

Written evidence submitted by Entrepreneurs Unlocked CIC

Introduction

I am submitting this evidence as I believe in the transformational power of education. I have observed it an employee of a prison education provider and the founder of my own organisation by learning from listening to over a thousand people in the last ten years either in custody or the community who are seeking help and support to improve their life chances.

Company background

Entrepreneurs Unlocked CIC vision is to reduce re-offending through entrepreneurship. It provides specialist and focused programmes of learning and support for people who are looking to develop their entrepreneurial talent as an employee, small business owner or self-employed subcontractor and become a positive contributor to society.

These programmes are carefully constructed to identify, explore, and harness the participants potential. The programmes include exploring your career pathway, how to set up and run a small business and gaining work as a subcontractor in the construction industry. The support ranges from distance learning packs, face to face small group workshops and individualised coaching. This starts in custody and can continue post release, or in the community for those accessing probation services.

Biography

I set up Entrepreneurs Unlocked after an eight-year career with Novus, the largest provider of prison education in England. As the lead for enterprise and self-employment I was able to substantially increase the number of prisons that delivered workshops and courses that enabled learners to develop their skills and knowledge. I engaged with and learnt from hundreds of men and women, enabling an informed pathway to be developed.

I was inspired to set up my own organisation following travels to the US in 2018 to research prison and community entrepreneurship programmes with exceptionally low rates of re-offending. The rate of Re-offending of these programmes is less than 10% compared to the US average of 60% within 2 years of release. This was possible through the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust, of which I am humbled to be a Fellow, and part of a network of like-minded individuals who travelled to learn and returned to inspire.

I am a Member of the Institute of Enterprise and Entpreneurs (IOEE) and was recognised as their Member of the Year 2018 for their outstanding contribution in developing entrepreneurship and self-employment programmes in over 40 prisons in England over a 4-year period, enabling 2,000 leaners per year to access enterprise and business start-up qualifications from their awarding body SFEDI.

As a Fellow of the RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce). This means I can access the latest research and networks that supports innovation in three major areas: creative learning and development, public services and communities, and economy, enterprise and manufacturing.

Submission

The purpose of education in prisons is to provide a pathway for the prison resident to increase their knowledge and make an informed choice about how to successfully re-integrate into society post release. Being educated can take many forms and should not wholly focus on gaining qualifications but provide a holistic learning framework based on the needs of the individual. It should empower people to take responsibility for their learning and be a positive experience and not something that is seen to be forced upon them. It should not just be about a pathway to employment but about personal, social and economic development and mobility. Learning about the world we live in, how to become a contributing member of society (in whatever form that takes) needs to be considered. Prison residents need to learn life skills as much as employment skills.

Employers are looking for people that have:

- 1: The personal attributes to be a productive and contributing member of their organisation
- 2: The skills, knowledge and experience to complete the activities required

The job market is so varied, with entry level occupations requiring lower levels of experience and skills up to graduate roles. Prison education needs to provide the opportunity for learners to have access up to date digital technology that better prepares them for the world of work. The use of technology is growing faster, and people are being left further and further behind, widening the skills gap.

Enabling access to secure, industry standard digital technology right across the prison estate should be a priority. Furthermore, greater access to higher level learning should be made available with L3 qualifications and certification from professional institutes in specialist industry sectors.

Employers are wanting to employ people with the right personal attributes, and with a number of prison residents having a limited employment history, there needs to be a greater emphasis on developing the entrepreneurial skills that can underpin a successful reintegration as a future employee or self-employed person.

Embedding entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills should become an essential part of any vocational education or prison workshop. Employers need people that are forward thinking, self-motivated, willing to try new things, determined, business focussed and confident. If you have a limited employment record you must be able to showcase these skills and talents. Personal Entrepreneurship is a way to do this.

Linking with the above is the need to develop ways for prison residents to explore and experience the potential to become self-employed. 15% of the UK workforce is classed as self-employed yet this is an under-represented pathway in prisons. A large number of people will not be able to gain employment due their conviction, so they need to have access to other ways of earning a legitimate income upon release. This does not necessarily mean setting up a traditional business but can be freelancing or offering services such as personal training. The construction sector has a significant workforce, with a large number of people being self-employed sub-contractors. Prison education needs to be able offer a blended learning approach of knowledge based and practical learning experiences to place a greater emphasis on this pathway.

Incentivising education needs to answer the “what’s in it for me question” for the learner. Why would someone want to gain additional skills and knowledge without knowing its value and benefit to them? Some prison residents are now much more aware of the prison education system and see themselves as an income generator for the provider. This is

highlighted when they sit in classrooms / workshops where other learners are put there to meet purposeful activity targets who clearly have no interest or motivation to learn about the subject matter. The incentive should be in the “sell” of the value the learning is going to provide the learner for their future prospects. If there is a consideration to a physical / monetary incentive that has an immediate impact to their prison life, then maybe an equivalent of a week’s education wage for successful completion of a L2 qualification.

Apprenticeships have the potential to provide a stronger link between forward thinking employers and prison residents that have a clearly defined and structured reintegration plan. They should have already completed their basic skills and be refining their skill set for the future. It provides the prison resident the opportunity to gain industry experience and knowledge in the world of work. Apprenticeships that are paying just the minimum wage are not always an attractive option to someone with household bills to pay, but if the prison resident was able to access this opportunity whilst on ROTL, then they benefit by not having household expenses and they can earn (even a little) while they learn. The challenge is overcoming the legislative and employment law barriers that exist. The apprenticeship provider also has to have a degree of confidence in drawing the funding to pay for their costs and make it economically viable to sign up to such a scheme. With a number of apprenticeships now being offered at a higher level and paying higher wages there are higher risks for the employer and provider that would need to be accommodated (length of course / continued access to learning and assessment).

Current prison resources for prison learning meeting need (in my experience) varies greatly depending upon the establishment. As previously mentioned, access to industry standard and up to date digital technology and learning platforms is essential. Investment in in-cell learning technology to complement classroom-based learning is a must. There must be an investment in upskilling the teachers and trainers by enabling them to access industry standard training and courses without the stress and impact of having to make up their contact hours quota. Enough money should be in the provision to enable CPD to take place.

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