

Education Committee Inquiry – Prison Education

Submission by Catch22

Investment in prison education should have a transformational effect on the ability of an individual to succeed in employment and therefore many other aspects of their life on release. Re-offending rates would be reduced and communities strengthened.

However, currently prison education varies hugely in both quality and type of opportunity across the estate. This is impacted by a multitude of factors –the disconnect between a sentencing plan and education plan, the varying quality of the buildings, and the impact this has on opportunities available, alongside a dangerous lack of access to digital technology and a lack of prison specific training to equip prison educators with the tools they need to effectively work within prison settings.

Catch22 is a national charity and social business that designs and delivers public services that build resilience and aspiration. Our 1,650 staff and volunteers work at every stage of the social welfare cycle, supporting hundreds of communities across the UK. Catch22 is a leading CRC supply chain partner for Through the Gate services, currently operating 23 custodial-based services in 20 prisons. We are the only offender management unit in the country delivered by a third sector organisation, with our resettlement and gangs services supporting approximately 35,000 people in custody in 2019/20.

Given our experience as a key third sector provider in prisons, we have set out our core recommendations below, along with specific answers to your questions. We would be very happy to provide further evidence – oral or written – on request.

Our core recommendations:

A. A combined sentencing plan

- A prisoner’s education plan should be a key part of their sentencing plan which should be linked into an overarching employability plan – tailored to individual need and the length of the sentence.
- Education targets must be achievable and realistic, based on individual need and life skills, not unrealistic expectations.
- Education programmes must contribute towards addressing criminogenic needs as opposed to solely focusing on educational attainment to accelerate the removal of barriers to learning and support re-engagement with education.
- A clear, mandatory process must be implemented across the estate to identify prisoners who have educational needs and to put the appropriate pathway plan in place.

- Education contracts must be jointly accountable with other involved prison agencies for employment outcomes. This will assist in promoting collaborative working.
- Prisons must have robust violence reduction strategies in place that recognise the impact of gang affiliation to ensure that prisoners feel safe enough to undertake the education programmes on offer.
- Consider adapting the terminology of 'sentencing plan' to something more all-encompassing such as 'Individual Development Plan' - incorporating sentencing, education, behaviour, health, care, employability.

B. Regular labour market reviews

- An internal review of labour market need in the resettlement areas of each prison must be undertaken, so that education provision can properly reflect the market demands for employment. This, in turn, must be married with prisoner aspiration, so that prisoner education can be tailored for the right employment prospects for the individual.
- A strategy must be developed and implemented for greater collaboration between prisons and local colleges or businesses, to explore opportunities for prisoners to complete courses outside the prison walls if they're released before the end of their course (i.e. find a way to incentivise local employers who are willing to offer employment to prisoners and willing to be matched to a specific prisoner cohort by guaranteeing supported training, apprenticeship or job offer).

C. A digital revolution

- There must be a digital revolution in prisons to ensure the right infrastructure and equipment is available to teach prisoners some of the future-proof skills they will need to enter the job market and contribute positively to society.

D. Investment in prison educators

- Specialist training must be given to all prison educators to drive up performance and support teachers in delivering high-quality prisoner education that leads to pro-social outcomes. A Teach First or Unlocked Graduates style prison education programme to get high calibre teachers into prisons would be hugely beneficial.
- Prison education must be subject to the same rules as schools if they fail to meet assessment standards.

- Prison education must have a greater emphasis on progression, not just achieving key milestones.

In answer to the questions you set out as part of your inquiry, please see our responses below:

1. What is the purpose of education in prisons?

At its most obvious, participation in education improves employability prospects and life skills on release thus contributing to reducing the risk of reoffending.

Prison education must therefore be more than a diversionary activity. Effective education in prison can also boost an individual's self-esteem and make a positive difference to society. In our view, the most effective education directly addresses criminogenic need. A prisoner's education plan should form part of their sentencing plan.

Education in prison also provides an opportunity for individuals that had previously deemed it "out of reach" for them and their circumstances – further increasing motivation and readiness to engage.

2. What data exists to demonstrate the effectiveness of education and training in prisons and on prisoner attainment?

- [The Prison Reform Trust](#)
- [The Chief Inspector of Prison's annual report](#)
- Dame Sally Coates [2016 review](#) and current work

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

Young Offender Institutes (YOIs) are funded to deliver the national curriculum. This means that, in general, the youth estate has ample resource to deliver effective education programmes. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for adult prisoner education.

Meeting learning needs is largely about getting diagnosis and screening right, yet there is no clarity as to whose role it is to screen people. If a prisoner isn't voluntarily going to enrol on an education programme, whose responsibility is it to encourage them to engage in educational activity? Also of concern is that initial screening assessments are currently done based on self-disclosed needs, which inevitably leads to gaps.

Young people in YOIs are often not long out of mainstream education – and so the concept of education is not alien to them. For older prisoners, many have not been enrolled in an education programme for many years and, in our experience, are too embarrassed to engage with education for fear of exposing gaps in knowledge.

Our strong view is that education should play a bigger part in sentencing plans. Education should be on par with accredited programmes (e.g. sex offender treatment and anger management progress). There should be a clear process in place to identify prisoners who have educational needs and to put a pathway plan in place.

Rather than a focus solely on outcomes (e.g. qualification achieved) there should be greater emphasis on 'distance travelled' metrics. By doing so, it would be easier to quantify the social impact of such a service.

As previously mentioned, education programmes for individuals should contribute towards addressing criminogenic needs as opposed to solely focused on educational attainment. This would help prevent the flaws in the current model whereby you see a small number of motivated and educated prisoners undertake lots of education but the hardest to reach cohort aren't targeted.

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

In most establishments, there is good provision around basic maths and English to improve general employability, and some general vocational qualifications are readily available (such as Health and Safety and Industrial Cleaning). Workshops now generally also include the opportunity to obtain vocational qualifications. In Devon prisons for example, this includes things like NVQs in product packing, working with textiles/wood working. Dartmoor offer construction courses and there is

provision to undertake the study element for a CSCS card in the Devon prisons though the practical test has to be done post-release.

In some establishments, there is the opportunity to access computers and develop skills on these. In Channings Wood for example, the Storybook Dad's project trains a number of prisoners up to use industry standard audio/visual software and equipment. Other opportunities include qualifications in horticulture, painting and decoration, barbering, and peer mentoring. We have also seen examples of longer-term prisoners undertaking valuable distance learning studies in subjects such as law.

However, these examples of good practice are not widespread.

Our view is that there needs to be an internal review of labour market need in the resettlement areas of each prison so that education provision can properly reflect the market demands. Labour market demand should be married with prisoner aspiration. Not every prisoner will want, or indeed should need, to embark on an entry-level job. Through proper assessment of labour market need, education can be tailored to help enhance job prospects. For example, a local construction company that one of our prison staff met with last year highlighted a skills gap in the construction sector locally, with companies keen to develop their social engagement and work with ex-offenders. However there doesn't seem to be a smooth transition between prisons training service users with specific skills that would enable them to walk straight into an employment opportunities like these.

In addition, prison industries are often focused on the effective operational running of the prison and/or productivity as opposed to being a tool to enhance employability skills of prisoners. Examples include a London prison where print workshops fulfilled the prison's printing needs. These were staffed with long term prisoners for stability and to maximise productivity. Further examples of this are found in HMP Coldingley where they print a large percentage of materials for HMPPS. They also have a number of contracts for the airlines and prisoners can sort and clean headphones. These examples do not reflect labour market needs for the area and are staffed with a cohort in which addressing employability skills were less urgent. However, prison industries can – and should – act as vocational training environments to provide real work experience which should be linked to labour market needs to maximise chances of employment.

Focus on re-skilling

As previously mentioned, education programmes must also address the prisoner's sentencing plan and take into account their individual abilities, experience and aspirations. For example, many sex offenders have previously held well-respected jobs. For them, education programmes in prisons are often too

basic and are too heavily vocational. Education should be aligned with vocational experience in prison. If someone wants to become an industrial cleaner, then Health and Safety education should be a priority – coupled with a role inside the prison that complements that area of work. In HMP Ashfield for example, there was cohort of prisoners with an interest in industrial cleaning. They embarked upon a course and formed part of a group who give quotes for cleaning projects that need doing on the prison estate. This allowed them to put their training into use and gain a qualification, as well as practice the vital skills of customer service.

There must also be a focus on re-skilling prisoners. For example, a prisoner who was previously a teacher but has been convicted of sexual offences will not be able to take up a teaching position when they leave prison. Too often in a case like this you see prisoners being given roles inside the prison estate that reflect their previous jobs – but in this particular example, that’s unhelpful for their prospects upon release.

Incentivise local employers

There are also some good examples of employers (such as Railtrack) running education courses inside prisons which lead directly into work upon release. Local employers who can begin recruitment and training of future employees whilst an individual is still in custody, should be incentivised to do so, including guaranteeing supported training, apprenticeship or job offer on release (based on the achievement of defined outcomes). This means that the potential employer/employee relationship can be established earlier meaning that success on release is a higher possibility, and in turn will empower them to behave and achieve throughout the sentence as there are tangible outcomes upon release.

5. How can successful participation in education be incentivised in prisons?

The process of linking an education plan with a sentencing plan – and ensuring that ties into an overarching employability plan – is currently lacking in most prison settings. It is however, in our view, vital for successful participation in education. The knowledge that they are working towards real opportunities in the community would improve prisoner motivation and thus engagement. There are still very clear divisions between the needs of the prison to keep people busy and fulfil ‘time out of room’ targets etc, and those driven by the offender manager and management of risk of the individual returning into the community. There needs to be better sequencing, with all elements having a clear vision of the end goal, instead of the multiple agencies involved focusing on their individual set of goals.

Prisoner perception of safety is also often a reason for non-attendance at activities or education. Prisons should have robust violence reduction strategies in place that recognise the impact of gang affiliation. The strategy should align and inform the education strategy to ensure equal opportunity and facilitate safe access to provision.

Education should not merely be a 'tick box' exercise. Nor should it be simply something that simply achieves a 'time out of room' target. Currently there is no measure of how far a prisoner has travelled on their education journey. If education was an integral part of the sentencing plan, this lack of accountability would be avoided. A prisoner 'passport' should be considered, documenting progress and achievements across sentencing, education, healthcare, behaviour, employability etc. This will act as a motivating factor for prisoners, and ensure plans are individually tailored, resulting in more positive outcomes.

Having a diversity of offer in prison education is vital. Most courses tend to be 9-12 weeks in length, which for those with shorter sentences is pointless. There should be more bite sized, focused courses that would be of direct use (for example, CV writing). There should also be greater collaboration between prisons and local colleges, to explore opportunities for prisoners to complete courses at a local college if they're released before the end of their course. This happens [regularly in Norway](#), for example.

Where education can be effectively coupled with work – to enhance experience and employment prospects upon the release, the work should be paid at a reasonable wage. We would also advocate bringing in more employers from the local community to talk to prisoners about opportunities available and demonstrate how they can still place working in their local community despite the fact they have been in prison.

6. How might apprenticeships work for those in custody?

Although a prisoner apprenticeship pathway was introduced historically by David Gauke MP, we have never heard or seen whether this was successfully mobilised. It seems that currently, apprenticeships can't be run in prisons because the prisons can't access apprenticeship funding and serving prisoners are not eligible.

Three things would need to happen for apprenticeships to work for those in custody:

1. Funding issues need to be addressed.
2. Apprenticeship levy transfer would need to be allowed into prison settings.
3. Release on Temporary License (ROTL) could be used practically, to include apprenticeship activity.

There is no reason why, if those issues weren't addressed, apprenticeships couldn't be broken down into bite-sized chunks (to be taught in prisons) and continued in a local college upon release. This would require the replication of real working environments in prisons – e.g. Timpson's and Redemption Roasters which set up commercial businesses within prisons and employed prisoners as staff. These could be part of customer service or hospitality apprenticeships, for example.

We would also suggest consideration is given to pre-apprenticeship training in prisons. This is something we advocate for in the outside world, so of course the same should apply inside the prison gates. This might include shorter courses which would equip prisoners with the skills needed to embark upon a specific apprenticeship upon release (e.g. the [Digital Edge programme](#)).

7. Are current resources for prison learning meeting need?

In short, no. The digital revolution within the prison estate is long overdue. In most prisons, there isn't the equipment available to teach prisoners some of the future-proof skills they need to enter the job market, with digital skills being a major area. In our view, education in the prison setting should reflect what it's like in society, so that transitioning into the 'real world' upon release is smoother.

Delivery of education in prisons is also far too generic and not flexible enough. It too often fails to take into account the needs of specific cohorts, and is unable to bend appropriately if there is a sudden influx of long sentence prisoners. The emphasis is on delivering specific programmes or courses, rather than adapting programmes for specific cohorts. In some ways this is a reflection of the teaching resource.

A greater emphasis must be placed on applying different methods of engaging a prisoner, given that almost half have been excluded from mainstream education. We need to look at alternative delivery methods to educate certain cohorts, such as education that is embedded into music/sport etc.

In addition, there is no specialist training for prison educators, and the qualification for teachers within custody are the same as the community. Specialist training needs to be given in dealing with not only disruptive pupils but also the fact there will be high levels of mental health issues, substance misuse,

and the fact that individuals are often anti-authority. The teaching environment is often, also, vastly different from a classroom.

There is an urgent need for a 'Teach First' style scheme for prison education. We believe this would help drive up performance and support teachers in delivering high-quality prisoner education that leads to pro-social outcomes.

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

Prison education should be subject to the same rules as schools if they fail to meet assessment standards. Currently, it's unclear what happens when a prison education provider doesn't meet the required standards.

At present, prison education contracts are clustered, which means that Prison Governors don't have much autonomy in selecting education providers. In particular, where provision is assessed as needing improvement, Governors should be given the flexibility to influence the education programme.

We would also reiterate that, in terms of inspections, the success of education provision should be based on distance travelled rather than achievement of specific grades.

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

The facilities available at more modern prisons, for example HMP Thameside or HMP Channings Wood, are certainly favourable to those in HMP Exeter, which is a Victorian local prison. The environment is much more conducive to learning. HMP Channings Wood for example is set in huge grounds and allows for a variety of practical courses to be delivered. This is very different from the more claustrophobic inner-city jails.

In Exeter, our staff have witnessed teachers attempting to deliver sessions in tiny interview rooms and workshop offices when other space was not available. Vulnerable prisoners do not have access to the

education building there and so separate arrangements had to be made, reducing the amount of time education staff were available to them compared to the rest of the prison.

When it comes to technology in prisons, this is far easier to roll out in modern prisons, where equipment such as smart whiteboards are the norm.

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

Regardless of whether provision is delivered in a private or a public sector prison, education is currently of a generally low standard. We don't see much of a difference between the sectors.

In our experience, private providers do well in target-driven environments. Therefore, putting the right targets in place will be vital to driving up the standard of prison education. We would advocate including targets relating to distance travelled and employability outcomes, which would no doubt see providers innovate and therefore drive the right sort of behaviours.

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

As outlined above, prison education and training is generally not good at being flexible to prisoner needs.

It makes no sense to start a prisoner on a course if they're about to be transferred – or indeed if they're about to be released. Because education providers aren't aware of each prisoner's sentence status, often education is inappropriate or of little use. In a busy local prison like Exeter, their very high turnover makes it inevitable that their education offering is more limited. This is where short, bite-sized courses can be useful.

Teachers in prison generally treat everyone the same and have no knowledge of whether they're a lifer or in prison for a couple of weeks. As we've highlighted, this results in education that is not tailored to the individual or integrated with that person's sentencing plan. Teachers need to be upskilled to work with different people; this is more than just delivering education, it's about how that education fits into the wider journey of the prisoner.