

Written evidence submitted by The Open University

1. The Open University (OU) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Education Committee's Inquiry on prison education.

Executive Summary

2. Prison education –including higher education –transforms the lives of many prisoners. It provides a multitude of benefits; including rehabilitating offenders, reducing reoffending, improving behaviour in prison, and therefore savings to the taxpayer.
3. **Based on our experience as the primary provider of higher education in prisons and secure units in the UK, we identify a number of recommendations for the Committee to consider in relation to the inquiry's call for evidence. These are:**
4. Providing each student with a secure laptop for learning would make higher education more flexible, accessible, and promote digital skills. This would also help meet the needs of employers, and would reduce the difficulty of moving physical materials around prison estates.
5. The Government (chiefly DfE and MoJ) should investigate initiatives to reduce the cost of HE study for prisoners to increase enrolment in higher education in prisons.
6. In-cell study should be classified as a purposeful activity to encourage more prisons to broaden their educational offer enabling students in prisons to select the course/type of learning most suitable to their needs.
7. Apprenticeships should be available to prison learners who are eligible for release on temporary licence (ROTL). Amendments to ESFA rules are required to enable this such as introducing a 'memorandum of understanding' with the employer to meet the requirements of an apprenticeship rather than the need for an employment contract.
8. Investment in ICT infrastructure and greater access to forms of digital learning are essential and a key priority.
9. More funding should be made available for innovative prison education pilot schemes to test and learn new approaches for meeting future resource needs.
10. The Ministry of Justice and Department for Education should work together to create a minimum level of infrastructure that should be available for prison learning. This would allow learning providers to standardise their learning offer across prisons. It would also reduce the many inconsistencies between prisons.
11. The Student Support Regulations for England and Wales should be amended to extend student loan eligibility to include people in prison who have more than six years to run on their sentence.

About the OU

12. The OU is the primary provider of Higher Education (HE) in prisons and secure units in the UK, operating in over 150 prisons (covering all security categories). In England the OU is contracted by the Ministry of Justice to manage degree study within prisons. We currently have a three year contract to provide prison education, the first such contract of its kind (contracts are normally for one year) The OU has provided courses to students in prison since 1972 and currently has approximately 1800 students a year in prisons and secure units. We also have a small number of post-graduate students in prisons too.
13. The OU's core curriculum for students in secure environments (SiSE) delivers c.130 individual modules and 28 named undergraduate Degrees. These include undergraduate degrees in Maths; Business Studies; Business Management; Languages; Arts; Social Sciences and Sports and Fitness as well as the Open Degree and several Certificates and Diplomas of Higher Education.
14. Between 2006-2016, over 1500 students in prisons and secure units gained an OU qualification; including over 1000 Certificates of Higher Education and over 250 Degrees whilst serving a custodial sentence.¹
15. OU study in a secure environment is organised through an individual prison education department, learning centre or Occupational Therapist. In partnership with the OU, the prison education department help with study plans and choice of qualification and modules; application and registration; fees and funding; study materials; tutorial visits; assessment; and general study support.

The OU's Prison Education Offer

16. SiSE have access to a range of HE courses. This includes three **interdisciplinary Access modules** that have been specifically designed to help students find out what it's like to study with the OU, get a taste for the subjects we offer, develop their study skills, build their confidence, and prepare them for further study towards one of our nationally recognised qualifications. These are; *Arts and Languages*; *People, Work & Society*; and *Science, Technology & Maths*.
17. The OU has developed a "walled garden", a **prison Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)** in order to address the "digital exclusion" of our learners in prison and to offer them a more equitable study experience. Access module students are currently able to study their OU modules using the OU prison VLE via the Virtual Campus and the University intends to offer as much of its curriculum as possible to prison learners using this platform. By the end of 2018 we offered over 120 modules on the platform.
18. All students receive an **offline pack** which includes all study materials, including books, printed materials and a DVD. To use some of this material requires access to equipment that plays DVDs and the use of a computer.
19. Before starting a module, SiSE are assigned an OU tutor to help them through the module via correspondence tuition and (where possible) tutorial visits. They may also occasionally hold telephone tutorials (when permitted).

¹ Statistics are only available for students who received their qualification whilst still serving their sentence – since the University does not track students on release. They therefore do not include those students who began studying in custody, continued their studies and attained their qualification on release.

20. Prison education departments receive further support through the OU's SiSE Support Teams. The OU has staff across England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland who look after students in secure environments and support the education staff. These staff have access to information and resources for all aspects of OU study, and can provide specialist advice and guidance to help with study choices, career options, and fees and funding.

What is the purpose of education in prisons?

21. The purpose of education in prisons is to help rehabilitate prisoners and reduce reoffending by equipping offenders with the skills to gain employment on release.
22. Many offenders commit crimes due to a lack of opportunity, which is limited by their low levels of education, qualifications, and skills. The 2016 Coates Review of education in prison² found that among adult prisoners:
- 47% report having no qualifications
 - 13% report never having a job
 - A greater proportion was assessed on reception as having English and maths levels at Entry Level 1-3 (equivalent to primary school) as opposed to Level 1 and 2 combined (GCSE level)
 - Added to that nearly one third self-identified as part of their initial assessment as have a learning difficulty and/or disability
23. Analysis by the Ministry of Justice Data Lab on reoffending behaviour after support from the OU showed that prisoners who have undertaken higher education via distance learning were less likely to reoffend and reoffended less frequently than those who did not.³ Furthermore, the Longford Trust reports that the targeted support it provides for serving and ex-prisoners to undertake HE courses at universities results in fewer than 5% of recipients of its awards reoffending.⁴
24. Within the prison itself, education brings its own range of additional benefits. Prisoners who study an HE course often take on a wide range of additional support roles within the prison relating to education, violence reduction, equalities, tackling drug misuse, counselling and listening. They often become trusted prisoners who contribute to a settled environment and can use their study experiences to guide others of a lower academic ability into educational pathways. They act as role models and take on formal mentoring within educational departments and vocational skills workshops.
25. Prisoners that study at a higher-level are also better placed to participate – constructively and proactively – in the committees and prisoner/student councils that tackle issues relating to the running of prisons. For example, HMP Coldingley and HMP The Mount both use student councils in this way. A violence reduction and mediation scheme initiated at HMP The Mount helped to address the high number of violent incidents against staff and between prisoners. This joint initiative between the Governor and OU students proved to be very successful.

² Coates Review. Dame Sally Coates. 2016. Ministry of Justice.

³https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/816039/JDL_Open_University_report.pdf

⁴ Unlocking Potential: A review of education in prison. May 2016.

26. The opportunity to study for a degree also contributes to a sense of wellbeing that cannot otherwise be easily met within the confines of a prison regime. It brings a sense of purpose and hope as well as offering a realistic pathway towards living a different life on release. Studying for a degree is a long-term commitment that not only helps the person while they are in prison, but also encourages positive behaviour that can override many years of an ingrained criminal lifestyle.
27. The benefits of education to prison students has been particularly felt by students during the current pandemic. Prisoners have been confined to their cells for longer periods of time during the pandemic to protect both themselves and prison staff. Those who have been studying, however, have been able to remain active and engaged, helping alleviate boredom.
28. Digital education within prisons can also help promote digital literacy among prisoners. Many prisoners – particularly those on long sentences – can quickly find that their digital expertise becomes outdated. Delivering education digitally can keep their digital skills up-to-date and thus help them reintegrate into society and work on release.

A former prisoners' perspective: Stephen Akpabio-Klementowski

Growing up, life was tough for Stephen. His father died in a car crash when he was a teenager and so he felt he had to get money where he could. He was soon sentenced to 16 years in prison for drug dealing. He'd left school with no qualification but, after being assessed for his education potential, enrolled at the OU. Despite other prisoners and guards telling him he was wasting his time, he studied through the nights and felt he was changing. He discovered he loved learning. He left prison after eight years, and with his first degree completed. He then went on to complete two further degrees at master's level and got a job working with students in prisons. He now feels he has found freedom within his own mind. He is currently a PhD candidate and lecturer in criminology at the OU. You can read and listen to Stephen's extraordinary story of how he transformed his life through education in prison here:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/ideas/videos/i-went-from-prisoner-to-phd/p08mpxtt>

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

29. Analysis by the Ministry of Justice Justice Data Lab for the OU shows that one year after release the reoffending rate for those who had studied for an OU award was four percentage points lower than an equivalent group who had not participated in HE study. This shows a 20-40% reduction in the rate of reoffending, when the fact that some offenders are in prison for multiple offences is taken into account.⁵
30. Furthermore, some of the most compelling evidence of the effectiveness of education in prisons is best said by our students themselves. Here are some direct quotes from students who have studied with us:

⁵https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/816039/JDL_Open_University_report.pdf

“Never in a million years would I have thought I would undertake a degree – yet here I am, doing it! What is most striking is how it turns from something to do with my time in prison into something I do with the rest of my life.”

– Nic, HMP Parc, 2018

“In my experience, higher level learning ... offers one of the best ways out of criminality. I believe my learning journey, which was only made possible by the OU’s ethos and philosophy of open access, will enable me to continue to make a positive contribution to society... I thank the OU for doing what they alone do best, widening access and participation to higher education, which in my case means facilitating the successful reintegration of prisoners back into society.”

– Stephen Akpabio-Klementowski, OU graduate, October 2018

“The benefits of OU education in prison were immediate. The lessons have helped me have a new positive focus on rebuilding my life. The challenging modules helped rebuild my self-confidence. The social science modules helped me learn how the world works in a much more complex way than I had imagined... This knowledge helped me establish my identity within society and made me feel a part of something larger. My OU studies were revealed to be a major factor in my new path of a crime-free life.”

– Anonymous OU Graduate, unsolicited letter of thanks, 2018

A Former Prisoners’ perspective: Mark Humphries

Mark was in prison serving a life-sentence and was at a loss as to how to keep himself occupied. Following advice from a learning co-ordinator, he enrolled on the OU’s English Literature and Creative Writing course.

Prior to studying with the OU, his education background was poor, yet he found that the OU course helped him stay motivated in prison. He states that OU study has changed him as a person; particularly helping him realise he can actually enjoy education.

Since leaving prison, he has succeeded in having some of his work published, and has written an Introduction to Creative Writing Course that can be studied through the prison in-cell learning channel. He has also gained employment with a prison education provider, where he has been placed in a position of responsibility, and his position within the company is growing.



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

31. Meeting specific learning needs is difficult within prisons where classroom-based learning uses a largely one-size-fits-all model. This is why the OU’s model of individual personalised learning is well suited to prison students with SEND/language/communication needs.

32. The OU currently sends hard-copy versions of its digital content to prison students. This makes it easier to support individuals with specific learning disabilities as we can deploy our range of alternative formats. For example, we can offer a range of adjustments for those with visual impairments; including coloured overlays, large print, combined formats, braille versions, and tactile diagrams. We can also provide digital audio material and comb bound books. We cannot, however, use our existing audio players as they have recording capabilities and so are unsuitable to prison environments.
33. Support from prisons for greater use of laptops could also help us improve the learning experience for prison learners by allowing more extensive use of audio material, and text-to-speech software.

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

34. Education in prisons is delivering many skills required by employers. Many of the most popular courses within prisons are either business oriented or help plug skills and knowledge shortages in the economy. The OU's most popular course in prison, for example, is Introduction to Business Management. Another of our most popular courses is *Essential Mathematics*.⁶ Furthermore, the requirement to manage their own study helps equip students with soft skills such as self-discipline, and autonomy. It also boosts self-confidence; making them more attractive to potential employers on release.
35. Digital technology is firmly embedded in working life and serves many vital purposes for society today. In education, technology vastly enhances the learning experience and makes study more flexible for students. Yet "despite the value of technology in the everyday lives of most people, it has been argued that prisoners constitute one of the most impoverished groups in the digital age".⁷ This can limit the impact of rehabilitative efforts both within and outside the prison gates; in particular making it more difficult for them to gain employment due to outdated digital literacy skills.
36. Traditional prison education, for the most part, continues to fail to provide students with the digital skills they would need for employment. The OU Business Barometer, for instance, found that 56% of employers feel their organisation's digital skills need to be improved.⁸ The failure of many prisons to adopt or allow secure laptops for prison students has stopped them gaining the digital skills that many employers will expect. Therefore, to better align the skills delivered by prisons, and required by employers, prisons should be encouraged to allow digital education provision. This should not prove challenging, given that education providers like the OU can already provide secure learning through laptops. This could also make learning easier in-cell, reducing the amount of wasted in-cell time, and could also help reduce the instances where teaching materials are lost during prison transfers.

How can successful participation in education be incentivised in prisons?

Incentives for Prisoners

⁶ As of April 2020.

⁷ Jewkes & Reisdorf, 2019.

⁸ OU Business Barometer 2020.

37. Full OU modules used to be funded from the public purse, initially via the Prisoners' Education Trust and, as the learner progressed, via a student grant. Today's system, however, requires students, in common with their mainstream peers, to apply for loans to study higher education, and thereby OU modules.
38. Prison learners are usually very reluctant to take out such loans because of their fears of emerging from prison with larger debts than they had on entry. Many are without family or other support that might reassure them in taking on debt. Like most mature students, they tend to be more anxious about finance, more price sensitive, and more debt averse.⁹
39. Even if a prisoner is willing to take out a loan, those with more than six years until their earliest date of release do not qualify. This means that valuable time is wasted where they could be learning and upskilling so that they can contribute to society on their release.
40. Any initiative that reduced the cost of study for prison students – especially a system of grants – would incentivise more prisoners to enrol.

Case Study: [The Garfield Weston Scholarship](#)

In recognition that prison students are more debt averse, and can require more support into HE, the OU (in partnership with the Prisoner Education Trust (PET)) offered free Level 1 courses to 150 prisoners a year in England and Wales as part of a three-year pilot scheme to help prisoners access HE.

The project was supported by a grant of £600,000 from the Garfield Weston Foundation and £300,000 from the Open University Students Educational Trust Charity.

The scholarship offered funding for students' first sixty credits of OU study for students who had successfully studied an OU access module and had not yet moved on to OU Level 1 study, or for students who wanted to enter OU study at level 1 and could evidence that they were ready to begin HE at this level. Funding is essential for the majority of students to access OU Level 1 modules. Without this, students may not continue studying beyond an access module.

Studying has shown significant benefits to most students in terms of increased confidence, self-belief, motivation and a purpose to their life beyond prison.

Recommendation: The Government (chiefly DfE and MoJ) should investigate initiatives to reduce the cost of HE study for prisoners to increase enrolment in higher education in prisons.

⁹ Department for Education, [Impact of the student finance system on participation, experience and outcomes of disadvantaged young people](#), 2019

Incentives for Governors

41. Currently, whilst there are incentives to encourage education within prisons, there is a disparity between the incentives for more traditional classroom-based learning, and the more independent learning the OU provides.
42. Prison governors are assessed on their ability to get prisoners undertaking “purposeful activity”. Currently, prisoners must go to a class for education to be counted as purposeful activity. As many of those studying with the OU choose to do so within their cells, it is not currently counted as purposeful activity. This disincentivises prison governors from putting inmates on OU courses as they do not boost the prison’s “purposeful activity” statistics. We therefore believe that **in-cell study should be classed as purposeful activity**, so that prison students are encouraged to select the course most suitable for their needs.

Recommendation: In-cell study should be classified as a purposeful activity to encourage more prisons to broaden their educational offer enabling students in

Case Study: The History of Prison Education, Free Badged Open Course

At the OU, Historian Dr Rosalind Crone has been leading a project in collaboration with the Prisoners’ Education Trust; *Prison History for New Learners Inside and Outside Prison*. The project is developing a new open educational resource specifically designed for learners in secure environments, as well as those commissioning education courses. This has taken the form of a badged open course on our free learning platform – OpenLearn.

Dr Crone’s level 0/1 (A-level equivalent) distance learning course will be free to access. Unlike many of the current free courses available in UK prisons, prisoners who, on completion, choose to progress will be able to gain credit for their learning through The Open University’s level 1 module, ‘Make Your Learning Count’ (YXM130). That the course provides credit provides a pathway for students into further learning.

The new course - launching soon - will be made available to prisoners through The Open University’s Virtual Campus, a secure, web-based learning environment available in English and Welsh prisons. However, in recognition of the problems of access to computing facilities in many prisons, an offline version will also be available. Prison staff, those working in the prisons sector, and members of public will be able to access the course through The Open University’s OpenLearn platform.

The course is also unique in that the team responsible for developing it includes former prisoners who have themselves studied in secure environments. Dr Crone says, ‘This is the first time in the OU’s history that former prisoners have been employed as paid members of a team responsible for developing an OU module specifically to advise on the suitability of content and delivery for students in secure environments.’

The course will not only encourage prisoners into learning, but by highlighting the benefits that prison education has brought in modern times, and its aims for students, could help explain the benefits to prison governors; encouraging them to promote prison learning.

prisons to select the course/type of learning most suitable to their needs.

How might apprenticeships work for those in custody?

43. At the present time, apprenticeships are not available to those in custody in England as apprentices are currently required to have a contract of employment, something that is not obtainable for obvious reasons. However, the OU believes that apprenticeships should be available to prison learners who are eligible for release on temporary licence (ROTL). Some relatively small changes to the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) rules could be hugely transformative. Apprenticeships for offenders would combine education - so integral to effective rehabilitation - with employment where the apprentice would have support and learning on the job. The OU also believes apprenticeships could make a big difference to the transition for an offender as they leave prison, with so many changes happening in their life at this time, the apprenticeship and the employment opportunity that it is linked to could provide one constant given it would span from custody to release.
44. The OU believes that offenders who are eligible for release on temporary licence (ROTL) could begin studying whilst in custody, followed by the work-based learning when placed with (and paid by) an employer. The ESFA rule change would be that they would need a 'memorandum of understanding' with the employer to meet the requirements of an apprenticeship rather than the need for an employment contract. We also feel that this model could be extended to include ex-military service personnel, for example.
45. The new measures announced in the Spending Review on 25 November 2020 to front-load training for certain apprenticeship standards may also provide a key opportunity to overcome this funding rule barrier and unleash the potential of apprenticeships for those in custody. We urge the Committee, MoJ and the ESFA to explore this further. One initial solution could be to pilot this as a special project to take into consideration any additional support or funding rule flexibilities that may be required to start this initiative in order to ensure that the apprentice is able to retain on programme applicant is able to successfully complete all elements of the apprenticeship.

Recommendation: Apprenticeships should be available to prison learners who are eligible for release on temporary licence (ROTL). Amendments to ESFA rules are required to enable this such as introducing a 'memorandum of understanding' with the employer to meet the requirements of an apprenticeship rather than the need for an employment contract.

Are current resources for prison learning meeting need?

46. Despite the best efforts of both HMPPS and the OU, access to our virtual campus and ICT equipment within Education Departments in HMPPS falls short of what is needed to support students both now and in the future. It is now widely recognised that prisons need to enable mobile technology to be available to students.
47. More could be done with a few relatively simple innovations. These are set out below.
48. Improving ICT on secure estates is vital to improving prison learning. The 2016 Coates Review presented this vision for ICT in the secure estate;

“Digital literacy is a key functional skill paving the way to further learning, employment and access to services in the modern world. The relevance and quality of ICT training in prison is every bit as important as that provided in maths, English and vocational skills provision. ICT and digital systems in prison must support more flexible access to learning that is tailored to the needs of individual learners and enables participation in distance and other learning.

If prisoners are, on release, to secure employment, continue to study, or otherwise contribute to society, they must be given the opportunity to use and improve their digital skills while in prison. Such skills form a key part of strategies in Further and Higher education for the wider population. There is a risk that prisoners will fall further behind in a world that demands digital skills in education, training, employment and personal life. Up-to-date ICT and digital systems in prison are also crucial to ensure flexible access to learning, to support progression and to enable effective performance management.”¹⁰

49. The OU is calling for all prison students to be equipped with a secure Chromebook and secure WIFI system (as required) within their prison so that all can become more digitally literate and gain the benefits from digital education, including the greater interactivity it provides. As already mentioned, gifting a mobile device to an OU student in prison would reduce the need for (and ideally eventually replace) print. It would give the student an enhanced learning experience, develop digital literacy and address specific learning difficulties needs for disabled students in prison. Materials would be portable, mobile and therefore with the student at all times enabling a far more flexible study option than relying on quantities of print metered out in line with ‘property within cell’ requirements. It would also increase study opportunities for students outside of Education Department or Employment working hours.
50. In particular, the introduction of secure Wi-Fi in all prisons would enable greater dissemination of secure laptops. This would free many other resources to be used for other areas of prison education. For example, it currently costs £200 to provide a single secure Chromebook (as is currently being prepared for a pilot scheme). This is a one-off cost, and can be used for the entirety of a student’s course. By contrast, printing teaching materials for one-module currently costs the MoJ around £160. This means that on a course of around 6-8 modules the saving could be around £760-1,080. This is money that MoJ could be using on other aspects of prison education, or which could be put towards grants for the prison students most in need.
51. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exposed some of the shortcomings of hard copy materials for prison learning. In many cases, SiSE students were unable to access hard or soft copy learning materials as we could not load material onto intranets, meaning prison staff could not print them off. This was a particularly the case in Scotland where many SISE learners were unable to study. In England however, the OU worked with the MoJ to upload electronic versions of material onto the internal HMPPS intranet, to be printed by prison staff. Furthermore, we were allowed to run a prison radio campaign; using pre-recorded information to inform students that the OU was working hard to find solutions to enable them to achieve satisfactory outcomes to their current modules.

¹⁰ [Coates Review](#). Ministry of Justice. 2016

52. Support from MoJ for greater use of digital technology for communications, assignment handing and registration due to the impact of the pandemic has been welcome and has enabled greater efficiencies and better support for students in many cases. However, investment in digital infrastructure and support for its use, is essential for the future.
53. There also needs to be greater resources for innovation and pilot learning schemes in prisons. Pilot schemes in many prisons are delivering excellent results, but prison

Case Study: Open Justice inside UK prisons

The OU Law Department has partnered with the [St Giles Trust](#) to implement a pro-bono programme to address the many unmet needs within our custodial environments. St Giles trains and supports peer advisors in 30 prisons across England and Wales. The advisors are serving prisoners who are highly motivated and provide advice, guidance and support service to their fellow prisoners. Peer advisors complete a City & Guilds Level 3 qualification in Advice and Guidance. Yet peer advisors are not currently trained to give legal advice.

The OU therefore invites its final year Law Students to work with peer advisors to inform and develop an area of law that would be relevant and useful to prisoners. It is very much a collaborative and empowering process with the Peer Advisors contributing and the Law Students also learning from them. Groups within prisons focus on one topic and develop resources together that the peer advisors could use and refer to when providing advice to other prisoners. For example, in HMP Cardiff the topic was family law, which was relevant and helpful to many male prisoners who were estranged from their families and needed advice and support to re-connect.

The programme has a really positive impact for the peer advisors, the prison population, and prison staff. It creates opportunities for reflection and discussion on broader issues relating to peer advice work and legal matters which are incredibly stimulating for the peer advisors. High quality and useful resources have also been produced that have resulted in more prisoners being able to access a wider range of effective advice and support. One Peer Advisor, especially in large prisons like High Down and Cardiff, can provide advice to up to 250 other prisoners in a month. Therefore, the impact of the programme is multiplied across the prison estate and the OU Students' expertise can be widely disseminated.

governors need to have the resources to embrace such schemes.

Recommendation: Investment in ICT infrastructure and greater access to forms of digital learning are essential and a key priority.

Recommendation: More funding should be made available for innovative prison education pilot schemes to test and learn new approaches for meeting future resource needs.

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

54. The variation in prison estates and infrastructure impacts hugely on learning. For example, the OU has its own teaching wing in some prisons, enabling us to provide state of the art technology and teaching. Whereas in other prisons the offering is much more basic. Regardless of whether a prison is public or private, there are huge

inconsistencies in terms of the available technology, space, resources, and even access to VLEs. This makes it much more difficult for learning providers to provide high quality teaching for fear that it will not be workable in all prisons. Having to provide a bespoke offering to each individual prison is resource-intensive and unnecessary given that the content is largely the same everywhere.

55. As already highlighted in our response, we are calling for all prison students to be equipped with a secure Chromebook and secure WIFI system (as required) within their prison so that all can become more digitally literate and gain the benefits from digital education, including the greater interactivity it provides. For HMPPS staff a secure mobile device for OU students would reduce security considerations in terms of print, allow the materials to be far more portable with the student when and if transferred, and remove the need for storage of materials within cells.
56. The OU has now partnered with Coracle – a MoJ approved provider – to implement mobile technology in the form of Chromebooks loaded with OU content to OU students. This pilot will build on the current provision of the 70 Chromebook provided in 17 prisons, to supply all our February 2021 intake of SiSE students on access modules with secure Chromebooks. If the pilot delivers on the desired outcomes then we would seek to ‘mainstream’ this work across OU provision in the secure estate.

Recommendation: The Ministry of Justice and Department for Education should work together to create a minimum level of infrastructure that should be available for prison learning. This would allow learning providers to standardise their learning offer across prisons. It would also reduce the many inconsistencies between prisons.

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

Lengths of sentences

57. The prison education system is particularly poor in dealing with different lengths of sentences. This is most obviously manifest for those with more than six years still on their sentences. Currently prisoners are prevented from taking out a student loan until the last six years of their sentence due to a requirement in the Education (Student Support) regulations. As recognised in the Coates Review, this means that prisoners on longer sentences potentially face years of wasted time when, through HE study, they could have been developing skills and attitudes to become valuable members of the prison community.
58. Investment in education, also results in overall cost savings for the prison service. The MoJ reported that the annual cost per prisoner in England and Wales was £37,543 in 2017/18.¹¹ If the six year ruling came to an end, our estimate of the upfront cost of student loans for an extra 200 OU entrants is £2.3m, but that is set against a potential saving to the public purse that could be nearly three times that even if the loans were never repaid. For 200 OU student entrants gained, the estimated savings could be between £3-6m even if the student loans went unpaid.¹²

¹¹ Ministry of Justice ‘Cost per place and costs per prisoner by individual prison’: HM Prison and Probation Service Annual Report and Accounts 2017/18.

¹² These figures are based on the calculated cost per prisoner in England and Wales when total expenditure on the prison system is taken into account. Reported costs per prisoner are greater for those in Scotland and Northern Ireland prisons. Secondary cost savings are not considered. Cost savings to the public purse are

(For more information see [Student loans for those on long prison sentences, HEPI Policy Note 18, October 2019](#)).

Recommendation: The Student Support Regulations for England and Wales should be amended to extend student loan eligibility to include people in prison who have more than six years to run on their sentence.

Movement between prisons

59. Gaps in provision are also evident as prisoners are moved around the prison as well as between prisons. As previously mentioned, when prisoners move facilities, physical materials can be left behind or lost, meaning there can be gaps in study as we must send them more materials. Laptops are more portable than paper-based material, and therefore easier to move if a prisoner moves within a prison or is transferred to another prison. We currently have a trial with philanthropic funding for 10 laptops pre-populated with the OU VLE on a closed system.

Ends.

January 2021

based on a total year's cost per prisoner per full year. Since the future sentence of a re-offender is unknown, the model assumes that a reoffender's sentence length is likely to be similar to their original sentence length. Study costs for potential new OU students are modelled based on study patterns of current OU students studying in secure environments and so as not to underestimate the cost of study, it has been assumed that all would complete their study, i.e. the full tuition fee is charged.