is called the Dynamic Purchasing System. This is an electronic purchasing system that is open to a very wide number of providers, including niche providers, smaller providers and charities—Prisoners' Education Trust, for example, was on the framework—to be able to provide a range of different niche learning offers within the overall structure.

There is only a margin available for this. Different Prison Governors decided how much they wanted to have put into that more flexible pot and that varies quite a lot from prison to prison and, of course, it varies hugely what Prison Governors have chosen to do with that money. One of the things they have had to use the Dynamic Purchasing System to buy has been all the information, advice and guidance that is necessary to support learners within the prison system.

The old contracts under the National Careers Service were brought to an end in a slightly chaotic fashion and the Prison Service found that the only route that it has to be able to buy in information, advice and guidance services was via the Dynamic Purchasing System. A lot of that money has actually gone on that, and I think that it is universally recognised that a system that is only very time limited is really not suitable for that service. Nevertheless, that is what they are using. In fact, a lot of those contracts have gone to the big four OLASS providers anyway, who can also get business under the Dynamic Purchasing System.

They have also used it to be more creative. Sadly, there isn't nearly as much learning going on around the arts, sport, those sorts of things. There was a desire that once you had that flexibility there could be a huge unleashing of creativity. They have done things like, for example, the Wayout TV system, which makes use of what is available in prisons, which is a TV, to provide some education contracts. That has been picked up by a number of different prisons.

**Chair:** Could you just try to wrap up, Rod, in a very polite way, because we have a lot to get through? Carry on, yes, in a nutshell.

**Rod Clark:** I think that there has been some flexibility but not nearly as much flexibility as one would have liked to see.



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Q19 **Fleur Anderson:** In terms of the contracting, could more be built into the contracts to enable more data to be held—because we have seen that is an issue—and to build in better quality provision as well? Is that a fault of the contracting? Where in the system is it not happening?

**Rod Clark:** HMPPS has put in place a data system called the CURIOUS system to gather management information from the education contracts. What we have not seen is any publication of what has come out of that. We suspect that quite a lot of data has been gathered. Certainly, the ambition was that that would include a lot of data about what is going on under the Dynamic Purchasing System, for example, and the work that charities like mine and Peter's deliver, but we just do not know because that has not been made widely available. Of course, Covid has knocked all that into a bit of a cocked hat.

**Chair:** Fleur, we will not direct every question to every witness.

Q20 **Fleur Anderson:** No. On those four big providers, did you envisage that the same four providers would secure the main contract beyond 2017? Is there an issue about those four main contractors having had it before, the system is not going well, but they still have it? Is there an issue there or any recommendations you would make about the way that the contracting is made and the four providers keep it? That is one part.

The other one is about prisoners moving a lot. Does that undermine the contracting? Would you make any recommendations about the frequent moving of prisoners and the impact that that has on their education?

**Dame Sally Coates:** I certainly did not envisage the same providers. I thought that some of them might get it but I envisaged a lot of local FE colleges, perhaps some of the bigger multi-academy trusts, providing education. I envisaged a much more open, more varied system. The actual retendering of the contractors took much longer than I ever thought it would. I thought, "Has it still not happened?" It did not happen for a long time and I understand sometimes things do work very slowly and they are obviously big contractors, but I envisaged a lot of contractors rather than the four same ones. Do you want to add anything to that, Peter?

**Peter Stanford:** On the moving around, which was the second part of Fleur's question, we have touched on the absence of data already. Obviously, if you move from school to school your records go with you. Far too often, and because of the lack of data, prisoners will end up in a new prison and their educational records will not go with them or will get there much later. We recently had a case of a young man who is doing Open University. He took his Open University assignments in to the education team at his new prison to be sent off. They did not even know he was doing it so they put them in a drawer for six weeks. They had no idea what was going on. There is that problem with transferring.

Some governors also have rules that mean that when you start in a new prison, when you are moved into a new prison, you have to spend a



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period of time—up to three months—not really engaging with anything while you settle in, which again interrupts the flow of things.

That brings me back to that thing that I raised earlier on about the six-year rule. An Open University degree is done in six modules, which in theory would take six years. If you have to wait three months every time you move from prison to prison, it is going to take longer. It is this inflexibility. I suppose the three-month wait is about security. It is the paramount importance of security in prisons and obviously security is very important, but it always trumps education. Therefore, educational progress is restricted.

**Dame Sally Coates:** Can I just make another point on that, Fleur? One of the recommendations is that we should have a modular GCSE in maths and English. At the moment, as you know, GCSEs are linear; you take an exam at the end. We do not have modular GCSEs, rightly for children at school, because it meant people were retaking and retaking and it made the system less rigorous. I do think for adult GCSEs for English and maths, particularly for prisoners and for adult learners, they should be able to take a module, bank it and then if you move prison you have the algebra bit of the maths banked and you can go on to the next.

We very strongly looked at a modular adult GCSE that the exam board and the awarding bodies could provide. GCSE has currency, as does A-level, but if it is linear it is very difficult to do because you are forever restarting or that course is not delivered, whereas in the modular approach you could do it independently. You could bank bits of it that you had passed, which would create a sense of success and confidence and all those kinds of things.

Q21 **Fleur Anderson:** I am now going to ask you for a recommendation. You have all given some recommendations already about what needs to change now. Looking at the recommendations that you had in your report, Dame Sally, and what has been put in place, what recommendations would you make now, given that Ofsted continues to find insufficient progress is being made? If you could wave a magic wand and you could make a couple of changes, where in the system is it that you would make those changes now?

**Dame Sally Coates:** First, prisons are the biggest mixed ability, mixed age class that you would ever have as a teacher. It is almost impossible. The biggest thing I would do is provide in-cell technology so people can learn independently. It would have to be in-cell technology alongside a culture where education is valued. You can have a laptop as a child, but if your parent does not give you space to do it or does not value you or does not say, "Go on to that programme" or, "Why don't you watch this? This is really good" you are not going to do it, so in-cell technology alongside education being valued in prisons.

If you are in prison, the education wing might be quite a long trek. Getting there takes two prison officers and you have to go through gang-



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related corridors where it is quite difficult to get prisoners to education blocks. Bring education to the prisoners. Bring it to the cells. Bring it to the wings.

Q22 **Chair:** Just briefly, Rod and Peter.

**Peter Stanford:** I would absolutely endorse the thing about in-cell technology and digital. I would also add that this whole six-year rule stops people starting an Open University course. As we have said, data is very poor. We know that about 2% or 3% of people coming into prison either have the qualifications or have started higher education degrees. There is no evidence anywhere that has ever been produced that people in prison are any less bright than people who are outside.

Given that around 25% of the population at the moment goes to university—and obviously there is a historic lag there; it is probably higher among young people—there is no reason at all why 25% or 40% or whatever of prisoners could not think about doing it. We have to have some aspiration, some financial incentive for the education teams to deliver. At least get it up to 10% because that is what really changes lives.

**Rod Clark:** I would endorse everything that Dame Sally and Peter have said, particularly around digital in-cell technology. There is also this issue that I return to about the fact that there has been a new round of contracting and what you have ended up with looks very similar to what was there before, with a great deal of rigidity. We do need to think very hard about how we get the right relationship between the prison management and the educationalists, working together in a flexible way to deliver what is needed for their learners.

I do not have a pat answer as to how to do that, but I do think that they ought to be sitting around a table and talking about that, not least as they come up to the point at which there is a contract break on the Prison Education Framework contracts and talk at least of making some substance to the prison education service, which was in the Government's last manifesto.

Q23 **Chair:** Why do you need these four national providers? Why not just let governors choose their own education systems in every prison? For example, you could choose some brilliant FE colleges, governors might want to work with the Open University, Milton Keynes and so on, but leave it to the governors to choose and then they will be judged by Ofsted and the Prisons Inspectorate and so on. Is that the right way forward?

**Dame Sally Coates:** That is the right way forward. That is the autonomy but then you do have to hold people to account. If it matters people will do it, and look how accountability and autonomy has transformed the school system. Exactly, I am sure it is up to—

Q24 **Chair:** You have this procurement process, four big providers, which for



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one reason or another does not seem to be working particularly well. I don't understand why we have developed such a system.

**Rod Clark:** I can say why we ended up doing something very similar again and I think it was to do with the capacity within the Prison Service to manage procurements. The feeling was that you did not have enough resource to be able to run 120 separate competitions properly and, therefore, you had to put them together with a central framework and a central structure.

The result is that you have ended up with very much what you had before, which is why I think the issue about how you crack the governance, the accountability, the management and the relationships in an individual prison so that you get creativity and flexibility is the big problem. I don't think they wanted to reproduce what they had before but, miraculously, that is what they seem to have come up with.

Q25 **Chair:** A prison must have a director of education who is charged with finding the relevant local bodies—and national if it needed to be national—to provide the education service to that prison. Is that right, Peter?

**Peter Stanford:** One of the recommendations of the report was that whoever was head of education in a prison should be part of the senior management team of the prison, which they often are not. One of the problems is that they do not have sufficient people who are able to do that work. I think another of the things that we recommended in the report—it was certainly discussed—was that two or three prisons, where they are quite close to each other, could band together and work, but much smaller groups. We were thinking of groups of two or three prisons as opposed to a quarter of the Prison Service going in different places. It is monolithic rather than flexible.

Q26 **Jonathan Gullis:** I would first like to declare an interest regarding Dame Sally. We have never met but you have met my partner Nkita Weldon, who you hired at Burlington Danes Academy, I think in 2013. That is just for the record. I know she is watching so she will hate the fact I have just named her on air as well.

**Dame Sally Coates:** Lovely. Yes, I remember her well.

**Jonathan Gullis:** Fantastic. I think this has been a fascinating discussion. Despite Twitter saying I am a dinosaur and even though I may shudder at the idea of in-cell technology—which will not surprise the Chair—I do agree that education will be a massive factor in how we deal with the prison population in getting people out of reoffending.

As a former teacher myself—sorry to drop that in again, to all the members of the Committee—I understand the importance that education plays. With that in mind, how well are prisoners with low educational attainment incentivised and supported in addressing their skills deficit while in custody? I know that the Coates Review envisaged the teaching



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of basic skills being embedded as part of workshops and industry rather than only in the classroom. Does this happen more widely now?

**Dame Sally Coates:** I will start. Rod and Peter will have more up to date knowledge. It did not happen very much at all, so you are absolutely right. When people have special educational needs or have had a barrier to education, you have to approach things a bit differently. We felt that sport, art, music and creative things played a real part and we use it in schools, don't we? We use football and sport sometimes to get people to take part in literacy classes.

Where there were barriers or where people had switched off education, we felt that you found other means or you made it meaningful, so it is part of a workshop. You are learning to be a painter-decorator and you are also doing measurements and your maths alongside, like measuring the wall and all that sort of thing. You make it meaningful and purposeful.

I think that a lot of people in prison have undiagnosed special educational needs. They may suffer from autism or all sorts of specific learning difficulties that perhaps were not even recognised when they were at school. I remember sitting in one prison where there were about 40 men all the way round the outside of the room. One by one they introduced themselves to me and practically all of them said they had a special need. I don't know whether or not they did. Some of them had been to special schools. Certainly, at the time I don't think those needs were catered for. Really good teachers tried their best but when you have special educational needs you need one-to-one tuition, small group work and all that kind of support.

It is possible because there are prisoners who could provide that on the wing. There are people with good literacy skills. We could use peers much more than we do in prisons. I felt really upset in a way about the fact that those were not met. I don't know, Rod, if you think those needs are being met now.

**Rod Clark:** There is a still huge amount to do to deliver special education support and that is certainly the case. The whole issue of embedding basic skills in other things is the way to go very often with people who are very disaffected about anything like a classroom environment. There are some good examples of where that has been done but it is not nearly universal enough. There are issues of whether the people running such workshops have any teaching qualifications or any training to back up the education and skills that they ought to be delivering. What you want to see is that education being captured and recorded against a learning plan. What we have not seen is whether the data is capturing the full educational experience and all the learning that is going on.

Q27 **Jonathan Gullis:** That is fascinating about the teaching element. I was in a Westminster Hall debate based on the Committee's adult skills report and one of the big challenges that we know in further education, for example, is getting businesses into colleges and using industry experts.



Denise Brown from Stoke on Trent College gave me an idea and I wondered what you thought about it: if you brought someone from industry and they gave up a fifth of their time to work in a prison as a prison educator, the prison may pick up a fifth of that salary, but then you are bringing in experts from industry, say, construction and engineering, rather than like you say. I fear that what happens a lot with alternative provision—and it feels like it is happening in prison education as well—is that a lot of not properly regulated or low quality teachers are coming in. What do you think of that as an idea for training and employment?

**Rod Clark:** There is an excellent model where you have employers that are looking to recruit a workforce, see a prison as a place where they can do that and support the delivery of training with their own personnel so that people are getting real top quality skills. There are some well-known examples of employers who do that, such as Timpsons and Halfords. That is a gold standard for how you make vocational education work. The truth is, of course, that we are talking about a few hundred prisoners getting the advantage of those sorts of opportunities at the moment and there are something like 80,000 prisoners released every year from our prisons.

Q28 **Jonathan Gullis:** As a Committee, I know that we are all passionate about apprenticeships and traineeships; no more so than the Chair of this Select Committee. What did you envisage should be possible with apprenticeships and traineeships? How do courses and training cater for those serving shorter sentences, particularly for women, which is something that Ian Mearns referred to in our pre-meeting. We have not talked about women and men. Is there a big difference in the two gender groups? How does provision cater for women prisoner learners for vocational courses and choices on offer? How effectively is release on temporary licence used to support education and training? Does the practice vary across the country?

**Chair:** Can I add, as Jonathan just mentioned it, that the Open University says that the ideal model for apprenticeships would be to offer elements of the apprenticeship in custody moving to employment on release on temporary licence and completion with the employer on release. Once you have answered Jonathan's specifics, I want to understand whether that is feasible and could happen.

**Rod Clark:** This was mentioned in the education and employment strategy that was produced in 2018 by the Ministry of Justice. There was a commitment made to try to get apprenticeships going in this way but it didn't come to anything. It is not at all clear why there was no more progress made, but I very much agree that the ideal model is that you have an employer waiting to take somebody who has already started on an apprenticeship journey into a full-blown job. The issue has always been that, because technically they are not employed, the existing framework for apprenticeships does not work but surely it is not beyond



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the wit of the officials in the Education Department and the Ministry of Justice to sort that out.

**Peter Stanford:** One of the difficulties with apprenticeships and working with employers in prisons is that, because our prisons are so full, people get moved on and that can interrupt those things. A great success story that is often quoted is The Clink, the restaurants that are run with prisoners and members of the public can go into them. The people who run The Clink insisted that anyone they are training in catering skills will not be moved halfway through because the prison is a bit full and it needs to move people on.

It is those breaks in education and—sorry to say the same thing over and over again—it is to do with the security idea that we have to move people and education doesn't matter; if it gets broken it doesn't matter, they can just move somewhere else. If you are going to get more employers in you will have to give them those sorts of guarantees.

Jonathan mentioned women's prisons. There was a great push to improve women's prisons during the last decade. It is very important to remember that only 5% of the prison population are women as opposed to 95% who are men. Just after he left office, Michael Gove said that he had always seen the improvements in education and training in women's prisons as the model to bring into men's prisons.

From our work with people who are going out on day release and engaging with some very practical courses as well as some more academic ones, women's prisons are extraordinarily better in doing it. They are dealing with smaller numbers and a smaller churn, but we can learn from the experience of the women's prisons. That was specifically what was meant to be happening and it doesn't seem to be happening.

Q29 **Jonathan Gullis:** We have seen the Government do the incentivisation for apprenticeships now, due to Covid, where you can get up to £3,000 as an employer if you take on an apprentice. Is that a scheme that we need to look at for employment of prisoners who are being released? Do you think that will help bring in business?

**Rod Clark:** It is certainly worth looking at, but it will not make the difference unless you can solve the structural issues of how these schemes are organised first.

Q30 **Chair:** Does that include the suggestion of the AELP, the trainer providers, that employers could use unspent levy to fund apprenticeships in prisons? Is it the same answer that you have just given, Rod: it is a good idea but the system has to work?

**Rod Clark:** Bringing in more money—and the Apprenticeship Levy would be a fantastic source of that money—would make a big difference. If you look at the education needs in prisons, £125 million does not go very far.

**Jonathan Gullis:** Thank you. I am going to hand over to Ian about



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careers advice because that is his baby, but I want to say one thing and to get your views. Careers advice is an issue we have seen across education, whether in prisons or in schools. I think that chambers of commerce or local enterprise partnerships have a huge role there. They are business people who have those links and they should be doing so much more. I would like to think that they would be real drivers in improving careers advice and job brokering in prisons. I will hand over to Ian because I know this is something he is very passionate about and I don't want to steal his time.

**Q31 Ian Mearns:** Thanks, Jonathan, for the build-up and the intro. It is very good of you.

Before I come on to careers, from every question I have heard and every answer that has been given, it almost seems that prison education hardly scratches the surface for the vast majority of people who are in the prison population. Education for prisoners in the population is either not thought about in many respects or it is an afterthought. It seems to me that there is an awful lot of potential wasted in the system if there is no recording and tracking of progress for those individuals. That seems to be self-evident from everything that has been said this morning.

How can we, as a society and as politicians, have an expectation that individuals will be prepared so that they will not reoffend when it seems little or nothing is being done to prepare them for what awaits them on release? Why do we have this unrealistic expectation? We could save a huge amount of resources by investing in the individual while they are incarcerated to prepare them for release.

**Dame Sally Coates:** Exactly. You have people in prison for 24/7 and I think what I could do with children if I had them—like in boarding school you have them all the time: how much can you do with them? We don't do anything with them or we don't do anywhere enough to prepare them for release. When you go into prisons—and I know many of the Committee in the future will go into prisons—and you talk to prisoners, there is an awful lot of hope. They really want to change. They mostly do not want to come out and reoffend and go back into the same cycle, but because they come in illiterate or without skills or training and go out without skills, training and still illiterate and they have nowhere to live and their families have disowned them, they drift back into crime again. It is the easy route of earning money and surviving.

We need to do something very different when they are in prison. Rehabilitation has to be one of the biggest priorities as much as security and safeguarding and all those other things. I totally accept we have to be protecting people's lives and things like that and keeping them locked up to do it—

**Chair:** Ian, I will bring you back before I bring in other witnesses.

**Ian Mearns:** I have just noticed that Rod and Peter are nodding, so is it okay if I move on to my question about careers?



**Chair:** Yes, please, Ian.

Q32 **Ian Mearns:** I think this is an important question because I am a critic of what has happened with careers advice, guidance and information in schools. Is anything happening with careers advice and job brokering in prisons that is tangibly effective or is it just affecting a very few individuals if and when it happens?

**Rod Clark:** The history of this is that information, advice and guidance and careers advice used to fall under the National Careers Service contracts. They were terminated but were not included, quite rightly, I think, under the Prison Education Framework contract because you want the advice to be separate. You do not want to be advising people to do just the courses that you have lined up already.

**Ian Mearns:** That is vested interest when it comes to careers advice, isn't it?

**Rod Clark:** What happened in prisons is that they had to use the one contracting device that was left to them, which was the Dynamic Purchasing System. To begin with, that was only one-year limited contracts, which really was not a suitable contracting vehicle, but they have gone on to get in careers advisers. Very often they end up being the same person who is delivering the PEF contract rather than a different provider. There is no consistency about the way those contracts are measured or put in place. I think that privately Ministry of Justice officials would say that they want to rethink how information, advice and guidance is more properly organised in future.

Q33 **Ian Mearns:** Is there any interaction with DWP staff, for instance, prior to release to prepare prisoners for release?

**Rod Clark:** Yes, there is certainly work on resettlement and DWP often has staff working in the prisons and supporting it in the prisons. One of the key things you need to do to get a benefit claim up and running, for example, is be online with an e-mail address and all these things. That brings us back to the digital exclusion of the prison population. That can be done safely without raising security issues.

To go back to your first point, Ian, I think the stark contrast between what has happened in the school or university sector, and how they have coped with Covid, and the real exclusion that has dominated education in the prison sector shows something about society or political priorities in managing this.

**Peter Stanford:** Can I add a couple of statistics that might help with that? Only 10% of men leaving prison have a job within six weeks of leaving and I am afraid, having said nice things about women's prisons before, it gets worse and it is 4%. Within six weeks of leaving, 4% of women have a job. You can judge the careers advice they are getting by that.



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**Ian Mearns:** Thank you very much indeed.

Q34 **Chair:** Can one of you say in a nutshell what should happen instead for careers advice? Rod, very briefly, in magic wand time, what should happen with prisons careers advice?

**Rod Clark:** I think you need a different contractual framework that is thought through and made available to each of the prisons to bring in staff or providers.

Q35 **Chair:** Would they decide or would you have the national bodies, the Careers and Enterprise Company, the NCS or whatever?

**Rod Clark:** Local autonomy would be a good thing within an overall framework with consistent measuring.

Q36 **Tom Hunt:** Back to special educational needs, it is tragic when you look at the percentage of those in prison who have special educational needs that have been diagnosed. It makes very clear how high the stakes are for SEN provision. You mentioned that it is important to provide that funding at the start of their lives to make sure they get the support at school so that it does not get to the stage where they end up in prison.

I have one question, which is a bit convoluted: to what extent do you think it is important that, when politicians are making the case for why it is so right that we increase the funding for special educational needs, we make the link to the SEN population in prison? It seems to me that you have individuals who are often unconventional in the way that they process information. They often have great potential, so, if you get it right, these individuals can be great contributors to society. Get it wrong and so often they end up in prison. To what extent do you think that we, as politicians, need to do more work on making that link about this is the morally right thing to do but also making the link with the prison population?

Secondly, it is about diagnosis. There is a lot of data and stats about a certain percent of prisoners have special educational needs, autism and so on. Do we know to what extent? There could still be lots and lots and lots in addition to that who have not been properly diagnosed. We are talking about autism and disabilities like that but we are also talking about things like dyspraxia and dyslexia, all sorts of things. If you look at the awareness of dyspraxia, so many people don't even know what it is and people living in their 40s and 50s don't know they have it.

Those are my questions. The first one is the importance of politicians making the link between increased SEN provision being linked to the prison population and how morally it is the right thing to do to increase SEN spending, but also it ends up making sense for the taxpayer in the long term. The second one is the point about diagnosis: how much high quality work is taking place? Should it be that every single prisoner needs to be assessed when they come in to see whether or not they have a condition?



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**Dame Sally Coates:** Absolutely, every single prisoner should be assessed. There are two things generally about education. Some children have very challenging behaviour and sometimes that is caused by poor parenting or other factors. If we put more money into early years we would prevent a lot of people perhaps becoming excluded and becoming prisoners in the future. Secondly, boys—and this is another big generalisation—often don't want to fail, particularly in front of their peers. A boy with special educational needs in a mainstream class might act out, behave really badly to get sent out and perhaps be excluded, because it is easier than failing and not being successful and feeling you are just not up to it with your mates. That kind of behaviour often manifests itself and then it continues: they get sent out. They have disruptive behaviour. They get excluded and they end up in prison, and they have special educational needs that have manifested themselves in very bad behaviour because of wanting not to fail.

We know that sometimes with autism you get very challenging behaviour and that mainstream schools may not have the specialism or expertise to help support, so perhaps those children need to be in a more specialised provision. It does not happen because there is not the money and the funding for that. The earlier the funding the fewer the problems you would have later on.

**Rod Clark:** To build on that, one of the positive things in the recent Government White Paper was the call for evidence on neurodiversity in the criminal justice system. I think the ministerial team at the Ministry of Justice is really committed to thinking about neurodiversity. It is bringing in a consistent tool for measuring neurodiversity needs across the prison population and I think that baseline assessment is really important.

The only other tiny caveat I would make is that I think identifying the needs is more important than diagnosis. Sometimes diagnosis can be quite a technical medical issue. If you wait for the diagnosis you can be held up from identifying what people need to help them progress.

**Peter Stanford:** One of the problems in providing the support that is needed on the basis of several of the prisons—Dame Sally talked about the prison where virtually everyone in the room told her they had special educational needs. The education teams there said, "If we answer these in the way that we want to answer them that will take up your whole £125 million budget". All the evidence points to there being many more people with these sorts of challenges in prison than in the general population. Therefore, there is a funding issue.

You also used the word "moral". I think we have to be slightly careful with "moral" because there is an argument that politicians—and I hesitate to say this since you are all politicians—are responsible to the public. There is a feeling sometimes that people in prison should not get a cushy ride. That somehow if we are doing all these things it is wrong. The argument is very clear, in the figures that have been done endlessly, that



reoffending costs us much more. It is not a moral argument. It is a practical argument that, if we supply these things, we are much less likely to be victims of crime. We are much less likely to be spending £44,000 a year sending people to prison. It is actually a practical benefit to address these things.

**Q37 Tom Hunt:** I tend to agree with that. There is a national SEN review going on at the moment and it is probably likely that we will significantly increase the amount of money and investment going into SEN provision. When there are competing priorities for where money goes, I think it might help politicians to make that argument more.

Dame Sally, sorry if I have missed a trick here. Is it the case that when you come into prison there is an assessment made of your needs? Is that the case for every prisoner? If it is the case, are they high quality, are you satisfied with the thoroughness of those assessments and what sort of improvements do you think could be made?

**Dame Sally Coates:** I think it is the case that you are supposed to do an English and maths assessment. I don't think it is the case that you have to have an assessment for special educational needs, although presumably the response to that test may show some special educational needs. We did recommend that and I believe that is happening on the whole but I don't think it is happening in every prison in every case. Even if that assessment is done, I don't think the progress or the learning journey is mapped across the board by all prisons. An assessment is done but we have no idea about what the data shows, because we have not seen it, and I am not sure that it is happening everywhere.

**Tom Hunt:** Thank you for that. Thanks. That is me done.

**Q38 David Johnston:** Can we go back to the discussion about level 3 and above qualifications? I will start with Peter here, but others might want to come in. You have talked about the six-year rule, which seems far too long. You have talked about people constantly being offered level 2 as they move through the system. What are the other barriers to studying qualifications level 3 and above, and what changes would you like to see to the access and to the funding, apart from changing those two things that you have already talked about?

**Peter Stanford:** The biggest barrier for serving prisoners in terms of accessing above level 3—I am afraid we keep saying the same thing—is digital. If you do an Open University degree, each module costs you just over £3,000. If you or I did a module, we would pay just over £3,000, and we could access everything on our laptop in front of us. Young men and women who are doing them in prison sometimes cannot. Because of the six-year rule they cannot get the funding from the student loans people. Often their families give it to them. As a charity, we try to support them in those circumstances.

They are doing it with one hand, or indeed you might say both hands, tied behind their back, because they cannot do it digitally. They have to



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go to the education department, which they cannot at the moment because lots of them are closed. They go to the library, but they cannot at the moment because they are closed. They are not allowed to put their fingers on the keys of a laptop that is connected to the internet. They have to find an education officer to do it. But still, they pay £3,000. At the very least, they might pay half, because they are only getting half the service.

There is that digital thing. I know there are risk worries within the Prison Service about how this access might be misused. I am not suggesting that is a foolish thing. We have to think very, very carefully about that, but, as anyone who runs a school or a library knows, there are lots of ways of monitoring that. We could have a digital revolution in education in prisons where people could access it in their cells.

This is an anecdote more than a statistic, but we do these awards twice a year to groups who want to start Open University modules and cannot get the funding; they apply to us. We have had the biggest bag of applicants we have ever had this September, which surprised me. I thought, "If you had been locked down for 23-and-a-half hours a day", as people had up to that stage, you might think, "Why bother, because I cannot go to the education department and I cannot go to the library?" But people want it even more.

There is this appetite out there, and it is about harnessing that. Digital technology is the way forward. There are lots of other good things happening. The university and prison partnerships are opening. There are lots of good things happening, but digital will really unlock the key.

**Rod Clark:** Just to build on that, leaving aside university level for the moment, if you just think about the difficulty of delivering an A-Level in a prison. You would need to get together and do it face-to-face in a conventional classroom setting—

Q39 **Chair:** Your microphone went. Can you start again? Sorry, your microphone went.

**Rod Clark:** Yes. Sorry about that. I was just saying that leaving aside the university side, just looking at the difficulties for an education provider in delivering an A-Level in a prison, you need to get together a full class for it to be economic, if you are going to have a teacher up in front of them. They all have to want to study the same subject. They have to stay studying the subject without being moved to another prison long enough to complete it because, as Dame Sally already pointed out, there is this issue about there not being modular elements in the way that these qualifications are constructed. Frankly, it is no surprise that those qualifications are not delivered. The solution has to be self-directed learning, which takes us back to Peter's point, in-cell access to be able to do it online.

Q40 **David Johnston:** Yes. I think you touched on this, but I had to step out



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for a minute; given the growth in long sentences and indeterminate sentences what has happened to the provision for education? Wishful thinking might say it kept pace with that; I am guessing it has not. Can you comment on the gap, presuming there is a gap?

**Peter Stanford:** If you talk to Prison Governors in secure environments where they are holding long-term prisoners, education is really difficult. Because of the very limited nature of the contracts that we have at the moment, you can only do so many level 1 and level 2 courses. As I said before, people end up doing them again and again. I am very, very keen on the idea, and, as a Committee, it sounds like you are keen on this as well, that things you do then lead on to work and lead on to career prospects. It is a whole different equation when people are serving 20 or 30 years in terms of where they are going to go for that. There is an argument that talks about education for its own sake, which I agree with, but which I can see from a funding point of view isn't compelling.

I remember the governor of Whitemoor, when we went to visit for the review, saying to us they have such heavy staffing costs there in terms of the number of officers to keep this very long-term population—it is a category 8 prison—quiet, and that if they were constructively engaged in things like distance learning they would need less officers. The prison would be much more peaceful. There is a cost benefit in doing that. At the moment they simply cannot do that, because none of them would qualify for any of the student loans or things that would come along to make that possible. The prison would have to pay for it.

One of the hopes that we had in the report was that this discretionary fund, the DPS for governors, would be used to do some of those things. Rod may know differently from his experience but, in my experience, I have seen no evidence of that happening yet. Education is a real Cinderella service in those long-term prisons.

**Dame Sally Coates:** Boredom breeds violence, and boredom breeds taking drugs and wanting to kill yourself, or whatever. It breeds all those things. Purposeful activity helps pass what can be very, very long days over a very long period of time. The more we provide, the safer the prisons will be.

Q41 **Apsana Begum:** I want to start by asking a couple of questions about what was discussed earlier in terms of providers and the number of providers there currently are for education. Is there anything you can share in terms of what the provision of secure schools would mean for academy chains and being able to apply to become providers? What is your understanding in terms of where that has already been the case and where that has worked, particularly in terms of the youth prison population, or those that are young and become imprisoned?

**Dame Sally Coates:** I got involved in doing the review because I had a young man who went to Feltham at the time, and he was very able, and I felt that he should have got all his GCSEs and then gone on to sixth form.



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During the time he was in Feltham he failed to do any GCSEs at all. It was during Year 11 and it was during the exam season. I felt very strongly that he should have done GCSEs, because if he had, when he left prison he would have gone to sixth form and would definitely have ended up in university. He was an A-star child, in care, and had everything going against him in his life, and education, I felt, was the way that he could have survived all that. As it was, he stayed in Feltham, did not do any GCSEs, and then went on and carried on committing crime and is back in prison again now.

I am very much in favour of secure schools. I think they are a really good idea, where education is really valued. They are run as schools but they are secure. I do not know where we are. I do not think one has opened yet. A provider has been chosen. I think it is a good idea to use good schools or multi-academy trusts with a good record to run those, because education is their business. I am in favour of them.

Q42 **Apsana Begum:** Very quickly, can Rod say something?

**Rod Clark:** I think the secure-schools model is really interesting. If you are getting Charlie Taylor along as a witness later, it would be really good to talk to him about that. What is interesting in the way they went about setting up the secure schools is that they did not run a contractual competition for the lowest-priced bidder to deliver against a detailed requirement about the number of GCSEs they wanted delivered within that establishment. They said, "This is the budget that we are making available. We now want to talk to you about what sort of service you are going to provide that will provide the right sort of environment". I think that is a very interesting model to bear in mind when you think about how you might be able to make prison education work rather better.

Q43 **Apsana Begum:** Thank you for that. Does it incentivise and create competition among providers? Does it just open the prison system to marketisation in some ways as well, where there is competition for longer contracts and, therefore, younger people being in prison for longer? Moving on to my next question, in your opinion what needs to change in terms of educational resources and facilities within prison estates to support training itself? My question is really around infrastructure in prisons, particularly digital infrastructure.

**Rod Clark:** Digital infrastructure would be the top of my list. All the education providers and education deliverers would much rather deliver a blended learning model in which the time in class is supported by time in-cell where people can do what is in effect homework, and you can use all those excellent tools that are out there to do learning. It would then facilitate those A-Levels, those degree-level studies, and all of those things.

The truth is that quite a lot of infrastructure has been put in place. There are something like 20 prisons that have the wiring in place, where all you would need to do is plug an end-user device on the end of the wire



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instead of a telephone. You would be able to get digital services up and running. The lack of investment and money has been the big stumbling block. The lack of investment in putting that in place is by far the biggest barrier.

**Peter Stanford:** Funding is a really big issue around rolling out digital. At the same time, the Prison Service has spent a great deal of money—many millions—on a system they call the Virtual Campus, which is an intranet, that is, it is shut off from outside. In a sense, what they have tried to do is set up something that is a bit like the internet, but is not an internet connection. Several of the prisons I have been in they are locked in cupboards or often access to it is locked in libraries.

The figures show that the content of it has got better recently, but prisoners just do not use it. Although there is a problem around funding and using digital that way, there is also a problem around the funds being used for the wrong things. The Virtual Campus has been failing for a number of years, and that money should have been used to use those digital connections in prisons that have them.

Berwyn, which is our newest prison near Wrexham in Wales, has been very, very successful at having tablets in cells. One of the things that was said is if you give prisoners tablets in cells to access learning they will start bartering them, they will smash them, it will all become part of a drugs ring, or whatever. The evidence in Berwyn is absolutely the opposite of that. What they say is they have had a few examples where people have dropped them and cracked the screen but, apart from that, they have been very, very useful. It is a combination of courage, money, and using money in the right way.

Q44 **Apsana Begum:** Is there also a problem then in terms of IT just being really out of date as well? How bad is the infrastructure? Is it really out of date still, and does that depend also on the type of prison? I assume that newer prisons have more up to date technology. Can you tell us a little bit more about your understanding of how up to date technology is in prisons?

**Peter Stanford:** There has been a digital rollout programme going on since the time we were doing the report. As Rod says, it is now in about 20 prisons. You are right, there are absolutely problems with big, old-fashioned Victorian prisons with very, very thick walls, but they can work around that. That is happening. It is the using of it as well. It is seeing the capacity of it. Some of the first people to introduce in-cell technology were the private prison providers, which I think Kim asked us about earlier. They introduced technology into cells for very good, practical reasons in that people could order their meals and their visits by that, and it has cut down on costs of prison officers. These things are all there.

One of the bigger problems, I think, is to do with the location of prisons as well. Quite a lot of the longer-term prisons are well away from centres of population, for very obvious reasons. As we all know, rural broadband



is not as good as city broadband. Where they are in these lovely sites in the hillside, the buildings are all miles apart, so there is a much bigger digital cost there. There are challenges, but they can all be dealt with.

**Q45 Apsana Begum:** I have one further question about what you think the avoidable institutional barriers are in the prison regime in terms of hindering prisoner learners developing their own skills. Specifically, prison tutors being paid much less—which is what the written submissions to our Committee is showing—is that an issue that needs to be dealt with much better institutionally, in order to retain tutors, for example, and to ensure that there is availability? My understanding is that some courses are just not made available because there are not the tutors to deliver them.

**Rod Clark:** There is certainly an issue around teachers, teacher recruitment and quality of support for prison teachers but I think there are other institutional barriers: the fact that there isn't sufficient emphasis on working out what the pathway for a prisoner should be and helping them go through their learning plan, or, if it is, it is not properly recorded and measured, and not in a way that is transparent. There is a whole lot more that could be done, and I am sure that Dame Sally will be able to speak much more about teacher training and education than I can.

**Dame Sally Coates:** Yes. We looked at whether we should say that there should be a different entry, or we should have a special teachers' scheme for prisons. In the end, we went with Unlocked, which is prison officers, because we felt that getting to education is tricky, because you have to walk through the prison, as I have explained before. There are different wings in a prison, and the education wing or education block may be quite a distance, so you need prison officers who are not doing anything else to take prisoners to education. Bringing education to the wing and making it much more part of the culture, reading groups, and classrooms on the wing, felt much more sensible.

The quality of teaching in prisons is very variable. I spoke to a prisoner who was doing a business studies course, and the business studies teacher had not been in for three months. That would never happen in a school. You would either get someone to cover, or you would be chasing up what is going on with that business studies teacher as to why they are not in. Because prison staff and governors do not run the education service, they are not necessarily following up or particularly caring that the business studies teacher has not been in. Those prisoners have just not been able to access that course for months, because the teacher has not been in.

As a teacher, you cannot take marking out, you have no IT or resources that you can bring in, there are no textbooks, and there are rarely exercise books, even. People use scrappy bits of paper and worksheets in classrooms. If you can just imagine a modern classroom and a school like that; it would never happen. It is very difficult to be creative as a teacher



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if you cannot even bring a stick in with all your resources on it, because you cannot show it. There are no whiteboards or anything like that. You are basically chalk and talk.

Q46 **Apsana Begum:** I have two follow-up questions, Chair. What are the differences in terms of the pay, for example, between a Prison Governor, and a teacher in a large academy, and a prison tutor?

**Chair:** Apsana, would you mind doing your two questions together, sorry?

**Apsana Begum:** Yes. The other question is: is it also the case that on-remand and prisoners who are serving shorter-term sentences basically do not have much, if any, access to any education and training?

**Dame Sally Coates:** I will take the first part, and then I will pass over to Rod.

**Chair:** Your Wi-Fi has gone, so we will go to Rob to answer that first. Your Wi-Fi has gone. Can we mute Dame Sally, and just help her with her internet, if possible? Rod.

**Rod Clark:** Yes. Sorry, remind me again what the second question was.

Q47 **Apsana Begum:** The second question was around on-remand and prisoners with short-term sentences. What level of access do they get?

**Rod Clark:** I should have jotted it down. It is obviously much more difficult to provide an education programme for somebody who may only be there for a few weeks. That is a real challenge. You are right and, therefore, I think very often you cannot get somebody started on a course that you have no confidence they are going to be able to finish. Particularly if you are incentivised around your contract to try to get people through to the end of their courses and to get the final attainment, that creates a real difficulty.

The other issue is that remand prisoners cannot be required to go to education, because they are not convicted people. They are just being held. It relies on engagement and getting them involved. You need to be quite creative about what you can do around a very short-term, temporary prison population. The needs there, of course, are as large as in the main-stream population.

Q48 **Apsana Begum:** Nothing further. I do not know if we have Dame Sally back.

**Chair:** Dame Sally, I think you are back. Nice to see you back, by the way. It went black.

**Dame Sally Coates:** I would say that I was quite shocked at the level of pay of governors. Given the level of responsibility, 1,000 inmates, hundreds and hundreds of staff, I think they should be paid a lot more, particularly if we are saying they have to have more accountability and more data. The head of a school in London, for example, of a school of



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that size, would probably be on a six-figure salary. Governors are very far below that.

**Q49 Chair:** I will ask one final question: what would be an ideal situation when a prisoner comes in in terms of being assessed for their educational needs? That does not seem to be very good, from what I have understood so far on this inquiry. What should happen when they come in, in terms of testing their academic ability, their skills, their numeracy, literature, and so on? Who wants to answer that? Peter.

**Peter Stanford:** When we were compiling the report, we saw a very good experiment that was going on in Cardiff prison, which is a city prison, so it has a high turnover. One of the things that they said to us—and it struck me as true—was that, before you start engaging in educational activity, there needs to be a programme that talks to people about the benefits of education and tries to identify any particular obstacles they might have psychologically or from experience.

Perhaps something like that, a pre-education course before you go forward. They certainly felt it worked well there, and they were a prison with a big churn. We were talking before about people hardly engaging at all. That seemed to work there, and I think they were doing it at another prison in Dorset.

**Q50 Chair:** Do they assess things like—referring back to Tom Hunt's question—dyslexia, or dyspraxia, or whatever it might be when they come in?

**Peter Stanford:** I think they were softer things, in a way, emotional and psychological things. The other things need to be done as well, but putting it together is very powerful.

**Rod Clark:** There are profilers that exist in order to look at neurodiversity needs. I think the Prison Service is now committed to a single model for that across the estate, and is beginning to roll that out. I do not know quite where that has got to, but that is a very important step forward to get that basic data.

The other thing I would say is, apart from just the testing, also you need to sit down and have that conversation about what the aspirations of that individual prisoner are and where they are going, so you can create a learning plan that makes sense to them. Education cannot be delivered through a needle, like some kind of medical treatment. It needs the active engagement of the individual. That means they have to see the point of it in fitting with their own lives.

**Q51 Chair:** Dame Sally, just going back, what should specifically happen when they arrive at prison, and how soon after should they be assessed for their education, skills, or any special needs they may have?

**Dame Sally Coates:** Normally when they arrive in prison they are put in a special area of the prison where new prisoners arrive, to make sense of



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being where they are and getting over the shock of being led down from the steps of the court, into the van and into the prison. I think it should happen over the first week. Perhaps not over the first day or so when they are still establishing the fact of where they are and getting over the shock, but certainly during the first week or two they should be assessed. They should do maths and English, which could be generic across the estate. They should have some discussion or chat with somebody about their needs and their background.

We did say in the review that we hold an awful lot of data on most people through the school system. That should follow them into prison, so you can see the educational background of what GCSEs, what A-Levels, and what qualifications they have. That would be available if that information was released to prisons, so they could see the educational attainments.

Q52 **Chair:** These assessments, do they follow them from prison to prison if they are returning prisoners or if they are moving prisons?

**Dame Sally Coates:** No. It should do. We recommended that, but I do not believe they do. It should be put on some sort of data system and it should follow them, but I do not think it does.

Q53 **Chair:** Rod, do you want to say something finally?

**Rod Clark:** I think they have made progress in the system that should in theory be doing that. What I do not know is how effective that is proving, particularly during Covid.

Q54 **Tom Hunt:** I have had enough assessments about whether I have something like dyslexia, or dyspraxia, and so on, which I did have. I seem to remember there was a specific test; I do not know if it was English. I think they should do not just an English and math test, but a test designed to see whether they have any of these issues. I think this is important in another way. Obviously we want to know what the problems are, so that hopefully we can support them and give them that tailored support they perhaps have never had before.

It also allows us to properly understand the scale of the problem as a society. If it is the case that 8% or 10% of the prison population have undiagnosed SENs, we want to know that. When we are having this bigger discussion about how we fund SEN support going forward, that all needs to be part of it. It feels like we are a bit blind if we do not know the true extent of it. I think it is really important to get these proper assessments done for the individuals, but also so we know the scale of the issue and the problem.

**Chair:** Just to add to that, is it right that they will not know if the prisoner has been excluded from school when the prisoner arrives? Will they know that or not?

**Dame Sally Coates:** I do not think they will.

Q55 **Chair:** Answer Tom's bit first, and just add it on. Sorry, Dame Sally, fire



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away.

**Dame Sally Coates:** Sorry, I have a builder, so I am aware of the drill in the background. If anyone hears it, sorry about that. I do not think they know whether they have been excluded. I do not think they have that information. Certainly they will not know the information from the school system, so they would not have that information.

Those tests do exist, Tom. Often in schools we use them. They are quite expensive. They have to be sent off, and often more middle-class families get them done privately in order to get the diagnosis into the school so the child can get the specialist help they need. I think they are quite complicated to administer, and they are expensive, and they do need to be sent away. Where there is any suspicion of that there might be an issue there, I certainly think it would be worth doing.

Again, it is about resources and time. If you do get a test that shows you are dyslexic or have dyspraxia, what then happens? We will have the data but do they get the specialist help? It would be important, really.

**Chair:** Thank you. Does anyone want to say a final thing? No? Okay. I really appreciate your evidence and your time this morning. It has been really invaluable, and of course your knowledge, experience and expertise in this area. It is a very important first session. I wish you all well. No doubt we will be in touch over the coming months.