

Written evidence submitted by Milton Keynes College

Milton Keynes College has considerable experience in delivering high quality and successful Educational Services to a range of Adult and Young Offender prison establishments. We have delivered these services in custody since 1992 and are currently delivering within 19 adult establishments across England, through the Ministry of Justice Prison Education Framework contracts.

We would be very interested in attending the Select Committee to offer oral evidence

What is the purpose of education in prisons?

Education in prisons has a range of purposes but key is to rehabilitate and reduce reoffending. In order to do this, education needs to be delivered by educational specialists, with an understanding of how best to meet the individual needs of a range of learners from a variety of backgrounds, and an understanding of the learning journeys and destinations that will support this rehabilitation.

Educational provision can have a significant impact by giving prisoners the opportunity to re-engage, or engage for the first time, in purposeful educational activities and thereby providing them with the chance to see the real opportunities for them in their wider communities, whether this is in custody for a prisoner serving a longer sentence, or on release for those serving a shorter sentence.

Education can provide the skills and training to support prisoners to engage in purposeful employment, both within a custodial environment but also on release from prison into their local communities.

Education can increase confidence and self-esteem, and allows a safe and supportive space for a prisoner to reflect, develop and improve their skills and abilities for work, for being with their families, and being a positive member of their community.

Education in prison can provide an important enrichment element to a curriculum, as well as a focus on developing skills for work, and supports prisoners' personal development and behaviours.

The recent period of lockdown, due to Covid-19, has also demonstrated the importance of educational services in terms of supporting prisoners' well-being, and supporting prisoners' engagement, motivation, and sense of self-worth.

Partnership and leadership across each prison is essential to provide a purposeful and constructive educational provision, with a joint approach and commitment from all partners

involved, including HMPPS colleagues. This will then provide a coherent and relevant curriculum which supports each prisoner's learning journey.

What data exist to demonstrate the effectiveness of education and training in prisons and on prisoner attainment and what international comparisons are available?

From the start of the current PEF Contract the Authority developed and implemented the Curious Management Information System. This is the mandated MI System for use across all prisons and is the repository for all data on prisoners' learning and enables both the Authority and authorised Supplier personnel to view the data at prisoner level, prison level, Supplier level and a national level.

These data demonstrate the effectiveness of education and training in prisons and support all stakeholders to assess need, target accurately and drive improvement in the breadth and quality of education and training.

These data will include success data on accredited and unaccredited programmes, as well as learners' achievement, retention and attendance data.

All education provision is subject to Ofsted inspection, which covers all work, skills and activities delivered in an establishment, not just the educational provision.

Each prison and each individual education provider will produce an annual Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan, which will make judgements, based on the Ofsted EIF and drawing on a range of data including success, retention and achievement, attendance, outcomes, lesson observations, learner feedback, Awarding Organisation reports, staff performance.

How well are additional learning needs met by the prison education and youth custody systems, including SEND and language and communication needs?

Within the provision that Milton Keynes College offers within the adult estate, all prisoners are screened at induction for barriers to learning including learning difficulties, sensory and physical impairment, mental and physical health conditions that could impact on learning, speech, language and communication needs and previous experience of education. Prisoners are also given the opportunity to share information about previous support and strategies they find useful.

When we are able to meet prisoners face to face (a challenge during the pandemic), anyone who flags as possibly needing support either at induction or at any point during their course is offered a detailed screening by a specialist member of staff to establish their needs in more depth and to discuss a support plan. This information is shared with all education staff and can be accessed by other prison staff as appropriate.

Learners are allocated a tier according to their support needs and will either be supported by teaching staff, learning support practitioners, trained peer mentors or a combination of all 3.

Each prison has a qualified member of staff to co-ordinate additional learning support across the department. They are supported by a level 7 qualified SEND Co-ordinator and a team of level 7 qualified assessors.

There is a robust process in place for offering exam access arrangement to learners who require them and staff are given annual training to support this.

Prisoner peer mentors are offered training to raise awareness of how to support learners with additional learning support needs.

Education departments are able to offer resources to support learners such as coloured overlays, tangles, reading pens and magnifiers.

Some prisons have good liaison between healthcare and mental health to enhance support for learners and to share relevant information. However we would like to see this good practice supported more by the prisons.

EHCPs are difficult to obtain; but we do have a process in place to follow these up. We can no longer claim the additional funding from the LEA for this.

There are regular meetings between the 4 PEF providers so that SEND leads can share best practice and work towards consistency of support for learners.

There are regular training and CPD opportunities for learning support practitioners, tutors and other staff.

Does education in prisons deliver the skills needed by employers, and what more can be done to better align these?

Nearly all prisons offer a range of vocational programmes for their prisoners to access; however, the relevance and quality of these programmes is not consistent across the estate.

Where we have successfully placed a large number of prisoners into sustainable employment on release from prison, our experience has been that it is essential to consider local sector needs, employer needs and to work in partnership with key stakeholders in order to develop a relevant and appropriate curriculum.

The successful programmes have been developed in partnership with the provider (us), the prison and an employer, involving the employer in delivery, providing resources and to support the route into gaining a real job. This link with an employer also gives programmes validity with the prisoners, as they can see and understand the purpose. Partnership working between those with the educational expertise is really important, but does not always happen.

There are some courses such as CSCS, which meet employer needs, but these can be difficult to deliver in prisons due to security requirements.

Many workshops are outdated and will need investment to bring them up to industry standard. Capital investment to support this is required.

A number of HMPPS industry workshops are run by HMPPS instructors who are not qualified teachers/assessors, and so are not in a position to deliver qualifications.

The need to run many of these workshops as production shops provides a challenge in terms of balancing the educational input (which take time) and the need to produce goods (which is time bound).

How can successful participation in education be incentivised in prisons?

There are a range of ways to incentivise participation – key is a recognition by each establishment of the importance and value of education.

The pay structure in each prison is essential. Currently, it is not unusual for an unskilled wing cleaner to earn 2 or 3 times as much as learner in education, studying to achieve maths and English qualifications, or working as a qualified peer mentor in the classroom. The temptation to take a manual job that offers a high rate of pay can often deter a prisoner with learning needs attending education.

Therefore, a consistent approach across a prison, that recognises and rewards educational attendance and outcomes, would act as a strong motivator (nb during lockdown, many prisoners have accessed in-cell learning who have refused to engage before, as they have continued to receive their higher 'worker' pay during the lockdown period).

A whole prison approach is important to developing a culture of education; if discipline staff understand, engage with and promote education ie through the key workers, this does have a significant impact.

Across the prisons where we deliver education, we provide a range of learner celebration events. Where possible, family members are invited to attend these. These are really motivational for our learners, as again, their hard work is recognised and valued.

How might apprenticeships work for those in custody?

We have spent several years researching the potential of using apprenticeships in custody, including involvement the Prisoner Apprenticeship Pathway (PAP) project. But as they stand, an apprenticeship is a challenge.

Reasons for this are the legal requirements for an apprentice to hold a contract of employment, the rigour of the new Standards and End Point Assessments, and challenges of providing the appropriate environment ie real work placements and a full working week.

An adaption of the Traineeship model (a route into an apprenticeship), with links to actual employers and training providers, would offer a strong route into an apprenticeship on release for the appropriate learners in custody. A pathway model could be developed, to include maths, English, robust work experience, employability skills, and on-programme links with the actual provider and employer who will take on the specific learner on release. To support this model, it could be incentivised along the lines of the Kick Start model, so that the learner, and the training provider and employer providing the apprenticeship on release, receive a financial bonus. ROTL could be used as learners approach release.

It would be helpful to have a 'financial development pot' to develop this pathway model and an initial alternative funding pot to fund the pathway as is being delivered and assessed for feasibility. (It is feasible for a current PEF provider to develop and trial a model under the current contract, to inform future contract potential). In this way, the pathway is not linked to current funding restrictions and would allow best practice to be developed. It would also de-link fears of double funding possibilities as the pathway is being worked on.

Strong advice and guidance would be essential to prevent issues of double funding ie if a learner completed a carpentry qualification in prison and then wanted to go on and complete a construction apprenticeship on release, the current rules would not allow this. So, clarity of learning pathways, the learner's preferred outcome and options to achieve this, are essential for each learner, and for the provision.

Prisons would need prisoners with an appropriate time left to serve ie at least 6 months to undertake this pathway model. Prisons would need to establish links with the employer and training provider. The Education Provider would be well placed to do this.

Qualified prisoner mentors could be used to support learners on the pathway model.

Branding is important. In our experience, learners in prison judge Traineeships/Apprenticeships as poorly paid and something that 16 year olds do. These need to be marketed well as something for learners to aspire to, within a prison environment.

Key sectors to explore would include construction, logistics, finance (book keeping/office), and customer service. Retail, catering/hospitality, hair/barbering were good, but not currently due to the pandemic. However, if a model is developed, it can be used across any sector as needs develop.

Are current resources for prison learning meeting need?

Learning and educational resources are often a challenge in prisons.

Most importantly, and as highlighted during the current pandemic, prisons need a coherent digital infrastructure. This is not just a PEF IT refresh (which is currently happening) but an infrastructure across the whole establishment ie in-cell technology. If the right technology was available on residential units and in cells, this would revolutionise how education could be delivered.

There is also a requirement for investment in key features ie prison workshops. There needs to be capital investment separate from the PEF contract, and this process needs to be

flexible, accessible and one that works. This capital pot needs to be de-linked from the contract for the education provision ie the current education contract is designed to force prices down, so it becomes a challenge to cost in full workshop refurbishments, whilst offering a competitive tender.

For educational providers, resources are inherited and can be poor quality and so may not reflect industry standards in many cases. Prisons could work with LEPs, employers, big projects ie HS2, to agree relevant resources and to see if external stakeholders will provide these, if we are training a potential workforce for them.

What should happen when prison education is assessed as not meeting standards?

It is really important that a culture of education is embedded into prison establishments. If prison education is assessed as not meeting standards, it will be multi-faceted problems and likely will not belong with one area in the prison.

It is essential that the LSM, HoRR, and Governor work in partnership with all providers in a prison to develop a coherent intent for their educational vision; our experience is that where this happens, provision is strong, as all parties regularly meet, discuss, review ideas and hold each other to account. Where the no.1 Governor chairs the Quality Improvement Group meeting, this has a significant impact.

On-going training for prison colleagues would be beneficial so that they understand that education is a professional service and is essential to the rehabilitation process. We need prison governors and officers to become advocates for education, and ideally governors with an educational background to manage the education contracts.

If Ofsted have assessed the provision and it is not up to standard, then support and guidance can be provided either from an Ofsted support team (if they still exist) or, in our case, through our Prison Services Quality Team, with support from the HMPPS Quality Team.

The provider's Quality Team can drive improvements in the provision through support, coaching and guidance. Staff will be supported to improve their practice, if this is the issue, or will be performance managed where this is not possible.

Providers and prisons need to share an understanding of quality standards i.e. we co-deliver training programmes and CPD for HMPPS Prison Instructors, and share standardisation meetings where HMPPS Prison Instructors deliver qualifications.

How does the variability in the prison estate and infrastructure impact on learning?

Some prisons are custom-built with 'education departments' and 'classrooms' and a good digital infrastructure within the education department; some prisons are old, with classrooms based in what were once cells. This impacts on both the quality of the learning

experience for the prisoners, but also on the motivation of and ability to recruit and retain highly professional staff, who will be accustomed to a 21st century learning environment.

Prisons also have a tendency to offer similar programmes, despite their category, or to offer what has always been historically available. As a result this does not always meet the need of individual learners (skills needs, sentence length and type), and may not be relevant in terms of employment opportunities.

For example, local prisons have learners for a very short length of time and need to offer a more intense offer. Training prisons should offer programmes linked to employment on release (as well as meeting wider and personal skills), whilst longer term establishments need to focus on well-being, enrichment, and a working life in the prison.

One approach would be to take a thematic approach ie to be allocated to prison X to do a particular vocational or skills based course, so that areas of educational specialism could be developed.

How does provision compare in the public and privately run prisons?

We have delivered educational provision in both private and public prisons, and have had both effective and poor experiences in trying to deliver outstanding learning outcomes. The quality of the provision will be impacted by the leadership, ownership, partnership and culture in each prison, and not necessarily linked to private or public ownership.

How effective and flexible is prison education and training in dealing with different lengths of sentences and the movement of prisoners across the estate?

Curriculum plans in each category of prison are intended to reflect that prison's population and have a purpose that reflects sentence length. Where these plans work well, they are the result of collaborative design of the curriculum at a local level, often reflecting a local Governor's personal commitment.

The current PEF contract is fairly bureaucratic and so it is not as easy to be flexible and innovative to quickly meet changing needs, as it would be for a provider delivering its mainstream provision.

Curious data, as referenced above, covers learning in all English prisons. This should support an understanding of each learner's journey and achievements to date, as prisoners transfer between prisons.

DPS enables a range of partners to deliver smaller, specialist programmes within each prison, to meet specific need. Smaller providers have shared with us that they preferred subcontracting their offers through us, as happened with the previous contact, as we can then manage the bureaucracy and the risk attached (as their learners are effectively our learners).

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