HOUSE OF COMMONS

Education Committee

Oral evidence: Prison Education, HC 86

Tuesday 2 November 2021

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Watch the meeting

Members present: Robert Halfon (Chair); Apsana Begum; Miriam Cates; Brendan Clarke-Smith; Kate Osborne.

Questions 320 - 352

Witnesses

I: Jonathan Gilbert; Kiri Jolliffe; Femi Laryea-Adekimi; Ben Leapman; and David Breakspear.

Written evidence from witnesses:

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Jonathan Gilbert, Kiri Jolliffe, Femi Laryea-Adekimi, Ben Leapman and David Breakspear.

Q320 **Chair:** Good morning, everybody. Thank you very much for coming. For the benefit of the tape and those watching on Parliament TV, can I ask you to introduce yourselves and anything else that you might want to say? How would you like to be addressed, by titles, Mr and Ms, or would you prefer first names?

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: First name is fine with me.

Chair: That is with all of you, first names, okay. Thank you. I will start with you, Ben Leapman.

Ben Leapman: I am a journalist with *Inside Time*, the prison newspaper. Between 2014 and 2019 I spent five years in prison, mostly at two different prisons, one a category B prison and one a category C prison. Shall I talk a bit about that?

Chair: No, we will come on to questions, so just briefly and I will let you expand later.

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: I currently work with the Prison Reform Trust. I am a network co-ordinator with the trust managing a network of prisoners, about 650 prisoners. I spent five and a half months in prison of a 20-month sentence back in 2019 until 2020.

David Breakspear: Good morning. I have quite an extensive history of the criminal justice system that dates back to the 1980s, with a number of prison sentences in there. I am someone who utilised the power of prison education to be able to turn my life around and the reason why I am sitting in front of you today.

Kiri Jolliffe: I am a youth violence intervention caseworker with St Giles Trust. I spent about six or seven months in prison on remand until I was later acquitted.

Jonathan Gilbert: I was convicted in 2014. I was a solicitor in a large bank fraud. I went into Wandsworth Prison, before being transferred later that year down to Wales where I am currently residing.

Chair: Thank you. I am going to divide this up into a number of topics and individual members are going to chair those sessions. I am going to start with Brendan, please.

Q321 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Good morning, everybody. Thank you for coming to speak to us today.

My background is that I am a former school teacher. We talk a lot about the culture of education and the communities we represent and so on, but today we are turning that more to look at prisons and this culture of

embedding that within it. David, could you start us off? You spent a great deal of your life in prison, I understand. How has your attitude towards education changed during the various sentences that you have had? You said you utilised the power of it. How did you do that? What is your story with it?

David Breakspear: If you look at prison education pre-1992, before it was outsourced, it is very difficult to say it was anything other than dire. Since 1992, and the outsourcing, prison education has improved. I did not access the education side of prison until around 2005 and I became a mentor for the Shannon Trust. That really did give me an understanding not just of the issues that we were having to deal with but a very good understanding of myself and, I suppose, coincidentally, of what I brought to the table in respect of my experience.

It was a way to hone that experience and, in my very last sentence, I absolutely utilised everything that was available to me to make sure that I could be sitting in a position like this if the opportunity ever arose.

Q322 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Anybody else? Has your attitude to education changed during your experience, Jonathan?

Jonathan Gilbert: I came from a family of teachers. I was the only one who broke ranks and became a lawyer. When I went away I think the first two years I was engaged in mentoring, initially with the Shannon Trust but then I worked up. I was a tutor with Open University degree courses. Then I realised I needed to do something myself as well, so I did a masters. It was a re-engagement with education for me. It was helping others initially and then trying to help myself, which led me on to Cardiff University where I am doing a PhD at the moment. It has been a fantastic journey.

It goes to show education can be lifelong. It can be transformative and, if it can be used as a tool of rehabilitation, yes, that is what we are here to discuss, I suppose.

Q323 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** One of the accusations that has been made before is that education and skills are not given sufficient priority in prisons. Has people's experience been that that has improved or is there anything particularly that you think needs doing? Is there a cultural change? Where does that need to happen? Is that something the Government need to do? Is it the prisons themselves? Is it getting prisoners onboard now? What do you think needs to happen? Kiri, what do you think?

Kiri Jolliffe: I did not spend too long, so I think it is a little bit difficult for me to say how it changed or if it has changed. While I was away I was already a student with The Open University because I was working full-time. When I went away it was early September and I requested the education department to change my address with the OU so that I could continue my studies. This was something that the department advised that it could not do.

I did not understand it because I had done all the background but no one knew how to answer my questions. I didn't know who to go to or who to speak to. I often found it very hard to speak to the officers on the wing because they were there to do a routine kind of thing, lock you in, and that was pretty much it. I just did not know what to do, so I didn't have much contact with education when I was away. I think the only thing I was offered to do, because I was a remand prisoner, there were so many questions and queries about how long I would be doing that they did not want to put me on a course, so I was left in limbo.

Brendan Clarke-Smith: There was no link worker or anything like that?

Kiri Jolliffe: There was nothing for me. As remand prisoners, they often wait until you are sentenced. I think that is a big thing because my trial was four to five months after I was remanded, so arguably what do I do in that time?

Brendan Clarke-Smith: Very interesting, thank you. My expectation was that you would go in and there would be somebody there and they would be looking at engaging.

Kiri Jolliffe: No.

Q324 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** It is interesting to hear that is not the case. Ben, what is your experience?

Ben Leapman: My own personal level of learning, I would have loved to do an Open University degree. I knew I was facing five years in prison of a 10-year sentence, but I wasn't able to do so because I wasn't eligible for a student loan. I couldn't pay for it myself and, because of the rule that if you already have a degree you cannot get a loan for a second degree, even though I hadn't had a loan already, I was ineligible. Therefore, I did a series of low level 1 and 2 courses, eight of them in total. I have a whole string of rather low-grade qualifications after my name, which was good to get me out of my cell and keep my brain slightly taxed but it obviously wasn't as good as getting engaged in a degree.

To answer your question directly, in terms of elevating the importance of education within the establishment, I think they need an education governor because, at the moment, the learning and skills manager is not a senior figure within the prison and they don't hold much sway. You have a security governor, you have residential governors, but education is not seen as important as a function of a prison. I think that is how you would change it.

Q325 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Femi, I see you are nodding along to that. Is there anything that you would add that has not already been said?

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: What Ben has just said, that education doesn't seem to be a priority within prisons, there is a lot of focus on employment within the prison, doing jobs, performing roles within the

prison, and education seems to be secondary to that. If you choose to go down the education route, you are not seen as contributing to the prison as much, so there definitely needs to be more focus on education. It should be on a parallel with employment within the prison.

Q326 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** One of the suggestions that has been made to us is about the offender management unit, its sentence plan and so on, and whether they should be incentivising education among young offenders. I suppose, from what I have heard today, it is not so much the will of the offenders. You feel that the system is not facilitating it for offenders rather than offenders having the will to do it, is that generally the feeling?

Jonathan Gilbert: Yes.

David Breakspear: Following on from what Ben was saying there, he had a degree already and he was unable to access higher education and, therefore, he was having to do lower education. In a way—and this isn't a dig at Ben—he did not need that so, therefore, if you look at the prison system I also think a lot of the wrong people are in education. Again, it is not a dig at them, because if it is available for someone to get out of their cell, of course they are going to go and do that. That is for the prison to sort out.

For me, it is very easy to get Ben and people like Ben into education in prison, but then it is very difficult to get people who actually need the education into education. That comes all the way back to needs analysis and the screening that initially goes on when people enter prison. That isn't good enough and that needs to improve because otherwise all you are doing is swimming against the tide. Until you know exactly what it is that that individual needs, how can you provide a sentence plan or a pathway out? For me, it all comes back to that initial needs assessment and screening. That has to be improved. Not should be but has to be improved.

Q327 **Brendan Clarke-Smith:** Do you think there is too much focus on using it as a management tool for offenders, rather than developing them and giving them the skills that they need?

David Breakspear: Prison education seems to be more based on the importance of KPIs and what they do than the importance of the individuals themselves.

Brendan Clarke-Smith: Thank you. I don't know if anyone else has anything to add on that, Chair.

Q328 **Chair:** Just before I pass over to you, do you think that when a prisoner arrives there should be a proper assessment of their educational abilities, which does not seem to be done at the moment, and then they are tailor-made? Some might want to do Open University. Somebody might want to do vocational education. Somebody just might want to do a BTech or something. That should be a compulsory requirement: every prisoner is

assessed for their educational abilities and given an education-tailored programme—if that is what they want—and incentives to do that educational programme. I think you make the point in the evidence you sent to the Committee, David, that the problem is when you do work you get paid for it; when you do education you don't get paid for it.

David Breakspear: You get paid but it is a lower amount. There are some prisons that are catching up but the rates of pay for education are terrible. In a way, low levels of education and poverty are linked so some people just cannot afford to do education. It isn't about the will. It is about being able to afford that. You don't need a lot of money a week to survive in prison but education does not provide that. Education does not provide you enough to be able to put on your phone and buy the things you need, so there is a lot of pressure for people to go into workshops and to do other activities.

With prison obviously the horse has already bolted, but that saying about going into where people fall in and not pulling them out later on, that is what is important with prison education.

Chair: Ben, you were nodding your head.

Ben Leapman: On the pay rates thing, this is a very difficult thing to establish. In my role as a journalist at *Inside Time*, I have tried to investigate and through freedom of information I have obtained some pay rates from prisons. Prison education is low paid. At Wayland it is £7.78 per week. It is not a lot. The workshop jobs are often exactly the same. It is not usually the case that education is lower paid. It is the case that the workshop jobs at the prison—and particularly the people who work in the wings as the cleaners and the servers—usually get paid even less. It is hard for everybody to—

Q329 **Chair:** On the assessment issue, should there be a proper assessment of people's educational needs? We know that lots of prisoners arrive not being able to read properly or have very low numeracy skills. Should there be some proper assessment and a tailor-made course and, if so, what should be the incentives? You cannot force people to do it, but what should be the proper incentives to enable prisoners to take up those offerings?

Ben Leapman: With the assessment it is important that there should be a proper assessment, as you say. Most important is that it should follow the prisoner around because, at the moment, when every prisoner is transferred—this happens very often—they get to a new prison and are given a very low-level assessment of English and maths questions. When I got mine it was on a laminated sheet and the tutor had forgotten to wipe off the last person's answers, so I had them all written down already. They don't take it very seriously. Every time you get sent to a new prison you have to do it again.

I have worked in this as a learning support assistant helping prisoners to do this and it causes a great amount of resentment. A lot of them say, "I have done this before. I am not doing it again". They throw it away and walk out. Then they get marked as zero for everything and they are not allowed to access employment because they do not have scores in English and maths.

Chair: What should the incentives be for prisoners to take up education other than money?

David Breakspear: One thing that we used to have was that, each time you achieved a certificate—and this is going back a few years—you received £5 on your canteen expense. That then dropped to £2.50 and then there is nothing; nowhere does it unless it happens in a local prison.

The thing with learning is once you unlock it in somebody they don't need any more incentive. It is about unlocking that. You try to do it in as many ways as possible. It has to be subjective to the individual. Someone might not need the financial incentive whereas someone else does. It really just comes back to—I am probably going to say this wrong—pedagogy. It is about being from the person first. We seem to forget about the prison journey. We think about going into prison. We talk about coming out of prison but there is that prison journey as well. That is the area that needs to be utilised in the best way possible, so that that individual gets out of it what they can, based on their own subjective needs and not the needs of the prison.

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: It is also important that the prison itself values what people achieve from education, that there is some demonstration and acknowledgement that they have achieved an education qualification. Not just a certificate but that the prison actually values it. If someone works as a wing cleaner, that is valued by the prison. The prison accepts it. They let people out. They unlock them and they feel like they are achieving something. Whereas if someone achieves a qualification—it may be business studies—there is no acknowledgement of that from the prison, except from the education department.

Kiri Jolliffe: I just wanted to add that as a personal incentive it would have been nice to have been able to be out of my cell more. If there was a lockdown or lack of staff, often workers would go out—like gardeners or kitchen—but any education would be completely shut down. That would be the first thing that would stop, so it was very hard to want to do something to better myself when I knew I would be spending more time in this room.

Q330 **Kate Osborne:** Good morning to you all. I will start to talk about accessing education, but I want to ask you about any individual learning needs that you may have or any barriers. I noted that Ben said that you were not given any initial assessment in terms of learning needs. Could you tell us a bit about your experiences of any assessments, particularly around special educational needs or disabilities and your experience of

that? Can I start with you, Ben?

Ben Leapman: Sure, yes. I personally do not have any such needs. Obviously, every prisoner is very different and there are very high levels of dyslexia, all sorts of different additional needs that there are in prisons. The education department will often try to identify it, but it is very much down to the particular prison and the particular person in the education department doing the assessments. As I said, I was given the worksheet with the answers already on it. They are not taken all that seriously sometimes but there is a huge scale of problem there that needs addressing.

Kate Osborne: I think you said that you were not aware of what courses were available until you received a glossy pamphlet.

Ben Leapman: At my first local prison that was a general thing with the induction. Every prisoner is supposed to get an induction for education, for healthcare, for everything, and it just wasn't done at my prison. That was at a time in 2014 when they had just had the austerity cuts. The staffing had been cut by about 20% and the prison was on its knees. People were just locked up. They could not run a prison effectively. I think things have improved since then. Staffing has improved and I would hope that inductions are done. The second prison I was at it was part of the induction process and it took a whole week. It was very carefully done. People had everything explained, from education to the chapel. A good prison will do that.

In most aspects of prison life, it is the local prisons that have the very high turnover of people coming in and out that struggle the most with staff off sick, low staff morale, low staffing, just generally unable to get people out of their cells and do things with them. Whereas the C category prisons, the training prisons, tend to do things better as people are further through their sentence. Of course, it is very important at the very start of the sentence that people get the help and that is where it is the worst.

Kate Osborne: Thank you. Would anybody else like to share their experiences?

David Breakspear: It is not so much an experience, but the Government's recent figures on prison education and learning difficulties and disabilities show that 29% have a problem with an LDD. The caveat at the bottom says that over 71% either did not need further assessment or they were not assessed. Well, how many of that 71% were not assessed? Because not enough people are being assessed within the prison environment.

As Ben just said there, the local prisons are the worst because of the turnover. However, the local prisons is where 95% of people begin their prison sentence. For me, that is where the resources should be higher and not lower than other prisons. First impressions count. If you can get

it right at the beginning of someone's sentence, it makes their journey through their sentence a lot easier.

Kate Osborne: Jonathan, do you want to say something?

Jonathan Gilbert: Yes. I suppose I was a little bit different there, insofar as I had a law degree so there wasn't much initially that I could have access to. I appreciate that is more the minority and resources should be concentrated elsewhere.

Having said that, I was asked to do a BTech in literacy and numeracy because I wanted to be a mentor in the education department, so I had to do this qualification. I suppose, from a different angle, my personal background wasn't really assessed. My educational position wasn't identified. It was probably a wasted cost there and a bit of repetition on my part.

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: I would say that the initial assessment, when it comes to education, going to prison is extremely basic. It is literally, "Take a maths test, take an English test and then tick what you are interested in out of this limited selection". It is not tailored to people's needs. Jonathan has just said he had a background of higher education but at no point was there any acknowledgement of that. The initial assessment needs to be far more in-depth, far more stringent, so that people's backgrounds are identified and then things are tailored to the individual.

Q331 **Kate Osborne:** Femi and Kiri, I know that you spent less time in prison. What do you think needs to be done to enable people with shorter sentences to access education more easily? Kiri, you mentioned your Open University degree and how you could not continue with that, but are there other things that you would like to see happen or changed in terms of making access to education easier?

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: From my experience, beginning education within the prison took a lot of effort. I went through the initial assessment but I did not hear anything back for a couple of weeks. It was only when I approached an officer and said, "Can you get me on to a course, any course?" that something started to move.

Again, there needs to be emphasis on education from the prison itself. The prisons need to value education and see it as something worthwhile and get people moving on to these courses, especially if they are on a short sentence. Every day counts when you are on a short sentence and every day lost is a massive part of your sentence. There needs to be a lot more focus and emphasis put on education and not this delay with regards to it.

Kiri Jolliffe: I think with me and with quite a lot of the female population it was about having transferrable skills. I did not know whether I was going to have a criminal record upon release because I had to sit my trial

first. That was an issue straightaway. I was on remand and they weren't prepared to give me any type of work or any type of education while I was waiting.

If you are on a short sentence, as a woman, and you are coming out, you have a criminal record, you have lost some time, however long that is. You are facing quite a bit of discrimination already against you. I would have liked someone to come and speak to me regarding an apprenticeship or working or something so that I could get myself back on my feet upon my release, so that I had links as well and contacts, so that I could have a bit of autonomy and make my decision of whether I would go into education, into an apprenticeship or simply just come out and work with probation, for example. I did not have any of that. I was acquitted and then released from court and that was it. I had no further involvement from anyone, so I had to stand on my own two feet.

Q332 **Kate Osborne:** Were you able to take up your Open University degree when you came out?

Kiri Jolliffe: Yes, I restarted it. I am in my third year now.

Kate Osborne: Fantastic, well done.

Kiri Jolliffe: Thank you.

Q333 **Kate Osborne:** Can I ask those of you who have served longer sentences—maybe David—whether or not there are any ongoing assessments? You go to a new prison and if you are lucky, if it works, you get an assessment, but as time goes on does anybody spend time with you to talk about what courses you have completed or what courses are available or a direction of travel for you?

David Breakspear: For me, on this one, yes. Coming back to the short-term sentences, on the flip side of the coin, with short-term sentences people sometimes utilise education because it can be quick to get into. Some things don't have waiting lists and have spare spaces, so it fills up that time you are in prison and that is all it becomes. It becomes a time filler. For me, I think the easiest way is to get rid of short-term sentences. Let's have a presumption against sentences of six months or less. That is one way to deal with that side of it and utilise what is available in the community.

In respect of an appraisal, I think there could be something similar to an appraisal system for the working world where you will continue. It comes down to the individual, I suppose, as in the individual tutor, maybe the prison officer or another member of staff who you will chat to. If it is something that is ongoing, therefore, you are always talking to people.

Everything that Femi was saying there is just bang on. The prisons really do need to value education and they need to make it a priority. All the time there is the confinement and control of the priorities, which I suppose in prison is quite understandable. Therefore, that should go

without saying and what we need to do is focus on education. It is proven to work in respect of reducing reoffending and it is the right thing to do as well.

Q334 **Kate Osborne:** Around digital resources, what kind of impact does that have, as in the lack of digital resources or the inability to have those resources within your cells and only being able to access them when you are in the educational setting that you are working in, Jonathan?

Jonathan Gilbert: We had an education department with 10 or 12 PCs, but there were commonly 18 or 20 there at any one time doing GCSEs up to an Open University degree, so it was difficult to get access even in that classroom time. I found it very challenging doing my masters in the cell with just Post-it stickers and notebooks. My wife would send in articles and get me second-hand books sent in, so it takes real personal resolve.

Q335 **Chair:** You funded it yourself, the masters degree?

Jonathan Gilbert: My wife did, yes. It was by distance learning so it was £5,000 over two years.

Q336 **Chair:** Was the university helpful? It understood your situation and was helpful in the way it worked with you?

Jonathan Gilbert: What, the university?

Chair: Yes.

Jonathan Gilbert: Yes, it was. The head of the education department would send off my assignment and then they would come back in, and my wife would upload things for me as well. Yes, the university was very helpful.

David Breakspear: From my own experience, again, I went down the degree route. I was excluded from school at the age of 14, so education for me from that aspect was something quite new. I began with an access module in prison and then I moved on to a degree in criminology and psychology studies. I have to say that The Open University for many years has been very empathetic and sympathetic to people in prison on their education journeys.

I had a student loan. I am paying for it myself. All I had access to in prison were textbooks. Technically, I had a tutor but by the time the phone call got arranged—because I worked as an education mentor at the same time, those issues were sorted out by the people I had around me, the support network I had around me—by the time I got to the tutor we were talking about things in the future, problems that could arise rather than what had arisen.

When I was released I was released mid-term, so there was a bit of a break. Then I had access to StudentHome. I became overwhelmed with the information that was available to me because basically I went from textbooks to having the world's library available to me. That was

something that was very shocking to me and I buried my head in the sand and deferred it for a year.

In that year I utilised OpenLearn, the free platform from The Open University. That allowed me not just to obviously enhance my own knowledge and experience but it also enabled me to get used to online learning. I think that OpenLearn and digital technology in someone's cell—I would love to know where I would be now had I had digital technology in my cell.

I have never had a problem with learning. My problem was always with the education system as a kid. Then my learning just took place in a prison environment. That is why I am very much a positive advocate of the power of education, especially the prison education, but it does have to move with the times. We are wasting too much of the person's time in that cell. Lockdown has proved it. It has shown you how much of a difference it has made. I think that is something that we need to build on exponentially, to draw a line now. Let's forget what digital technology was available. Let's look at what is available and let's utilise it.

Q337 **Kate Osborne:** A lot of people are very nervous about prisoners having IT within their cells. How do you respond to that?

David Breakspear: It is understandably so. We are not talking about having access to the internet. We are talking about having access to pads that are read only, that do not have any access to the outside internet. Yes, it would be great to have access to the proper internet—under supervision perhaps—with education. Every single keystroke that you would make would be recorded by security, so it is not as if there is no kind of failsafe or no back up.

It is the right thing to do. Everything is about technology these days. You cannot even go to a garage now without having to use technology. There is a lot of digital illiteracy around. There is a lot of digital poverty around, so it isn't just about the provision of digital technology. It is also about providing the skills for digital technology because that is what the future is about.

Kiri Jolliffe: I think it would be important to have technology within prisons. I understand the opinion of, "What are they going to be doing on that?" but I think it needs to be noted that not every person in prison is there for a criminal matter. There are some people who are serving sentences for civil matters. Arguably, there are people in prison who haven't committed that crime, so I think that that opinion should not be pushed on to every prisoner.

Also, how can you rehabilitate someone? Because that is what they are in prison for. It is for rehabilitation, not for security. Therefore, why would you put so much money into making sure that prisoner is in that cell, rather than utilising everyone who wants to help and utilise the resources

that you can have to rehabilitate that person and help them when they come out to be a functioning member of society?

Jonathan Gilbert: As a prison community there is a situation called FOMO, fear of missing out. I used to bring these little course booklets back to some of the guys on the wing and then his pad mate would say, "What are you doing tonight?" and he would be doing a little criminology course or something. Then everybody starts, "Can you bring me one back, Johnny?" so you create some momentum there.

If there was some in-cell tech then, "What are you doing?", it would make that so much easier and you would get less drop-off as well. Because if you are doing an Open University degree enclosed, it is what they call a bird killer. You are keeping active, mentally active and whatever, but there is a big drop-off when those people go up to an open prison. Then the desire is to go out and perhaps get a job and earn some money and get a shop and bring it back, whereas sitting around camp doing an Open University degree when everybody else is going out is probably not favoured. I think that sort of thing would sustain that continuation or continuum.

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: It is understandable that the community would be concerned about prisoners having access to the internet, but in schools they have security measures so that children who are accessing the internet cannot access anything that would damage them. It is possible even in your own home to put in specific security measures to limit what kind of access there is.

Chair: A firewall, basically.

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: Exactly. It is very possible to have that same kind of thing in prisons, to limit access to anything that can be dangerous or damaging. If people have access to certain parts of the internet that would be used for education and that is all, there would be no issues. There would be no concerns.

Chair: Just very briefly, Ben.

Ben Leapman: I believe that Wayland and Berwyn, two prisons, have had these in-cell devices for a number of years now and I don't think there has been any problem.

Q338 **Chair:** Just before I pass over to Miriam, we had some evidence where they said an ex-prisoner wrote in, "Once allocated to a class, students go on to a list given to the Wing Officers who unlock them from their cells prior to the starting time of the class so that they can travel through 'free flow' when you walk from one wing to another past an officer check. On many occasions there are errors with the lists and people are not called or are not permitted through to their classes causing great frustration as those studying are very committed to their studies". Did that happen to you all of the time, all of you? Why does that happen? From everything

you have said it seems to me—especially when you said at the very beginning that you were given a test that somebody had already filled in and had not been wiped clean—that education is not given any priority at all and nobody cares. Is that the reason? Why should such a thing happen and be allowed? Should there be one person in the prison properly charged with education, like a deputy governor, whose sole job is just education of prisoners?

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: Definitely. There should be somebody who is dedicated to prison education within the prison who is on the same level as the rest of the senior leadership team, who is potentially, like you said, a deputy governor, who can be overseeing this kind of thing and, if there are clerical errors like this happening on a regular basis, they can see that. They can address this and set targets and say, "Look, we can't have this happening".

Chair: The prisoners should have access to that person?

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: Yes, of course. They should have access to any one of their leadership team.

Q339 **Miriam Cates:** Thank you all so much for coming in. It has been a fascinating discussion so far. We talked about education in terms of its purpose in prison, so partly to pass the time, partly to better yourself, something to do, perhaps reward. I suppose one of the main purposes has to be to allow you to gain good employment after leaving prison. I know that you particularly, David, have had some criticism about the link between education and employment, in terms of what kind of skills are being taught in prisons and whether or not they relate to jobs. Could you expand on that and whether you think there are any skills in particular that are being missed that could help prisoners once they leave prison?

David Breakspear: Yes. We were talking about digital skills. The industry is going to be screaming out for people with digital skills soon. Where is there a better place than prison for people to be able to learn those skills, to be able to turn their lives around?

Yes, I suppose I did criticise because for far too long the prison system, education, or prison itself has had the hospitality industry and the construction industry quite sympathetic and empathetic towards the needs of prisoners, and the education has gone down that road as well to back that up. I don't know of many people who have utilised BICS to set up their own cleaning firm. I know that there are a number, but there are thousands of people with a BICS certificate. It is as if we are creating qualifications, we are creating certificates, education pathways to get yourself through prison, but nothing to set you up for the future. I think a lot of that comes down to that one-size-fits-all approach.

I mentioned as well about education having more of a local impact, so that the local prisons, the governor of the prisons or the areas can react to what their area needs. There is no point teaching someone in

Pentonville about farming, not that those are the only jobs. For me, we really do need to focus on what the local area issues are and then why not utilise schools, colleges, universities and prisons to be able to fill those gaps?

It seems to me that a lot of people expect or seem to think that prison exists out of society and, once you go into prison, you are just forgotten. You are no longer a person. They are. No one really wants to be in prison. It is about options and opportunities and, yes, employment is very, very important along that journey.

Q340 **Miriam Cates:** Femi, you mentioned in this initial assessment that you had to tick boxes of courses you were interested in. Do you think that could be changed somehow to focus you more on what employment you might be interested in and work back from that? How could that be made more useful?

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: I don't think employment should necessarily be the focus of education. It could be connected and within the community employers. Like David mentioned, colleges within the community around the prison should be able to link into the education within the prison, so that if people achieve a qualification once released that qualification can lead to employment. I don't think that employment should be the focus of education. It should be about personal development so that person can develop skills that they can then transfer into employment, but not necessarily their education is focused on them getting a particular job once they have been released.

David Breakspear: It comes down to that individual. Reading and writing is a goal for some. For most of us here it has been a degree but that is not the same for everybody. A job is not for everybody. However, we still need sculptors. We still need poets. We still need artists. That does not need that academic education so much. That vocational training should be there but let's understand it from the needs of the individual. It is not about ticking boxes. It is about asking questions. Not everyone knows what their needs are but we all know what our dreams and aspirations are. That is all you need to ask, "What are your dreams and aspirations? What would you like to get out of it?"

Q341 **Chair:** Can I just briefly challenge you both on that? I argue constantly that the education system across the board does not do enough to prepare people for work. I think the world is changing in a big way with artificial intelligence and robots. Yes, absolutely, obviously there will be some prisoners there for a very long time. Education should be about developing the mind and the intellect but, surely, the most important thing when a prisoner comes out—apart from having a house and support—is to be able to get into work again. The most likely chance of that is if they have a proper education that prepares them for the world of work when they come out and, surely, that should be the priority?

David Breakspear: The priority is to make sure that everyone leaving prison can read and write. I think that is the priority.

Chair: Yes, but that prepares people for the world of work, though.

David Breakspear: It certainly does, yes, but for me reading and language development are very much linked. Low literacy is also linked to language development: you do not know how to respond to people. You do not know how to ask the right questions. It is very important that we do not forget that. As much as it has been complaining in the past that it has only been about the basics, let's not forget the basics because it is the basics that are important.

Ben Leapman: I think that the role of prison workshops is overlooked. I know this is the Education Committee talking about education, but they are seen as two separate functions in prison: the education block where you go to a classroom or the workshops where you go to work. A lot of prisoners prefer to work because they enjoy the routine of it and they are earning some money. Some of the people who are working in those workshops have never actually had a legitimate job before. That is a very valuable thing to teach them about getting up on time and going into work and doing a job, doing what you are told. There is scope within that.

I was a learning support assistant across eight different workshops for a couple of years. Some of the people in those workshops did vocational qualifications on the back of their work, but a lot of the work was quite low grade and it would be good to get it enhanced. The biggest employer where I was was making camouflage nets for the army, which involved tying bits of string to bits of plastic. It was quite dull, but we managed to craft a vocational qualification out of it, bringing in literacy and numeracy: how many bits of string; how many bits of plastic? If that could be brought together so that every prisoner had written on their sentence plan not just any behavioural courses but also a pathway of education in classrooms or work with vocational training in workshops, that is a good way to get prisoners work ready when they leave.

Kiri Jolliffe: I want to make the point that for women in prison we cannot come out and do a simple job, like driving. It is not inviting to want to work in a warehouse, for example, where it is a male-dominated area of work. Therefore, education is very important for females to be able to come home and do a job that they would want to do.

I think there is a statistic out there—don't quote me—that something like 53% of women who leave prison are still on getting-into-work benefits two years after. I don't have the answers on what would be great for women when they come out, but it is a case of what job could they go into if they did have an education? They have a criminal record so what is out there?

Q342 **Miriam Cates:** Yes, I suppose there is a difference, isn't there, between basic skills, basic numeracy, basic literacy, basic digital skills that

everybody needs for whatever job? Perhaps prisons should have a strong responsibility for ensuring that nobody leaves prison without them. Then there is the employment link, isn't there?

I think what Rob was saying about the direction of travel for, let's say, further education outside of prison is very much employer led, skills focused. How could that be put into the prison world so that local employers have a better link, not just to make sure that prisoners can find jobs locally but that they have the skills to find jobs locally? Do you have any thoughts on that? Jonathan, do you want to start?

Jonathan Gilbert: The prison journey, as we have touched on, is a bit snakes and ladders, as we know, at the moment. If you assess properly day one or prison one, if you have this passport where you can build up there, you don't have to then go back and do something again. That forms part of the OMU so the next prison knows exactly where you are. They know what your targets are, whether vocational or educational, and then support that through.

Then in open prison what do you do? Do you go to the local college, develop your skills there, or do you go into the workplace or whatever? The resettlement department can then be contacting the local employers. When I was at open prison we were working for DHL in Avonmouth. There were, say, 24 prisoners going in there every day. Then they can actually say, "This is what this cohort of prisoners have done. They have done this". They haven't wasted their time with the cleaning courses that David was referring to. This is their whole journey.

At the moment, resettlement departments do not know that. They probably give the jobs to people who come down and door knock and say, "Can I go for that interview?" Whereas you can actually then identify what pathway that offender is working towards.

Miriam Cates: Does anybody have any more comments about how local employers could have a better relationship with prisoners?

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: If local employers took a little bit more interest in prisoners and did not side line prisoners or think that they were a danger or a risk on release, or maybe if employers were prepared to offer apprenticeships on release, a lot more prisoners would be able to move into employment from the education within the prison.

There are ways that employers could facilitate a bridge from prison into employment but—like Jonathan mentioned—having a record of what the prisoner has achieved educationally within a prison that is centralised will help that greatly because then employers will know, "This prisoner has achieved this, this and this. They can offer this to my company. They can perform this role".

Without that it is difficult for a prisoner to come out on release and say, "Look, I can do this. I have achieved this. I have studied this in prison". I

think what Jonathan has mentioned, a sort of passport of education, will help employers to be able to do that.

Miriam Cates: A bit like a CV that is verified, yes. Ben, did you want to come in?

Ben Leapman: Local employers: it would be great to have more links employing prison leavers. In some cases, employers opening workshops in prisons works fantastically well. That takes a certain scale and that kind of employer. More often it is smaller employers and, as colleagues have said, getting the record of what you have achieved is particularly important because a lot of the qualifications are not of a level that are recognised. It is important I think that the prisoners talk to employers and work out what skill they want. If it is a construction industry, a particular card certificate to provide that rather than a cheaper lower grade alternative that is not going to be recognised.

Q343 **Miriam Cates:** Moving on to apprenticeships. Kiri, you mentioned that it would have been useful for you if you could have embarked on some sort of apprenticeship. I will move on to others in a minute, but do you think that better access to an apprenticeship would have a significant difference to employability?

Kiri Jolliffe: Yes. The only issue that I would have had would have been money because the apprenticeship wage for an adult who needs to stand on their own two feet is a bit difficult. Personally for me, I would have loved to have had the opportunity to go on to a law apprenticeship so that I could gain the experience and so that people did not look at my CV, see a gap or potentially see my name and go, "Okay, we don't want to take her just because we have heard of things". I would have been able to show my face and show how well I can perform within an office, for example, rather than them just looking at a piece of paper and completely writing me off.

Miriam Cates: Yes. Does anybody else want to come in on that?

Jonathan Gilbert: Yes. Obviously, there has been a lot of media attention recently about prisoners resolving the haulage crisis and so on, but there are not enough prisoners in open estates. We talked earlier about prison jobs. At my open prison only 110 from 240 were allowed to go out to work because they needed the 130 to run the prison. It is that dynamic as well. If we get more open prisons, get people through the system quicker—those who can obviously be trusted and at low risk—that would then give a larger pool.

If you had the large construction companies quoting for public contracts, you could just say, "We need 2% of the workforce to come from the prisons" and then you have that larger cohort ready to go into those construction jobs, to go into the hospitality sector, to pick fruit on a farm. After four years in a closed prison, I would have happily picked strawberries. It needs that sort of change.

Kiri Jolliffe: The only thing I would add to that is that I do agree but what about females?

Miriam Cates: What jobs are possible for women to do, yes.

Kiri Jolliffe: I would not have happily gone on to a farm and started picking fruit. I know I did not do a long time but I would have thought, "Now I have studied. I have good skills. I was working before I went to prison. I was doing really well for myself". I think I would have taken that really personally. It would have hit me a little bit, the realisation of how things had changed for me. Then I think it would go down to mental health.

David Breakspear: You have to understand as well that the women's system is so widely spread around the country when it comes to local issues, local community and local employers because of the displacement of so many women and, of course, women are also disproportionately serving shorter-term sentences as well. You have all of that to throw in the mix. I think, yes, women do have it rough with respect to follow-on employability because of the fact of that displacement.

Miriam Cates: They are likely to be moving a long way away, yes.

David Breakspear: Exactly, and between countries if you look at Wales. There is no female prison in Wales so they utilise Eastwood Park, which is in England. Then we have NHS England but there isn't an NHS Wales. Even just on a health basis there is not that connection between the two countries. We really are letting the women down in this.

Miriam Cates: Femi, do you have anything to add?

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: Yes, following on from what Kiri mentioned, I think this is why I would be concerned about education being focused on employability rather than allowing people to choose what they want to do and which avenues they want to do down. If we disregard things like the arts, music, acting, and say, "They are not really things that people can be employed from", why not? Someone could come out of prison and become an actor. People have done that. They could become a musician. They could become an artist.

We need to allow people within the prisons, whoever they are, to choose what they want to do and then allow them to use those skills. There should be a wide range of employers from different sectors prepared to take people from prison, no matter what they have chosen.

Ben Leapman: I never got to an open prison. I was in closed prison. I think there should be more open prisons and there should be an expectation that most prisoners should spend some time in one and that would help with the employment.

Miriam Cates: Yes, the transition. Thank you.

Q344 **Chair:** I don't think it is an either/or. I think it is both. Do you not think that apprenticeships could be started in the prisons? You start your apprenticeship and maybe even complete it but at least start it in the prisons. Just one person, who would like to respond on that?

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: Yes, 100%, apprenticeships should be able to be started in prisons if people want to do an apprenticeship. If someone, for example, wants to do an electrical apprenticeship and learn to be an electrician, what stops them from achieving the practical side within the prison? There is electricity within the prison. They can be supervised. They can be used by the prison to perform those practical parts of their apprenticeship.

Q345 **Apsana Begum:** I have two questions. For the first one I would particularly like to hear from David and Femi. Surely, one of the main objectives of education in prison should also be to help reduce rates of reoffending. I want to get a sense from you of what you think about that and what things you think need to be changed in terms of prison education to address that? What are the things that, if they are in place, really help reduce reoffending? For my second question I will come to Kiri afterwards.

David Breakspear: Prison learners, a reoffending rate of 34%; prison non-learners I think is around about 43%. That is on the average. We are not talking sentence length there. Femi, do you want to—

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: Sure. With regards to reducing reoffending, prison is supposed to be about rehabilitation and it is supposed to be about reintroducing someone from prison into the community. Education can easily be used to replicate the community setting. When I was in Pentonville Prison I did a criminology course with the University of Westminster. It brought students from the university into the prison. We had 10 from the university, 10 from the prison, and we studied together as a group.

The community setting was replicated and for me that gave me a sense of being part of the community, not being separate. That is where education can be a powerful influence in prisons by replicating the community setting because, when people are released, that is what they are going to go back to. If we get them used to this while they are in prison and help them adapt to that, on release they are more prepared. They are more well suited to reintegrate into the community and so reduce reoffending.

David Breakspear: I stopped myself because I did not want to say, but we place too much focus on reducing reoffending and not enough on the individual. If we start focusing on the individual, the actual prison journey and the education journey and the employability journey through prison, reducing reoffending will take care of itself. Again, there is just far too much focus on that. Let's focus on the individual and what it is that the

individual requires for them to turn around their life and live a life crime free.

Q346 **Apsana Begum:** Thank you. My question for Kiri: you have spoken a lot about women prisoners. We have seen various evidence and research showing that more than half of women in prison report that they are victims of domestic abuse. I want to get some sense of whether you think there are ways in which education in prison can adapt, recognise and support women to recognise that in themselves and to stop that cycle of harm in society when they come out.

Kiri Jolliffe: As a woman, when you have been through something like that, the first thing that happens to you is you forget your self-worth and you forget that you are okay and you can do this and you don't need to let that incident define you. Quite a lot of the women I met while I was in prison often blamed men for the reason why they were there. It could have been that they were their co-defendant or it could have been that, "I only did it because of him". There is a lot of blaming and a lot of, "I didn't do it. It wasn't me. It was him".

In terms of education, if women are taught more to respect themselves and know that they are a good person, they have just made a mistake, I think that that would be quite pinnacle to their movement when they do leave prison. Regarding actual education, it is very difficult because there is overwhelming emotion because you are potentially not going home for a long time.

First and foremost, I think it should be that their mental health is assessed to see whether they can do the courses because, personally for me, I have a lot of self-doubt. If I think I cannot do something I am just not going to do it. If I was taught that, "Actually, you can do this" and I did not hit those walls and feel like, "I am not doing this anymore. It is too hard" I would have been more successful.

David Breakspear: Can I just say something there? Let's not forget that we are talking about domestic violence and, yes, there are male victims, but in respect of the females they cannot be at fault and victims, so the education should not be towards the women in that respect. It should be towards the men who are committing the offences.

Q347 **Chair:** Thank you. I have a few questions to end. On exclusions, I understand that head teachers have to exclude pupils if they bring knives or drugs into the school. However, I do worry that we have 40 exclusions a day in school weeks and 60% of prisoners have been excluded from school. What should be done about this if we know that 60% of prisoners have been excluded? Clearly, the argument is to look at exclusions in general and see how we can change that so they do not end up in prison in the first place.

David Breakspear: The research is there. The University of Edinburgh in 2013 looked at the issue of prison overcrowding in Scottish prisons. It

concluded that the best place to reduce the prison overcrowding is to stop school exclusions. Over the last 10 years, schools in Glasgow have reduced school exclusions by 88%. Over that same period, youth crime has dropped by 50%. That is not a coincidence.

We don't just think about the individual; we have to look at the impact of parental imprisonment. A child is six times more likely to end up in prison if they have a parent in prison. You are breaking that chain if you can stop the school to prison pipeline. What I say is you can't go on a diet while continuing to eat the same amount or even more, and that is what the school exclusions provide. They are providing cannon fodder for county lines and they are providing cannon fodder for the criminal justice system. It is as if the education system is saying, "We can't deal with them. Let's pass them over to the criminal justice system". With that rate, as soon as you are excluded from school, you have a one in two chance of ending up in prison and that is not right.

Chair: I happen to agree with you. We have to have a proper place where children who have difficulties have supportive learning units, ideally in the school.

David Breakspear: Definitely. That is why we have prisons as well for—

Q348 **Chair:** At the moment, we just seem to dump a lot of these kids. Ben, you had this idea about having a prison national college. It is a very innovative idea that prisoners would go to an open prison but they spend their final months doing more formal education, as I understand what you are suggesting. How would it work and how would demand meet supply because you are suggesting just one?

Ben Leapman: Yes, and it probably wouldn't just be for the final few months because I would like to see a place where prisoners who have the aptitude to do higher education could transfer to one or two centres where there was a mass of them so they could then be taught by visiting lecturers. When we talk about secure schools, this would be like a secure college or a secure campus.

It would be a very powerful incentive for prisoners at every prison all over the country who felt they had the potential to do a degree-level study to work at getting the GCSEs or A-levels that they need to qualify to get to it. It wouldn't be for people on very short sentences but it would be for people who have some years to serve. They could earn the qualifications, transfer there and do it. It would incentivise people all over the country and, once they were there, it would be a real way to improve their lives.

There is a powerful case made by author Sophie Campbell in a book called "Breakfast at Bronzefield". She talks about the women she was serving with who were young women in their late teens or early 20s, who would have been at college at the time they were arrested, perhaps for looking after drugs or guns or something with a boyfriend. They have a

long sentence for it but they were people who were on a career path. They were at college and studying to make something of themselves. They get to prison and there is nothing for them. If they could get to an institution where they are kept in secure conditions, with all the perimeter walls around it, but within it they are taught to a degree level to get a qualification, when they leave they can go out and resume their lives as productive citizens free of crime, rather than having their whole career destroyed and ending up not having a future and more likely to reoffend.

Q349 **Chair:** Can I ask you about the educational providers that you had because there are four of them? Which ones were they and were they any good? Who was your educational provider?

Jonathan Gilbert: I didn't use those providers because I self-funded.

Kiri Jolliffe: It was PeoplePlus where I was. I didn't have much communication with them while in prison. There was one lady but the excuse given for her not understanding or knowing answers to my questions was because she was new.

Chair: Did you rate it or not?

Kiri Jolliffe: Did I rate it as in—

Chair: Your educational provider PeoplePlus? Are you saying it gave you a poor service?

Kiri Jolliffe: Yes.

Chair: Thank you. Interestingly, when we had Ofsted here, they couldn't even name who the four providers were, by the way.

Kiri Jolliffe: Watch that.

David Breakspear: Mine was PeoplePlus as well, east of England, and the Open University. I also have to mention the Prisoners' Education Trust, which played its part. For me, it is more to do with the individual than the provider. I am still in contact with my curriculum manager at HMP Norwich. She is no longer there as she's now teaching in mainstream schools or colleges. It was because of her that I am sitting here now. It is irrelevant whether that was PeoplePlus, Weston College or whatever one. It was that person who was next to me.

Chair: Yes, but it is useful to know which provider—

David Breakspear: Yes, it was PeoplePlus.

Chair: You were happy with its service?

David Breakspear: I was but I knew what way I needed to go in respect of education. Yes, the right courses were available at the right time, and

Deb Stewart just happened to be the right person at the right time in education, which is the reason I am sitting here today.

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: I was with Novus but Prisoners' Education Trust also played a big part. I would have to stress, like David, that it was the educators themselves who worked for Novus.

Chair: Were you happy with Novus? Did it give you a good service?

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: Yes. It was okay, yes.

Chair: You are not just being diplomatic?

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: No, no, I am not being diplomatic. It was okay.

Chair: Or being like a politician?

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: No, no, not at all. Novus was okay but it was the educator themselves who took the initiative and came up with—

Chair: You are saying that often it is not down to the agency, it is down to the individual?

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: Yes.

Ben Leapman: At my first prison, it was Novus and it was dreadful. There was no education I could do so I worked in the laundry for two years. That is probably more a function of it being a local prison rather than Novus being bad. I suspect it was the prison being bad. At my second prison, it was PeoplePlus. It was a lot better. Again, I worked in the prison industry's workshops rather than in the PeoplePlus education block, but they seemed to do a better job of it at that place.

Q350 **Chair:** In a nutshell, to all of you, in your prisons how supportive were the governors of education?

Ben Leapman: First prison, not at all supportive of education; second prison, a lot more so.

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: In mine, I think the educator had a good reputation with the governor so the governor gave them quite a long leash to work with.

David Breakspear: Hit and miss but improving.

Chair: Hit and miss.

Kiri Jolliffe: I honestly don't know. There is nothing I could comment on.

Jonathan Gilbert: At the start of my journey not at all, but later on very much so.

Q351 **Chair:** Finally, when we do our report we have to write a summary, which is what most people will read. What are three simple things that

could be included in the summary that people outside and the Government would understand about transforming prison education in our country?

Jonathan Gilbert: I would probably say culture. We touched on it initially. Make education equal with the vocations and prison jobs. It is the poor sibling at the moment. Then resolve the disconnect by the passport system or the assessment of the passport system and then the channel out through the open estate.

Chair: You are saying that every prisoner should be given an educational passport they can transfer from prison to prison?

Jonathan Gilbert: That is right, yes. You get continuity, not snakes and ladders.

Kiri Jolliffe: I say to ensure that the education is transferable and there is not a certain block of degrees you can do if you want to follow that process. I know in Foston there is only a certain number of degrees; there aren't loads that you can do. Also, focus on rehabilitation and use the money for those resources rather than things that security has, for example, like the x-ray machines.

Chair: Can you explain that, sorry? You are saying do not spend so much money on x-ray machines, spend more on education?

Kiri Jolliffe: Yes, just as an example of the stuff that they use. When you do go into prison you have body scanners, x-ray machines, all of this jazzy stuff, but I think they are using those resources for no reason. I think you should focus on the actual rehabilitation.

Chair: Thank you. David?

David Breakspear: Probably slightly left-field but stop school exclusions; value prison education in our prison system; and improve the needs analysis and screening.

Femi Laryea-Adekimi: I would say increase the use of digital technology. Don't use it to replace face to face, though. Jonathan mentioned transferability; have that passport centrally so people moving can keep records of their education. Reduce the limitations on what people can do; whether they are serving a long or a short sentence, allow more accessibility to all education.

Ben Leapman: My three thoughts are, first, increase the spending. I think it is £150 million a year at the moment, which works out as £5 per prisoner per day. A prisoner's food budget is £2 per prisoner per day and the food is not good. £5 per prisoner per day, the education is not good. Secondly, the secure college idea I was talking about would be a fantastic innovation, and I would love to see the Committee pick it up. Finally, I would do away with the four education providers and have one national service so that when prisoners move between prisons, as they always do,

they can continue with the same courses and not have to start from scratch again.

Q352 **Chair:** Do you have in mind who that national provider would be? Should it be the Open University or an FE college, or private?

Ben Leapman: I am old fashioned so I would like to see a national education service run through the Department for Education. If it was to be a private one, I don't know if the Open University would have the skills. Maybe Milton Keynes College or something would do it, but it would be better to have one doing it nationally rather than piecemeal. I do not think there is any benefit to having different providers.

Chair: Thank you, it is appreciated. It is invaluable for our evidence. Thank you for your time in coming here today as well. I wish you luck in all the work you are doing in your respective areas, so thank you.