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Introduction

This report, drafted by the 'Lead individual', has had input from and been endorsed by the four tutors listed as 'Additional individuals' in the submission portal. Additionally, there are a number of other tutors, all of whom are currently based at HMPPS Springhill & Grendon, who are in support of the great majority of its contents and some have also contributed to it. Some detail in the report inevitably relates to the 'Lead individual', and it has been drafted in the first-person form, but the underlying principles are supported by the group.

This group has wide-ranging experience of delivering vocational and English/maths/IT courses in prison establishments for adult males and has taught in prisons covering all four categories, from 'A Cat' through to 'D Cat', some over a substantial period of years.

The tutors come from a variety of work and social backgrounds and bring a wealth of vocational and life experience to their teaching. Academically, they have a wide range of qualifications including college and university degrees and vocational / professional qualifications.

Submissions have only been made for those areas that we are well-placed to comment on. We must also stress that our contribution is a personal one; we are not acting on behalf of our employer, Milton Keynes College, or our peers and we do not purport to represent their views.

We have addressed the Committee's areas for submissions in the order published:

What is the purpose of education in prisons?

I consider that the purpose of education is far wider than any academic qualifications gained. Additionally, I consider its purposes are to:

- Develop prisoners into more rounded human beings – identifying the intrinsic value of each individual, their individual aptitudes and gifts and assist in developing them. Help prisoners to value themselves and others.
- Challenge prisoners' ignorance, misconceptions and attitudes that are harmful to both themselves and others.
- Develop knowledge, understanding and wisdom including a passion for learning.
- Identify and nurture hidden talents.
- Inspire prisoners to explore new opportunities using their new-found skills and talents and provide constructive support and guidance.

- Demonstrate that other people are interested in them and see value in them.
- Provide basic/core skills which enable them to have greater self-sufficiency in society including core skills and attributes that employers look for in their staff.
- Encourage prisoners to live productive, law-abiding lives that contribute to society by providing them with skills, encouragement and self-belief. Demonstrate to prisoners that they can live richly rewarding lives without resorting to unlawful behaviour and challenge perceptions of what constitutes 'successful lives'.

In short, education provides a wonderful opportunity and environment in which to show them care, respect, compassion and support whilst also encouraging their development. It's not unusual for tutors to have much higher expectations of learners than they have of themselves...

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

I am unable to provide data other than pass rates for courses, which the MOJ has access to. At HMPPS Springhill, the key measures we use are statistics measuring course completions, course pass rates and student retention; all of which are very high. What I can say anecdotally is that I have seen students achieve much more than they thought they could and in the process their self-belief, self-respect and optimism for the future have all increased.

Each tutor will have their own stories to recount; I have had students with minimal academic qualifications study my Bookkeeping & Accounting courses and have discovered that they have a natural aptitude for it; their self-confidence and self-worth have increased with the result that some have left with the intention of studying it at a higher level at college or university.

If tutors were permitted to maintain contact with prisoners after their release, we would have a much better idea of our effectiveness.

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

- In my experience, this is a significantly under-funded area. Currently, we have one SEND specialist covering an entire region. Locally, there are ALS Practitioners (in our case, we have one practitioner spread across two sites) but prisoners with LDD's need greater support than the one meeting every 2-3 weeks that an ALS tutor is able to offer.
- The prevalence of LDD's and mental illness amongst the prison population is well documented but the support to address these needs is inadequate.
- Some tutors consider that they are unable to adequately meet the needs of prisoners with LDDs in spite of the support received from ALS Practitioners.
- Prisoners acting as 'Classroom Assistants' could offer a valuable service but there has been limited uptake of this at HMPPS Springhill; in the past the prison had been reluctant to embrace the concept, its argument had been that mentors are not considered to be as gainfully employed as they would be elsewhere in the prison estate or doing community work. This was mistaken and short-sighted in my view as

often students feel greatly supported and encouraged by classroom assistants and some achieve more as a consequence.

- There are benefits for the Classroom Assistants too; they deepen their understanding of the subject matter and also improve their mentoring skills, which could lead to a vocation upon release. The role focusses on helping others, which has great relevance and benefit for society upon their release as it helps change prisoners' mindsets from one of an inward self-serving attitude to that of an outward appreciation of the needs of others.

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

My concern at the question posed is that it is narrowly focussed on the employment-related benefits that education has to offer. I believe that not all education courses must directly relate to available job roles and that an additional question is posed: *'Does education help produce better, more rounded, more caring and confident human beings who have a greater appreciation of the value of themselves, their neighbours and society in general and what can be done to achieve this?'*

That said, and addressing the question as framed:

- Concerning employment, too much of what we offer is of too low a standard; prison education providers need to offer more courses to a higher level than the Level 2 currently available for most courses. In Dame Sally Coates's 2016 paper: *'Unlocking Potential - A review of education in prison'*, she highlighted that of 101,600 learners on OLASS (now 'PEF') courses in 2014/15, just 100 learners participated in a full level 3 course, with none participating at Level 4 or above.
- A greater range of work placements is required to utilise a wider range of learner skills – there is too great a focus on manual labour / unskilled jobs e.g. rail track maintenance, warehouse picking roles, 'back of house' charity shop work sorting out clothes and other low skill, manual roles.
- A closer relationship is required between local employers, the prison (CRC?) and its Education Department so that the relevant prison staff and tutors have a clear understanding of the skills required by employers. Courses could then be restructured to meet specific needs, including developing specific social and employability skills that a particular employer requires.
- Improve the minimum academic requirements of prison tutors so that a wider range of courses can be delivered and to a higher level. In my nine years' experience of teaching in prison, the weak academic abilities of some tutors have been a cause of concern to me.
- Employ tutors who are subject matter 'experts' in the subjects they teach rather than expecting a tutor to deliver a course (s)he has no knowledge of (e.g. asking a tutor without knowledge of business finance to deliver related Business courses). It is not unusual that a college delivers a new course, perhaps at the behest of the governor or for financial reasons, and asks a tutor without the subject-matter qualifications or related work experience to deliver that course. This short-changes the learners, puts additional pressure on tutors and, in my view, is plain wrong.
- Offer a limited number of job placements ('work scholarships') to the most deserving prisoners. This could have a great motivational impact on learners including changing their view of the value of education.
- Question – do we ask employers of prisoners to identify prisoners' skill gaps? I'm not aware of this or of responses being fed through to the Education Department.

How can successful participation in education be incentivised in prisons?

- D cat prisons – offer higher-level qualifications (e.g. L3 & L4). Many prisoners coming to D Cat establishments have already taken a number of courses in other prisons and D-Cat prisons should be focussed on gearing the prisoners up for release, honing skills and ensuring that they have the skills necessary to support themselves in life.
- Currently there is no additional financial incentive to participate in education instead of other prison activities; prisoners are currently paid the same to mop floors as to improve their life chances by attending education. Increase the payrate for those attending and successfully completing education courses?
- There needs to be a recognition that some prisoners financially need to get outside paid work and education has to compete with this draw.
- One option is to reduce some of the unjust levels of costs borne by prisoners (e.g. phone bills) so that they can afford to stay in education should they wish.
- Have courses that directly lead to apprenticeships; prisoners will engage more when they can see a clear link between studying and a tangible outcome such as a job placement.
- Prisons claim they prioritise education (indeed, it is a ‘top priority’) but the reality is often different; the prison’s performance is measured based on a variety of conflicting criteria including occupancy of work parties (e.g. waste management, farms & gardens) and in the case of D Cat establishments, community work and work placements - so there is competing demand for a finite pool of prisoners. If education is to be a high priority, then the measures by which prisons are evaluated must align with this.
- Continually improve the quality of PEF tutors so that prisoners will want to attend education. Prisoners want to be taught by highly skilled tutors who know their subject, who want to teach in a prison environment and who are both proficient and motivated at transferring that knowledge to students.
- Those in full time education (and off-site work parties) to be placed in enhanced accommodation blocks where there is a more peaceful environment (e.g. quiet at night) to enable them to better engage in these activities.
- Improve the available resources and remove prison-generated barriers to allow prisoners to study in their cells/huts e.g. greater access to computers, internet etc
- Provide a greater range of courses which are seen as being interesting and useful to prisoners. Some courses develop useful employment and life skills in addition to the course content e.g. Bookkeeping and accounting courses strongly develop a prisoner’s ability to work efficiently and accurately, to critique (including performing reconciliations to confirm the accuracy of an outcome) and proofread work as well as developing an attention to detail; all of which are valuable workplace skills.
- Until just a few years ago, a ceiling of Level 2 was placed on available education courses offered by PEF colleges (leaving aside OU courses etc delivered by third parties) – thereby immediately disenfranchising the more able students and reducing the perceived value of education courses; there was a lack of stepping-stones and role models at higher levels incentivising others to want to progress.
- Although academic and vocational courses are useful for future employment prospects, greater weight could be given to life-enhancing courses such as cookery & nutrition, art, literature, theology. These courses, although not directly relating to most job roles, will have nevertheless have indirect but tangible benefits to prisoners.

How might apprenticeships work for those in custody?

- There is a large number of very capable prisoners who would benefit from an apprenticeship.
- I think some form of mentoring is crucial here, which could be fulfilled by a tutor in conjunction with CRC acting as a lynchpin between the employer and prisoner. The Education Department and CRC could work more closely to support the prisoner and employer in making the apprenticeship work e.g. by providing supplementary training as required and mentoring the prisoner.
- Apprenticeships will offer prisoners an improved opportunity of gaining paid employment and developing the skills to progress further.

Are current resources for prison learning meeting need?

- Absolutely not. Education provision in prisons is the poor relation of mainstream education.
- Classroom infrastructure facilities are, in some cases, extremely poor - physical buildings with rotting walls and doors, mould, leaking roofs requiring buckets, lack of adequate heating etc.
- The IT facilities in the classroom at HMPPS Springhill are totally inadequate (lack of computers in some classrooms, obsolete computers in others that regularly break down, no smartboards etc) and they have a direct detrimental impact on learners. There are too few prison-owned 'C-Nomis computers' which has been the only means by which any electronic data can be accessed from within the prison (although the latest version of Virtual Campus should partially alleviate this problem). At HMPPS Springhill, there is not a single C-Nomis computer allocated to the tutors.
- In short, the IT facilities are very outdated and are not fit for purpose. In the aforementioned Dame Sally Coates review, she highlighted IT provision as being a key area (Chapter 5).
- The IT shortfalls impact on prisoners' preparedness for employment and ability to integrate with society upon release.
- I believe that HMPPSPS generally has a disproportionate focus on security which prevents it from thinking creatively about how the outside world can be brought into the classroom without compromising security and prisoner & staff safety. This, possibly coupled with senior prison management who are not tech savvy and are fearful of the consequences of making changes, has resulted in a lack of appetite to change how IT, and therefore education, is delivered in prison. In May 2016 Dame Sally Coates stated that "*There should be a fundamental review of the overly-restrictive regulations that currently restrict its use across the prison estate.*" In my experience, this has not changed.
- A recommendation made to the Dame Sally Coates team when they visited HMPPS Springhill was that the tendering process should include a ring-fenced financial commitment to invest in IT and educational resources. Education providers have been reluctant to commit to expensive IT investment when they have no guarantee of winning the tender process the next time round.
- Some parts of the IT infrastructure are owned by HMPPS (e.g. cabling in classrooms and network ports) whilst other parts are owned by the college (student computers). This has resulted, on occasions, in a standoff between the parties arguing whose

responsibility it is to fix an issue whilst the tutor is left with an IT system that doesn't function properly.

- Finally, I would urge the Committee to look at the issue of prison tutors' pay, where we feel acutely that we are the 'poor relations' of mainstream education. Prison tutors get paid much less than our college counterparts for teaching the same material for the same number of hours, whilst working in a more challenging environment. This does not encourage high calibre tutors to apply for prison education positions and staff turnover can be high. Over the past 7 years, we have received just one inflationary pay increase; real wages which are already poor due to the low start point for PEF (OLASS) staff, have further dropped by c. 15% over this period. This must be addressed, possibly by incorporating within the tender process a financial obligation on education providers to, as a minimum, maintain real wages for their PEF staff.
- Introduce an element of performance-related pay for tutors, to incentivise performance and value for money.

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

I am unsure what I can contribute here other than to pose the question '*Are prison governors and their senior management team sufficiently challenged and encouraged to take risks and are they allowed to fail if an initiative proves unsuccessful?*' My experience is that the security concerns have been given disproportionate weight in ruling out what otherwise could be constructive initiatives.

Greater flexibility and creativity are required of the prison service; I am not convinced that prison management are sufficiently challenged on what can be done to improve matters. Too often, the default is that something cannot be changed rather than requiring the prison to think creatively about how an outcome could be achieved i.e. a simple "no" is, in my view, a lazy and unacceptable response.

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

- When I taught in a C Cat prison, I was able to use reasonably current accounting software (c. 1 year old). Two years later, I moved to my current D Cat prison but due to its older (now obsolete) IT operating systems I had to use a 2-year older version of the same accounting software, i.e. I had to go backwards two years. That software is now 10 years old and will not reflect what is being used by most businesses.
- In Grendon prison there were insufficient computers in the Business Studies classroom for the number of enrolled students and those computers were not networked. Repeated requests to have this rectified were not actioned with the result that it was very time consuming for the tutor to manually load data on to each student's computer. Prior to my involvement, the business course students were completing their portfolios manually (i.e. paper-based), including manually filling out paper-copies of spreadsheets, because of the lack of IT facilities, which ought to be a source of acute embarrassment to the prison and college.
- Varying levels of access to the internet within the prison estate makes it nigh impossible, in some prisons, to present some teaching resources in class e.g. video clips.

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

I am unable to contribute to this point.

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

- Greater flexibility is required of the types of courses offered to prisoners; those serving long sentences must have the opportunity to study at a higher level. This will assist with their rehabilitation, enable them to be productively engaged and will offer improved career choices upon release.
- Why shouldn't a prisoner serving 10-15 years in prison, say, train and qualify as a lawyer, accountant, professional mentor or counsellor? Prisoners could use these skills whilst 'inside' to benefit their peers and the prison generally.
- The prison estate could offer specialised centres of excellence, which would encourage only those deserving prisoners to progress from Cat B to C to D. Too often, I have seen 'problem prisoners' moved onto an enhanced wing or moved from closed to open conditions in order to 'move the problem on'. Prisoners must earn their right to progress through the system and education could assist in this e.g. we run Bookkeeping & Accounting courses up to Level 3 at HMPPS Springhill and this could be done to an even higher level. This would attract more responsible and motivated prisoners who are more likely to respect and not abuse the greater freedom they have in open conditions.
- Covid-19 has forced us to deliver education more flexibly with traditional classroom teaching being replaced by the provision of learning packs which are remotely marked. A next step could be setting up the IT infrastructure to enable students in different prisons to access courses at another establishment e.g. via video-link tutorials. Currently, prisoners can only access the courses delivered in their prison, which is arguably a 'wooden' and antiquated form of delivering education. Tutors could be reaching more students across multiple sites and thereby increasing their skill sets, morale, motivation to learn and life opportunities. This would have benefits for the prison service. But it requires greater investment in IT infrastructure and creativity/flexibility in how education can be delivered in prisons...
- Finally, consideration should be given to how prisoners can be better supported post release. There is, rightly, a great focus on the 'learner journey' but when a prisoner is released that close support suddenly stops. This is at a critical time when that person needs support as they face the cold realities of life on the outside. An idea could be for vocational tutors, say, to have an on-going mentoring role with prisoners after release, discussing any challenges they might be facing in their work situation and generally being a support and guide for them, whilst continuing to teach in prison. It could make the difference between a prisoner taking a poor, possibly destructive decision in isolation and being guided along a better path by someone they know and trust.

Supplementary considerations

In addition to the requested areas for submission, I feel that it's important to highlight other factors that have a direct impact on prisoners' educational development:

- the prevalence of drug taking in prisons and how that affects learners' concentration levels. Some prisoners develop a drug-taking habit only upon arriving in prison and I understand that the Mandatory Drug Tests (MDT) system encourages some prisoners to take harder drugs because they pass more quickly through the body's system than 'softer' drugs such as cannabis, say, with all the knock-on effects that entails.
- the indifferent attitude of some prison officers (and I think it might be a minority) in ensuring prisoners attend and value education, possibly as a consequence of their own experience of education and low academic levels.
- the divide that exists, in varying degrees dependent upon the site, between the prison and education providers; there is still too much of an "us" and "them" mentality. There is sometimes a lack of understanding and a disconnect between the two factions, which is in part due to the different cultures of the two parties.
- the prison system still retains an excessively authoritarian and hierarchical ethos that stifles innovation and discourages any challenge to 'the way things are done'.
- the extent to which we still use pass rates as the main evidence of educational progression when learners with LDD's, say, or those not used to an academic setting require longer to progress than the prescribed Guided Learning Hours (GLHs) of courses allow for.
- and what of those who successfully run businesses, say, and don't want to advance their Maths, English or IT skills - do we have a 'one size fits all' approach to delivering education when deciding what is and isn't important for an individual?
- Finally, what processes exist for the evaluation of major IT projects and how effective are they? I ask because there is an IT system called 'Virtual Campus' which has absorbed a great level of financial and staff time resources and yet has had significant reliability issues (the system has been inaccessible for periods of months) and is one which many tutors consider to have been of extremely limited use. And yet staff have been mandated to use it - essentially to prove its usefulness! It's been the proverbial 'elephant in the room' for many years. I suspect that any review of its efficacy has not been sufficiently rigorous or unbiased and like any software, its only as good as the infrastructure and the ability of students to access it. The users (tutors – customers, effectively) ought to be involved in any review process.

Conclusion

I apologise for exceeding the requested maximum 3,000-word count but I hope the Committee recognises the importance of the aforementioned points, which are borne from direct experience and have been presented openly and accurately. Both myself and many of my colleagues are keen to see change and we offer our support in improving the delivery of education in the prison sector. We are in the business of transforming prisoners lives and believe that everything we do should be focussed on, and measured against, this objective.

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