



Welsh Affairs Committee

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From the Chair

09 February 2024

Bryn Hall
Senior Development Officer for Wales, Clinks

Thank you for appearing before the Welsh Affairs Committee on Wednesday 17 January as part of our inquiry into prisons in Wales.

During the session, you agreed to write to the Committee on the matter of education provision for Welsh women serving sentences in English prisons, noting that at HMP Eastwood Park – where a significant proportion of Welsh female offenders are held – its most recent inspection report failed to mention the educational experiences of Welsh women serving custodial sentences there.

I would be grateful if you could outline your organisation's perspective on the adequacy of education provision for Welsh women serving sentences in English prisons. Furthermore, could you explain how this compares with the education provision available to men serving sentences in prisons in Wales?

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Stephen Crabb MP

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Dear Chair

Re. Welsh Affairs Committee inquiry into prisons in Wales – Follow-up to oral evidence session on 17 January 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to provide oral evidence to the Committee in January as part of its inquiry into Prisons in Wales, and your subsequent letter of 9 February 2024.

Following that, we have been in contact with voluntary sector organisations to try to gather information about the experiences of Welsh women in prison around education. However, the detail that is available on this topic is very limited.

Whilst the majority of Welsh women are likely to be placed at HMP Styal or HMP Eastwood Park, they could be placed in any prison across the women's estate. In the latest *Prisons in Wales 2022 Factfile*, published in November 2023, Dr Robert Jones found that there were 226 Welsh women in prison in 2022. These women were held in 11 of the 12 women's prisons in England, with 77% placed at HMP Eastwood Park and HMP Styal. As such, it is important that the focus on education for Welsh women in prison is not solely limited to these two prisons.

Detail on the education provision HMP Eastwood Park and HMP Styal is concerning or limited as a result of its timeliness, respectively. In the most recent Independent Review of Progress at HMP Eastwood Park, from September 2023, it was found that insufficient progress was made against all three of the themes Ofsted identified for improvement as part of the Unannounced Inspection carried out in October 2022, in which education received an overall effectiveness grade of 'requires improvement'.

The most recent inspection of HMP Styal was an Unannounced Inspection in September and October 2021, during which time overall grades were not given following inspections as prisons were still recovering from the height of the pandemic. That inspection did identify that "leaders were making reasonable progress towards ensuring that staff teach a full curriculum and provide support for women's needs". However, these findings are now two and a half years old and so it is not known whether this still reflects the current experiences of women in HMP Styal.

The overall judgement of the quality of prison education across the whole estate has not been positive: in 2022-23, of the 43 inspections carried out by HM Inspectorate of Prisons and Ofsted,

only four were judged to be 'good', with 20 judged as 'requires improvement', and 19 judged as 'inadequate'.

However, the process of these inspections also highlights a problem around the education provision for Welsh women: as the women's prisons are based in England, the education offer is being inspected and monitored by Ofsted, the English education inspectorate, rather than Estyn, the education inspectorate for Wales. This raises questions as to where the responsibility lies for ensuring the provision, and monitoring, of the quality of education available to Welsh women, especially if they wish to access Welsh courses, or participate in education in Welsh.

The Ministry of Justice does publish statistics on accredited programmes in custody and education in prison. However, this data is not broken down by establishment nor by address location prior to entering prison for the education data. This means it is hard to draw any conclusions about the experiences and outcomes of Welsh women in prison regarding education separate to those of all women in prison. As such, Clinks supports greater disaggregated data being published around education, to help enable an understanding to be built of the experiences of Welsh women.

In the Review of Offender Education in Wales, conducted by the now former MP, David Hanson, in 2019, challenges were identified around access to Welsh language materials for Welsh women in English prisons, and that labour market information data from Wales was not used by education providers in English prisons as they instead focussed on skills needed in the areas surrounding the prison.

The findings of this review were highlighted in the written evidence to the Committee's inquiry submitted by the Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA), as well as some further details about the Hanson Review's recommendations. We would encourage the Committee to return to the relevant section of that submission to its inquiry. Building on the Hanson Review and the written evidence from the PLA, we would also recommend that the Committee investigates what scope there is for work to follow-up on the findings and recommendations of the Hanson Review around education for Welsh women in prison.

As was identified in the Hanson Review, Clinks believes it is essential that the education available to Welsh women in English Prisons is equitable with the education options available to Welsh men in Welsh prisons. Part of this also includes ensuring that Welsh women are able to access education, training, and employment support in Welsh, if they wish to do so.

In order to achieve this, it will be essential for HM Prison and Probation Service to work with the Welsh Government to ensure Welsh women are able to access education courses that are likely to be of most benefit to them. The Welsh Government's Offender Learning and Employability Stakeholder Group has an objective "to enable key stakeholders to influence the support for employability of female offenders residing in Wales who are in prisons in England", showing its aspirations to drive improvement in this area, which will rely on good partnership working with criminal justice agencies.

Separately, we would also like to share some further information with the Committee in relation to Q50, asked by Rob Roberts MP, during the oral evidence session. Since the session took place, we have finalised the data analysis of our 2023 *State of the sector* research, and so are able to share some more information with the Committee. Mr Roberts highlighted the finding in *State of the sector 2022* that 80% of organisations who responded to our survey reported an increase in the level and complexity of service users need, with over half reporting an increase in the urgency of service user need.

In our research this year, we posed the same question to voluntary organisations working in criminal justice and four-in-five respondents told us that the level and complexity of service user need had increased in 2022-23 compared to the previous year. Moreover, just over seven-in-ten organisations said the urgency of service user need had risen. We have seen survey respondents report an increase in the complexity and urgency of need in the last six surveys we have carried out, and since the introduction of the question in 2021, organisations have reported an increase in the level of service user need every year.

To support the survey, we also conducted focus groups with representatives from voluntary organisations. In the focus groups, participants said these findings about the increase in service user need matched their own experiences. Participants identified the primary factors behind the increase in service user need as being the cost-of-living crisis, the impact of the pandemic, and the longer-term trend towards reductions in public services. It was felt that these had resulted in more acute issues, with fewer ways for people to access support, leading to a greater clustering of problems.

Our research also found that voluntary organisations had seen rises in operating costs, and were delivering services under contracts on which they are not achieving full cost recovery. This latter challenge around the cost of delivering public services to the voluntary sector has also been highlighted in recent research from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations, *The True Cost of Delivering Public Services*, published on Monday 4 March 2024.

Whilst a majority of the organisations that responded to Clinks' survey said they were confident about their organisation's financial sustainability over the next two years, this optimism was qualified by participants in the focus groups. Participants were broadly confident their organisation would still exist over the next two years, but they were unsure in what capacity they would be doing so. This reflected that, while the financial outlook for organisations had improved from a year ago, there remained a large amount of uncertainty within the sector.

Our complete 2023 *State of the sector* research is due to be published on Monday 18 March 2024, and we would be delighted to share that with the Committee if it would be of help to its inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Bryn Hall
Senior Development Officer for Wales, Clinks