

Written evidence submitted by Ms Joanne Vance

Currently, education in prisons is provided by external businesses, its purpose is not always known and prisoner engagement is erratic and in decline. In many instances the providers' learning and skills management teams have not worked in education for many years, and therefore are completely unaware of its relevance to the offender and their life, how it should be delivered effectively in order to have a positive impact and they do not appear to make the changes to delivery and curriculum in line with schools and colleges.

In prison, education is delivered in establishment classrooms with lessons lasting up to three hours and assuming the same structure as in a school or college. Given that many prisoners were excluded from school it seems nonsensical to think that placing them back into a similar environment would have a different outcome; quite often prisoners do not see the course through. This is because the quality of education in prisons is for the most part substandard - subjects are taught to the textbook and the test with no context or sharing of the bigger picture, such as real life applications of the work being undertaken by the prisoners. Consequently, prisoners become disengaged, leave the course and ultimately their self-esteem and confidence continues to plummet. Furthermore, whilst the prisoners may gain Functional Skills qualifications in mathematics, English and possibly ICT there are limited opportunities for the prisoners to extend beyond these levels unless they do so through distance learning courses.

When tracking education data in the prisons, providers focus solely on individuals and their progress, however, there appears to be limited data and reports on the effectiveness of the provision of education in the long term:

- Were the prisoner's qualifications relevant to them and their future?;
- What percentage of prisoners continued onto further education?;
- What percentage of prisoners who accessed education in prison did not reoffend?;
- What percentage of prisoners with LDD access education?;
- What support is there for prisoners with LDD in the establishment's education system?;

Until education providers can honestly answer these questions I believe that the true impact and quality of education in prisons will remain unknown.

A significant amount of money is paid to the external providers of education for their services yet prisons are full and offending and reoffending has a combined social and economic cost of approximately £48 billion per year therefore could it then be argued that the organisations providing education in prisons are most definitely not

doing so within a value for money and accountability framework. When this issue is addressed prison education may actually begin to have the desired impact and outcomes.

Education in prisons needs to be more personalised to be successful and given the large amount of money being paid to providers this should be possible, it simply requires the providers to be passionate about social justice and social capital and not the bottom line.

Incentivising prisoners to participate in education should not, and indeed would not be necessary if the subject was relevant and the subject matter was current and delivered in context by outstanding practitioners. Rather than incentivise participation in education classes, incentivise the outcome; for example, in the real world the level of education positively correlates to the level of pay (Eurostat data). Therefore, the higher the level of qualifications a prisoner has the higher the salary they receive while employed in the prison. Additionally, removing education from classrooms and embedding it into industries gives it more value, highlights its relevance and makes both employment and education more accessible for all; this also imitates the format of traineeships and apprenticeships in society and therefore when a prisoner exits the criminal justice system they are aware and familiar with education and employment systems, processes and content.

To conclude, data and reports that are available and indeed the data and reports that are not available highlight the huge chinks in the armour of the current prison education system. Reform of the current prison education system and the delivery process is needed imminently if more effective and long lasting outcomes are expected; this should possibly begin with detailed reviews of prisons Inspectorate reports and those that are paid to deliver a vital and what should be outstanding service.

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