



Prisoners'  
Education  
Trust

# Brain Cells

Third edition  
Listening to Prisoner Learners



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September 2014

Clare Taylor, Prisoners' Education Trust



# Prisoners' Education TRUST

**Our vision is that every prisoner has the opportunity to benefit from education.**

## **Our beliefs**

- Education has the power to enrich, change and develop people throughout their lives.
- Offering prisoners access to education improves their self-esteem and enables them to choose a more constructive way of life – making it less likely that they will re-offend.

## **Our purpose**

- We support prisoners to engage in rehabilitation through learning. We do this by providing access to a broad range of distance learning opportunities and related services, to enable prisoners to lead more fulfilling lives and to contribute positively to society.
- We focus on those whose needs are not served by statutory prison education and who want to progress.
- We work to influence policy and practice so that education provision for prisoners becomes more effective; and we enable prisoner learner voice to be heard.

# CONTENTS

Foreword	1
Executive summary	2
Key areas for improvement	4
Introduction and methodology	6
Profile of Respondents	9
Chapter 1: Learning needs	13
Chapter 2: Learning Support - Building social capital	23
Chapter 3: Access to facilities and resources	32
Chapter 4: Virtual Campus	36
Chapter 5: Learner Voice	39
Chapter 6: Why Learn? Aspirations beyond custody	46
Concluding Remarks	52
Appendix A: Copy of survey	53
References	57
Acknowledgements	60

# Foreword



In 1991 I presented a report to the then Conservative Government as to my conclusions and recommendations following the Inquiry I had conducted (partly with His Honour Judge Stephen Tumin, HM's Chief Inspector of Prisons) into the riots at Strangeways and other prisons in the summer of 1990. The report was debated in Parliament and its recommendations were generally accepted. In the report I included the uncontroversial statement that:

*'The Prison Service has to live with...prisoners during their time in prison. The rest of the country lives with them afterwards. We cannot afford to lock them up and forget about them'.*

This finding is as true today as it was then of a prison population which has approximately doubled over the intervening period. It is essential that all prisoners, but especially those serving significant sentences are encouraged to make as constructive use as is possible of periods spent in custody. Learning can be the most constructive way to do this. It can help prisoners cope with imprisonment, maintain well being and achieve the skills that will assist them to lead a lawful and useful life after release.

Prisoners' Education Trust makes an immensely valuable contribution to this through supporting self directed learning for thousands of prisoners; the statistical evidence shows how it reduces subsequent re-offending. With greater resources and the right support system it could do even more to achieve the just, effective, economic and successful prison system I called for nearly two decades ago.

This is an excellent paper. It is based on the responses of prisoner learners. It highlights the issues experienced by prisoners serving long sentences in custody. Despite some modest improvements in isolated areas when compared to previous years, sadly its findings paint an overall picture of missed opportunities. Educational progression, use of ICT and the use of prisoners themselves to support learning could all be hugely improved. There is currently much policy attention on supporting prisoners at the point of release. Important though that is, this paper is a timely reminder of the essential need to support prisoners to build new lives, to assist them towards becoming positive contributors to society in the long term. I urge everyone involved or responsible for the prison system to study the paper's findings. Now more than ever, and as I said back in 1991 *'we must ensure that the Service makes proper use of the time a prisoner spends in prison, and the best use of the money available for keeping him or her there. The aim must be to reduce the likelihood of prisoners re-offending'*.

**The Rt Hon the Lord Woolf**  
A proud patron of Prisoners' Education Trust.

September 2014

# Executive Summary

This report summarises the results of a survey prepared by PET and distributed through Inside Time newspaper in September 2013. The survey contained 29 questions, which can be found in Appendix A of the report. Respondents to this survey were similar in part to the general prison population, but included a larger proportion of life and indeterminate sentenced prisoners. Because of this we believe the results are particularly important and timely as the Criminal Justice System goes through a period of unprecedented change under the Transforming Rehabilitation (TR) agenda. Under TR, short term prisoners are the priority. It is important that longer sentenced prisoners are not side-lined amongst all the changes and that their voices are heard; this report gives space for that to happen.

The report highlights positive findings, and the appreciation prisoners have of dedicated and supportive education staff, as well as sharing examples of good practice and improvements since our last report. However, it also highlights many ways learning needs are not being met. The findings will be of particular use to those involved in the management of longer sentenced prisoners in non-resettlement prisons. Our key recommendation is for the development of an overall learning strategy for longer sentenced prisoners. As part of this, our report presents ten key areas for development (p.4-5) in order to better meet the needs of this group.

## Key findings

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### Chapter 1: Learning needs

- 80% of respondents had qualifications when they came into prison, including 45% with GCSEs and 20% A-levels.
- Just over a third (37%) said their learning goals and needs had been supported by the prison.
- 41% of respondents did not engage in prison education because nothing was available at a high enough level.
- Only 42% had been encouraged to progress to higher levels of learning and only 40% said they were aware of opportunities to study through distance learning.
- Some respondents were studying courses well below their level due to lack of options; 41% of prisoners with A-levels before prison took level 1 qualifications whilst in prison.
- Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) respondents were more likely to have some qualifications prior to prison but were less likely to engage in learning once in prison.
- Vulnerable prisoners told us their access to education was restricted.
- Female respondents tended to be educated to higher levels prior to prison than male respondents and achieved well whilst in prison but reported courses not being available at a high enough level.
- The majority of 18-21 year old respondents were learning whilst in prison with most gaining level 2 qualifications. However, the numbers progressing onto level 3 qualifications were low, with some respondents highlighting dissatisfaction with short courses.
- 28% of respondents identified themselves as having a specific Learning Disability and Difficulty (LDD). 66% reported receiving no specific support for their LDD.

### Chapter 2: Learning support – Building social capital

- Respondents spoke positively about the support they received from education staff and had a good understanding of the funding/benchmarking pressures they were facing. 84% said they had received most learning support from prison education staff with almost half saying this had been a lot of support.
- Only a quarter (26%) of respondents said they had received useful information from the National Careers Service.
- Just over a third of respondents said that they had received learning support from prison staff/officers with only 9% of those reported receiving a lot of support; a 4% decrease from our last Brain Cells survey.
- 58% of respondents said they had not received any support for distance learning from the prison.
- Just over a quarter of respondents said they received support from a peer mentor but 63% said they had received support from fellow prisoners indicating that support from peers often happens informally. Almost a third said that access to a mentor would have made learning easier.
- Over half of respondents (54%) did not have, or did not know if they had an Individual Learning Plan. However this was an improvement from 56% in 2011 in Brain Cells 2 and 58% in 2009 in Brain Cells 1.

**Chapter 3: Access to facilities and resources**

- Survey responses indicated that increased access to computers and a wider range of books, materials and resources would help prisoners with their learning.
- Almost two thirds of respondents said that they would like more opportunities to learn outside of standard work and education times.
- Over two thirds of respondents said that they would like to see a wider range of distance learning courses available.

**Chapter 4: Virtual Campus**

- Most respondents felt that access and support for the Virtual Campus (VC) was poor; 83% said the VC is not easily accessible within their prison and 87% said that prison staff did not support and encourage prisoners to use the VC. In qualitative responses, some respondents said they had never heard of, seen or used the VC.
- Some learners mentioned problems with using the VC for Open University and distance learning courses as well as for vocational learning.
- Respondents were positive about the potential of the VC and put forward suggestions for improvements such as; updating content, using more for learning and resettlement purposes and introducing to prisoners at the start of sentences to ensure they gain maximum benefit.
- 23% of respondents felt that the VC had enhanced their IT skills.

**Chapter 5: Learner Voice**

- Compared to previous surveys, respondents were much more likely to have been given opportunities to express their views through feedback and surveys; 57% had given feedback on a specific course or activity (a 50% increase from previous findings in Brain Cells 2 in 2011). Exactly half of respondents said they had expressed their views through completing a survey given to them by the prison (an improvement from 2011 in Brain Cells 2 when only 29% of respondents had fed back in this way).
- Less noticeable improvements were seen since our last survey in more participatory and empowering forms of Learner Voice such as Student Councils and Learner Forums; a 3% increase from 9% to 12%.
- Learners were keen to get involved in more Learner Voice activities; over three quarters wanted to speak directly with policy makers (20% increase from Brain Cells 2) and 46% wanted to take part in a learner forum (18% increase from Brain Cells 2).
- Respondents were asked what the best things about learning were in their prison; the most frequently cited response was supportive, encouraging and motivational tutors and learning support staff.

**Chapter 6: Why Learn? Aspirations beyond custody**

- Respondents were most motivated to learn to occupy their time usefully (81%), to gain qualifications (71%) and to improve their employability (70%).
- Qualitative responses also revealed that a number of respondents were particularly motivated to progress to higher levels of learning and go to university in the future. Many respondents said they wanted to turn a negative situation into a positive one through education.
- Over three quarters of respondents said that engaging with education in prison had improved their ability and desire to learn, indicating that opportunities to progress further are key, particularly for longer sentenced prisoners
- 69% of respondents said that learning had improved their ability to cope with prison, with 40% saying that it had improved a lot. This is an important finding for longer sentenced prisoners and people with mental health issues.
- 68% of respondents wanted to continue studying post release and 70% wanted to gain employment.
- Respondents identified potential barriers to being able to gain employment after release including: being prohibited from employment due to criminal record, disability, age and illness.
- 45% of respondents were keen to volunteer to gain and build up experience.

# Key areas for improvement

## 1. Better meet the needs of longer sentenced and higher level learners

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An explicit learning strategy for longer sentenced prisoners should be developed. The need to have such a strategy is evident from responses to this survey and from previous research carried out by Ofsted in 2009. Longer sentenced prisoners will have more time and therefore need more opportunities for in depth and higher level learning. As part of this, restrictions on Higher Education only being available six years prior to release should be lifted. Non-resettlement prisons will need greater flexibility (under Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) contracts and funding mechanisms) for the curriculum they can teach. The current system is more suitable for short sentences; offering bite-size, low level courses and not explicitly funding distance learning support.

We also advocate for data on educational backgrounds of all sections of the prison population to be collected, not only for those serving four years and under. This will enable us to gain a representative and accurate picture of prior levels of learning within prisons. We welcome the new compulsory testing on entry to prison introduced in August 2014 but would like to see the collection of prior qualifications on entry to prison, similar to information collected through the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction survey but for all sections of the prison population. Testing should be conducted at a suitable time and within the context of a broader education induction process.

## 2. Improve opportunities for progression

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Learning should be aspirational, with prisoners who achieve their basic skills being able to progress to higher levels. There is no evidence to suggest that teaching of basic skills adequately meets the learning needs of prisoners or by itself leads to employment. Ministry of Justice (MoJ)/Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) should fund the commissioning of robust, individual evaluations of courses delivered in prisons to look at quality and targeting; also a recommendation of a recent report which used data from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction survey (see page 26). Once engaged, many prisoners do develop a thirst for learning, which often can be met through distance learning. Each non-resettlement prison should have a Distance Learning Co-ordinator who is responsible for advising learners about appropriate distance learning courses and how to apply for funding. They should also have access to tutor support. Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) for the purposes of learning should also be fully utilised where appropriate. Links with local colleges, universities and training centres should be developed, to enable learners to progress and gain practical skills.

## 3. Improve Information, Communication Technology (ICT) to meet learners needs

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Access to computers for word processing (and especially for distance learning) is crucial. A classroom with computers available for non-OLASS learners should be provided in all non-resettlement prisons, with learners given sufficient time to use them, including outside of the core day. Provisions should also be made available to enable suitable learners access to security authorised in-cell laptops from the prison in the same way they can loan TVs. Security risks should be managed in a proportionate and robust way so that ICT can be used as an effective tool for resettlement and rehabilitation.

## 4. Improve Virtual Campus (VC) to meet learners needs

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A co-ordinated ICT strategy is needed, which recognises the central place ICT and the Virtual Campus have in reducing re-offending. Learners within prisons should be consulted with about content, usability, location and access. More than one relevant staff member should be trained to a high standard in the use of the VC so staff feel confident in supporting prisoners and are more likely to encourage them to use it. The VC needs to be in a place in the prison that is accessible to the majority of prisoners. The virtual learning environment should be piloted and developed for secure, interactive and engaging web-based content.

## 5. Improve access to books and materials to support learning needs

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The recently introduced Prison Service Instruction (PSI) 301/2013 restricts the number of books prisoners can have in their possession to just 12 and also prevents family members from being able to send in books. PET is concerned that this is inadvertently impacting on higher level and distance learners who need a variety of sometimes specialist books. We recommend this is reviewed urgently to ensure that it does not inadvertently inhibit learning, and encourage prison Governors to use their discretion in the meantime. This is especially important as currently staff shortages are making it increasingly difficult for prisoners to access prison libraries.

## 6. Learner Voice to meet learning needs

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Every non-resettlement prison should have a Learner Involvement Strategy suitable to their population, encouraging a learning culture at all levels and in all departments in the prison. Prisoners should be involved in the development of this strategy, which should include a wide range of learner voice activities, at different levels of the 'learner voice participation ladder'. PET welcomes the progress made since our last report with significant improvements in the numbers of learners completing surveys or feedback on courses. However we would like to see similar improvements in more participatory learner voice activities, such as student councils and learner forums. Opportunities for prisoners to get involved in learner voice activities should be well promoted, particularly through using other learners as Learning Representatives and Learning Champions. Opportunities for prison staff/officers to become Learning Champions should be encouraged and supported. Each Learner Involvement Strategy should include a feedback mechanism for providing prisoners with a response to their suggestions. Progress against this strategy should be inspected by Ofsted.

## 7. Individual learning plans (ILPs) to meet learning needs

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ILPs should be reviewed on a regular basis with input from the learner so they are not seen as tokenistic and allow learners to take ownership of their own learning. Learners should be able to keep an updated copy to refer to as well as a copy being held centrally by the prison. Where possible collaborative working between different agencies/departments (e.g. education, resettlement, National Careers Service, Offender Management) should take place and learning plans should take into account not only learning needs but also social, behavioural and emotional needs and tie in with sentence planning.

Learning plans should enable progression and encourage prisoners to have a long term focus as well as short term goals. They should also be joined up when prisoners transfer to other prisons and with the community, allowing for the continuation of progression and review.

## 8. Peer mentoring to meet learning needs

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National Offender Management Service (NOMS)/MoJ should issue guidelines and a mentoring strategy for both within prisons and through the gate under Transforming Rehabilitation. Support for mentoring must come from the top on a strategic and practical level. Within prisons, it is important that Governors and Heads of Learning and Skills promote the value of mentoring and support mentoring projects. Time, energy and money needs to be invested in training, support and supervision of mentors in order for it to have real value and not feel tokenistic. Better pay for mentoring opportunities could go some way to encouraging more prisoners to get involved and also show them that mentoring is valued and not just an economical way for education providers to meet their targets. Prisons should provide more support for learners to become peer mentors, classroom assistants, learner reps and/or learning champions. Prisoners' contributions to peer learning support should be recognised, positively reinforced and encouraged.

## 9. Excellence in teaching to meet learning needs

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The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) should support the development of specialist prison education modules for Initial Teacher Education Programmes. OLASS should establish guidelines on continuing professional development (CPD) provision for staff employed under OLASS contracts. In the interim, education providers applying for an OLASS contract should be required to set out how the CPD needs of its employees will be supported and funded. Where possible, tutors should be encouraged and supported to use engaging teaching methods including embedding learning into other activities and in different locations throughout the prison.

## 10. Changing the regime to support a learning culture

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Prisoners should have access to learning opportunities at weekends and in the evenings, especially in working prisons, ensuring that prisoners are not disadvantaged by the prison regime. PET would also encourage all prison Governors to show they value learning by revising their pay structures, rewarding prisoners who choose skilled and educational opportunities rather than unskilled work. Wages for education should be the same as for work, encouraging more prisoners to take up learning.

# Introduction and Methodology

This report summarises the results of 343 responses from prisoners to a survey prepared by Prisoners' Education Trust and distributed in the September 2013 edition of the prison newspaper *Inside Time*. The survey is the third in a series that Prisoners' Education Trust has published bi-annually, allowing us to track change over time and compare to other available data. In this edition, we kept many of the questions from previous surveys whilst also introducing new ones, for example a question relating specifically to the Virtual Campus. We also felt it important to give respondents more opportunities to give qualitative as well as quantitative responses, providing us with richer data about learner experiences.

It must be stated from the offset that respondents to this survey were not representative of the wider prison population. First, given the self-selecting nature of the survey and that completing the survey required a reasonable level of literacy, we are aware that we have obtained the opinions of a selection of the prison population. Prisoners whose voices are less likely to be represented include; those with poor literacy; learning difficulties or disabilities; those who see no relevance in education or expressing their views or who do not read *Inside Time*. The voices heard in this report are likely to be from prisoners committed to learning and to improving the conditions and facilities for learning. We thank them and hope their views are listened to by those with the power to influence change.

Secondly, we know from the information gained that the majority of respondents were older white males serving longer sentences. The largest proportion of the sample, 30%, came from prisoners serving life or indeterminate sentences despite this group only making up 20% of the general prison population on 30th September 2013<sup>i</sup>. However, we believe these results are important and timely as the Criminal Justice System goes through a period of unprecedented change under the Transforming Rehabilitation agenda.

## Setting the context

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There are a number of important policy changes and issues which are significant for setting the context for this survey and which highlight issues for longer sentenced prisoners.

### Transforming Rehabilitation - the split between resettlement and non-resettlement prisons

The government's 'Transforming Rehabilitation' agenda focuses on short sentenced prisoners (serving under 12 months) who will be held in newly appointed 'resettlement prisons'. As a result, resources are being concentrated on these prisoners, in particular the last three months of a prisoner's sentence. This resettlement support and attention is to be welcomed, as re-offending rates for people released from short sentences have been consistently higher compared to those released from longer sentences, for example; between July 2011 and June 2012 re-offending rates for adults who served sentences of less than 12 months were 58% compared to 34% for those who served sentences of 12 months or more<sup>ii</sup> (although this figure did exclude prisoners sentenced to life and indeterminate sentences for public protection). Despite this need, PET is concerned that longer sentenced prisoners are becoming a forgotten group, even though prisoners with sentences four years and over make up almost half of the static prison population. The majority of longer sentenced prisoners will only be transferred to a resettlement prison approximately three months before their release date<sup>iii</sup>.

Although a lot has been written about resettlement prisons, very little information has been made available about non-resettlement prisons and what opportunities will be available in them. Longer sentenced respondents to this survey highlight particular barriers to learning, indicating that in many ways their learning needs are not being met. This report will therefore be important reading for a variety of audiences, including; governors of non-resettlement prisons, designers of new prisons, those responsible for designing new OLASS contracts and those working with young people on long sentences making the transition from the youth estate to an adult non-resettlement prison. This report could be used as a blue-print for what education in a non-resettlement prison should or should not look like.

### Learning strategy for longer sentenced prisoners is needed

In 2009 Ofsted evaluated the provision of learning and skills for prisoners serving long custodial sentences (four years and over) based on 19 prison visits and an analysis of 10 inspection reports. The report found that none of the prisons had an explicit learning and skills strategy for longer sentenced prisoners and that the curriculum did not adequately provide for this group<sup>iv</sup>. Furthermore, in the government Review of Offender Learning in 2011<sup>v</sup>, there was no acknowledgement of the differing needs of longer sentenced prisoners. With the split between resettlement and non-resettlement prisons it will be important to ensure that there is an explicit learning strategy for longer sentenced prisoners. The need to have a strategy such as this is evident from responses to this survey.

### Thematic review of life sentenced prisoners

A year ago a joint prison and probation thematic inspectorate report into life sentence prisoners<sup>vi</sup> was published, which was critical of the learning provision for life sentenced prisoners. In the report the Chief Inspectors found that:

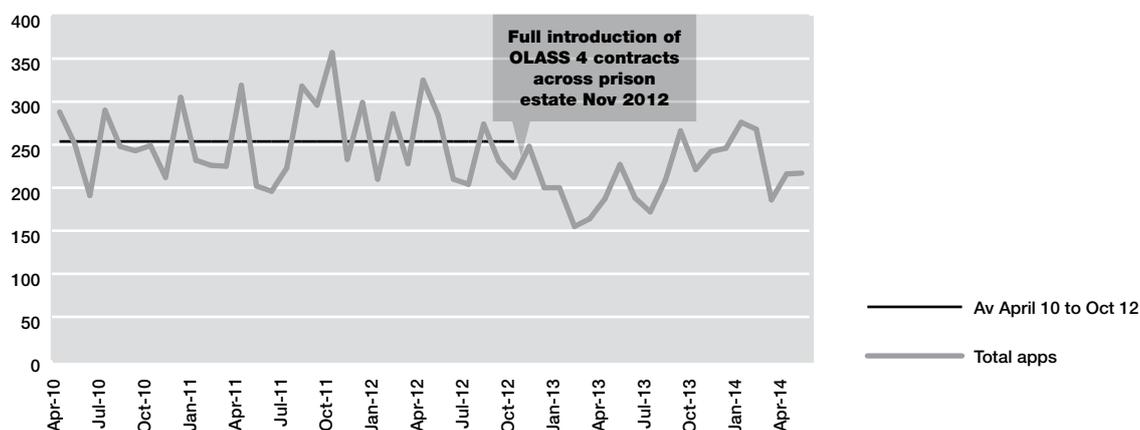
- The new arrangements for providing education within prison, under the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS 4) contract which took effect on 01 August 2012, had vastly reduced the available options for life sentence prisoners.
- Although distance learning was still an option, it was much less widely available than previously.
- They ignored the potential benefits which such qualifications could offer both the life sentence prisoner and the prison throughout their protracted time in custody.
- Gaining qualifications within custody undoubtedly served to raise a prisoner's self-esteem, particularly if they had previously achieved little in life.
- There was a general lack of training for independent living and some prisoners felt that more should be done to prepare them for a return to a society which had changed during their incarceration, particularly in the field of information technology with the advent of the internet and social media.

One of the recommendations made in the Inspectors' report was that Transforming Rehabilitation should be used as an opportunity to reassess how life sentence prisoners are managed both in custody and the community, with a view to providing a clearer strategic focus ensuring that they have access to a wide range of services designed to promote rehabilitation.

### OLASS 4

2012/13 saw the introduction of phase four of the OLASS contracts, which have a focus on employability in the period immediately before release; '*developing skills and routes to employment, especially in the 12 months before prisoners are released*'<sup>vii</sup>. Whilst for many prisoners this kind of learning and support can be a major goal and motivator, some groups, including older and longer sentenced prisoners are excluded<sup>viii</sup>.

Under OLASS 4, written guidance to education providers states that, '*you must support learners who want to study with the Open University and other institutions that provide courses on a distance-learning basis*'<sup>ix</sup>. However, with no specific funding available for this and staff cuts due to benchmarking, it may not be the number one priority for education providers. When this survey was sent out to prisons last year, the OLASS 4 contracts were in the 'bedding in' phase. Throughout 2013 Prisoners' Education Trust did notice a drop in distance learning applications, which can be seen on the graph below. OLASS 4 contracts were introduced between September and November 2012, following which a noticeable drop is evident.



As a result of this PET began working more closely with prison education departments offering support to them. Since then the situation has started to improve although the numbers of applications are still not as high as we would like. PET will continue to work with prisons where possible to improve prisoners' access to distance learning opportunities.

### 24+ and Higher Education (HE) loans

24+ Advanced Learning Loans were introduced by the UK government for learners aged 24 and over studying at Level 3, Level 4 or Advanced and Higher Apprenticeships on 1 August 2013. The introduction of these loans has led to the withdrawal of many higher level, high quality courses which, in some cases had been running in prisons for years. This is likely to affect longer sentenced prisoners particularly, who due to sentence length do have the time to progress onto higher levels of learning if the opportunities are there.

Currently the only widely available route for prisoners to study level three courses is via distance learning, usually through a grant from PET. Whilst we are clearly an advocate of distance learning, it can not be expected to fully meet the needs of all learners in prison, particularly those undertaking vocational courses. For example, it would be possible to learn the theory of plumbing through distance learning but not the practical elements needed to qualify. There is a need for prisons to provide practical courses at a level that will be sufficiently challenging for learners and realistically lead to employment.

A further issue since September 2012 is that arrangements for prisoners wishing to study HE/OU courses have changed too. Under previous guidelines for Government funding for OU courses, PET were able to fund initial OU courses towards an Open University degree. PET is now restricted to funding Openings or Access modules that are preparatory to full degree level study. Any new student wishing to study for a full degree must now apply for a student loan as is the case in the community. PET is keen to find out what information and support is being provided to learners so that they can make informed decisions about student loans.

Another restriction in relation to OU study is that the learner's earliest release date must now be within 6 years of the first day of the course starting (for indeterminate sentences the sentence tariff is seen as earliest date of release). This means that many prisoners are now being prevented from taking on higher level study until much later on in their sentence and missing out on opportunities, learning and benefits that come from higher level learning and play a key part in the desistance process.

### **Incorporating teacher voice into the report**

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Although this report is based on the voices of prisoner learners, we also feel it is important to triangulate with research representing the views of prison teachers. We know through our close work with prison education departments in the past 25 years that prison teachers and education staff are also affected by policy changes and want many of the same things that learners do.

Over 60% of teachers working with young people in prisons and who responded to a survey by Institute for Learning (IfL)<sup>x</sup> said that it was essential for teachers and trainers working within prisons to have level 5 post-graduate qualifications. Upfront investment in qualified teachers/trainers and effective practice was seen to be a low cost option compared with high levels of youth re-offending.

Another report based on 278 responses from prison educators to a survey by University College Union (UCU) and Institute of Education (IoE)<sup>xi</sup> found that 62% were heavily critical of the practice of competitive tendering for prison education and funding being dependent on educational outcomes achieved. They said this aspect of prison education policy was having a negative effect on learners and on the overall quality of education offered. In their view, profit was the overriding concern of the prison contract providers. Their views echo the learner voices contained within this report.

### **The case for investment: learning works**

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Amongst all these issues and policy changes it is important to feature recent evidence highlighting learning as a low cost intervention that contributes to reduced re-offending.

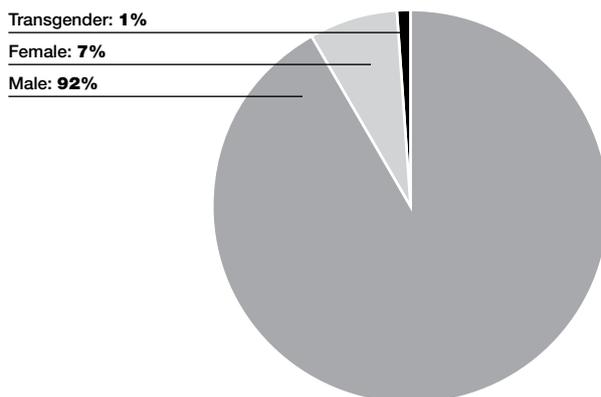
Analysis by the Ministry of Justice Data Lab<sup>xii</sup> found that participating in an intervention (distance learning) by Prisoners' Education Trust led to a reduction in re-offending between 5-8 percentage points. The one year proven re-offending rate for 3085 prison learners who received a grant from PET was over a quarter lower at 19%, compared with 26% for a matched control group of similar people but who had not received an intervention from Prisoners' Education Trust. The 3085 people who made up the sample were largely people who had served longer sentences of four years and over; 61% were serving between 4-10 years and 7% more than 10 years.

The evidence presented above and throughout this new Brain Cells report indicates that the case for investment in the learning needs of all sections of the prison population is crucial, whilst highlighting the need for approaches specific to the circumstances of longer sentenced prisoners. Their voices tell us that the benefits of learning are far wider than reducing re-offending and employability and therefore the aims of prison education should be too. We hope their voices can help to influence change going forward and a genuine commitment to providing learning which meets the needs of all types of learners within the Criminal Justice System.

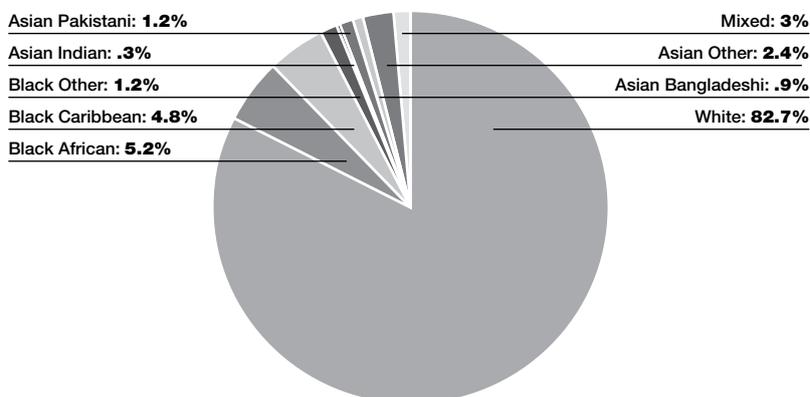
## Profile of respondents

Considerably fewer prisoners responded to this survey when compared with previous years; a decrease of 36% from 532 responses in 2011 and down by 27% from 468 responses in 2009. One explanation could be that only one copy of the survey was included with each copy of Inside Time. When conducting another survey we will consider more copies being distributed through Inside Time and work with different prison departments to distribute it in other ways.

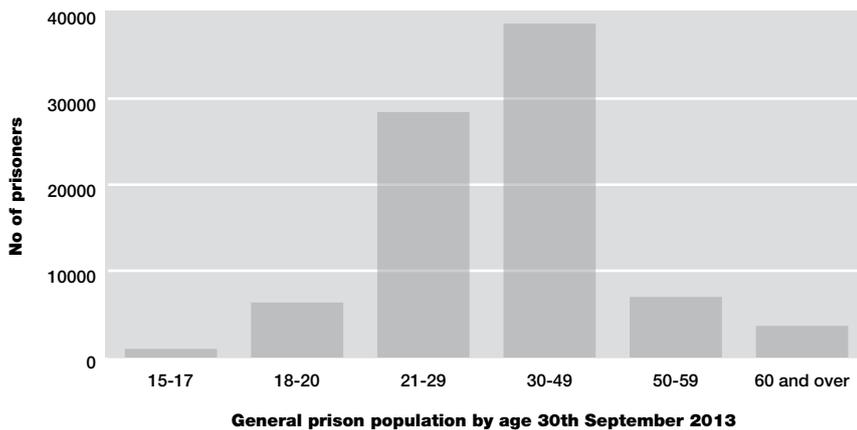
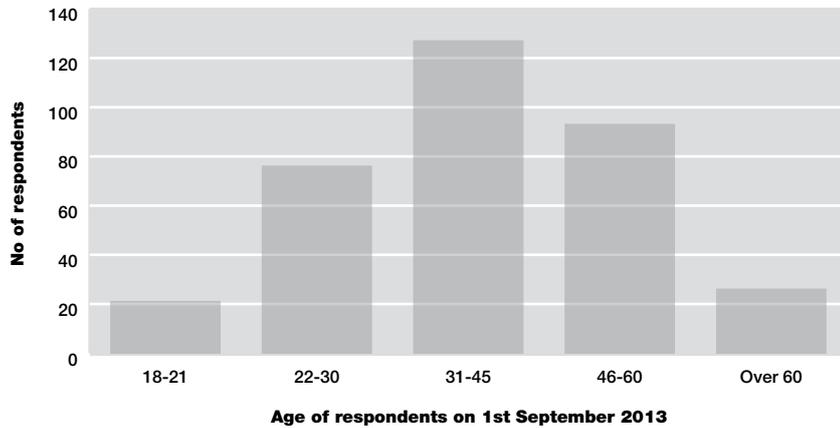
**Gender:** This year 92% of respondents were male, 7% female and 1% transgender. The proportion of females who answered the survey is less than the 11% who did last year but slightly higher than the proportion of women in the general prison population, which was 5% on 30th September 2013<sup>i</sup>.



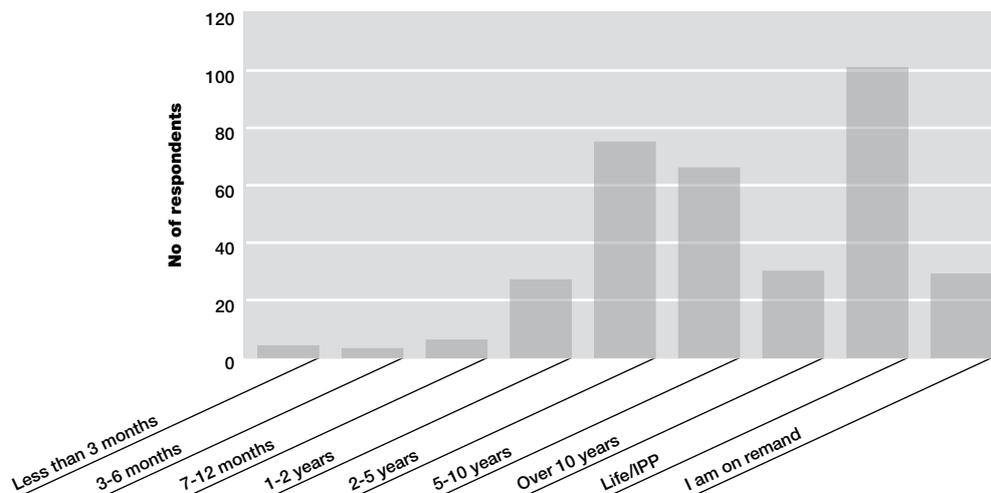
**Ethnic/cultural background:** The majority of respondents defined themselves as white (83%) with the remaining 17% being Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds. This is lower than the number of BAME respondents in the last survey (19%) and lower than in the wider prison population (22%) during September 2013<sup>ii</sup>.



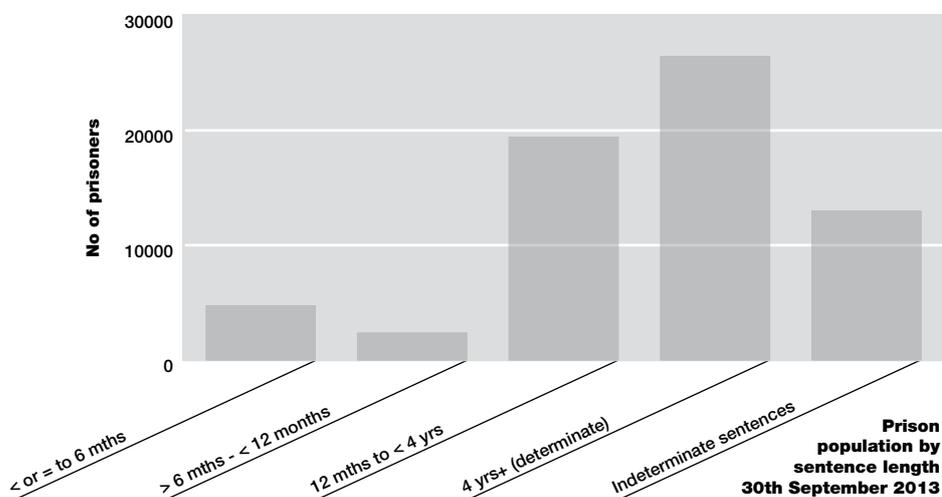
**Age:** The average age of the respondents in our sample was between 31-45 years (37%), which was similar to the 2011 sample. In total, our sample included 6% 18 – 21 year olds but no 15-17 year old respondents (15-17 year olds did respond to our Brain Cells 2 report). However, the sentenced youth population (under 21s) decreased by 12% in the last year which may explain lower numbers<sup>iii</sup>. 94% of the sample was over 21, which is broadly similar to the general prison population in September 2013<sup>iv</sup> and follows the normal distribution bell shaped curve as highlighted in the diagram below. Slightly higher numbers of 46-60 year olds responded this year compared with Brain Cells 2. People aged 60 and over are now the fastest growing age group in the prison estate with numbers rising by 122% between 2002 and 2012<sup>v</sup>.



**Sentence length:** Our sample was similar in part but not wholly representative of the wider prison population. The majority of responses to our survey came from prisoners serving over two years (80%).



The graph above show that the largest group of respondents were prisoners serving life or Indeterminate sentences for Public Protection (IPP) (30%), whereas government statistics (see graph below) show that only approximately 20% of the general prison population were serving such sentences on 30th September 2013<sup>vi</sup>. Prisoners serving IPP sentences are now spending longer in custody as almost 70% and a third of life sentenced prisoners had passed their tariff expiry date<sup>vii</sup>. A smaller proportion of our sample (4%) was serving sentences below 12 months compared to 9% of general prison population. Clearly there were differences between our sample and the wider sentenced prison population, most notably with a higher proportion of IPP and life sentence prisoners in our sample. However, the overall shape of the distribution was not hugely different.



On the 30th September 2013, 46% of the static adult prison population aged 18 and over were serving sentences of four years and over in the general prison population<sup>viii</sup>. Therefore, when we are making recommendations for improving learning opportunities for longer sentenced prisoners who will be held in non-resettlement prisons we are talking about almost half of the population.



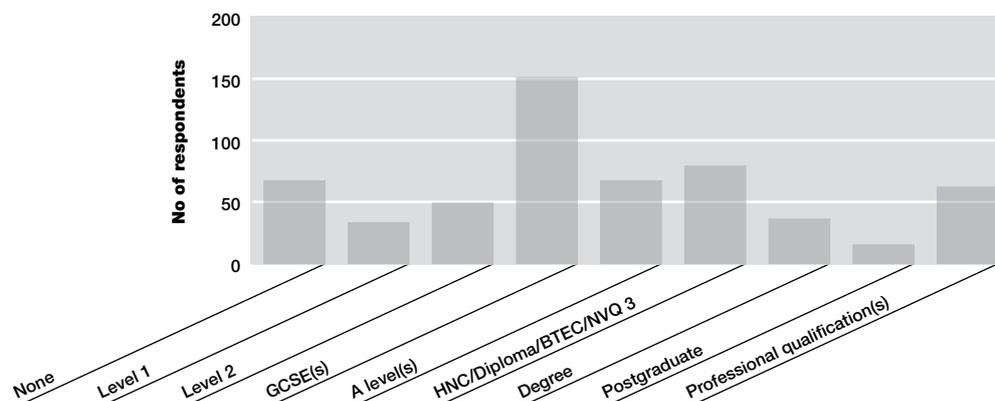
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A young man studies in his cell at HMP Pentonville

# Chapter 1: Learning needs

## Educational profile of respondents

Educational profiles were similar to our 2011 survey. 80% of respondents who answered this question (only five did not answer) had a qualification before entering prison (but we did not ask if this was achieved before their current sentence or their first custodial sentence and so the qualifications may include some achieved during previous prison sentences):



- 45% reported having a level 2 GCSE compared to 50% in Brain Cells 2.
- 20% reported having level 3 A-levels similar to Brain Cells 2.
- 23% reported having level 3 NVQ/HNC/BTEC/diploma (4% increase from Brain Cells 2).
- 11% reported having a degree (level 4) similar to Brain Cells 2.

Respondents to our survey reported having higher levels of qualifications compared to the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) research (2012), a longitudinal cohort study of adult prisoners sentenced to between one month and four years in England and Wales in 2005 and 2006. Approximately 5% had A-levels and only 3% had a degree<sup>i</sup>. However, as the SPCR study only includes prisoners sentenced to four years or less, it is clearly different from our sample.

This study is therefore useful to understanding the characteristics of the longer sentenced prison population, who have not been covered by other longitudinal research. Although it is inevitably more difficult to carry out longitudinal research with longer sentenced prisoners whose journey through custody to release is much longer, we do recommend further robust research.

### Prisoners with no previous qualifications prior to prison

20% of the sample said that they had no previous qualifications, which is similar to the 2011 findings (21%) but considerably lower than 2009 findings (36%) and more than 50% lower than findings from the SPCR (2012) study<sup>ii</sup> where 47% of newly sentenced prisoners reported having no qualifications at all. They are also higher than another SPCR (2014) report, which focused only on the prisoners serving between 18 months and 4 years (who they define as longer sentenced prisoners) where 43% reported having no qualifications<sup>iii</sup>.

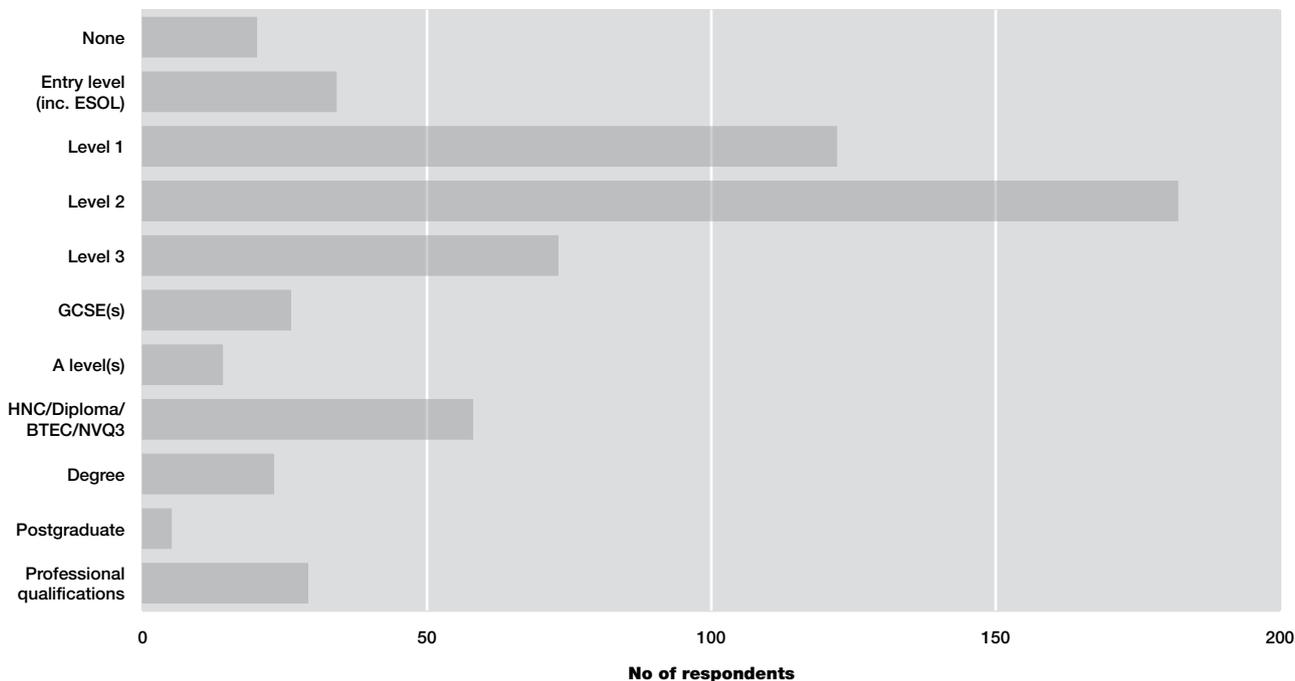
Of the respondents in our sample reporting having no qualifications prior to prison, 77% said they had a negative experience at school (compared to 43% of the whole sample). However, a large proportion of respondents reporting having no qualifications prior to prison have since progressed in their learning journey whilst in prison as highlighted below:

- 84% were undertaking formal courses with a teacher in the education department.
- 30% were undertaking distance learning courses.
- 42% were undertaking vocational courses.
- 56% had achieved a level 2 qualification.
- 32% had achieved a level 3 qualification.
- 5% had achieved a degree.
- 2% had achieved a postgraduate qualification.

The above findings suggest that with the right support, prisoners who have not engaged with learning previously, can progress to high levels. They also reflect findings from the SPCR research about prisoners' attitudes towards learning in that they were highly motivated to learn with very few not being interested in learning, education and training<sup>iv</sup>.

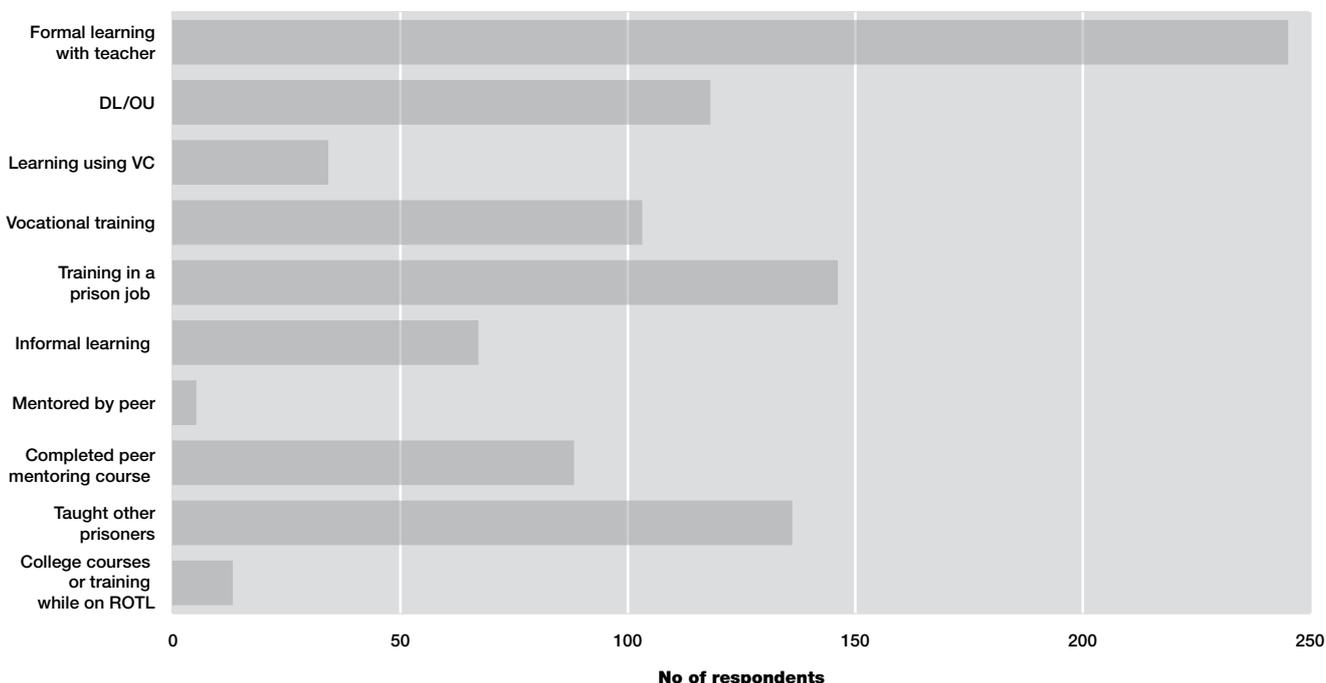
### Qualifications gained whilst in prison

The graph below provides a breakdown of the qualifications gained by our sample whilst in prison.



- Most prisoners gained qualifications at level 2 (59%).
- Just under a quarter gained level 3 qualifications (24%).
- Only 7% of the sample reported not having gained any qualifications which is encouraging and further backs up the finding that prisoners' attitudes towards learning are positive and they are motivated to learn.
- However, 12% of the sample (36 people) did not answer this question so it could be that a higher proportion of our sample than 7% were not engaging with learning and as stated at the outset, our sample is likely to over-represent those with an interest in or commitment to education.

### Types of learning whilst in prison



## Positive Findings

- Eight out of 10 respondents had been engaged in formal courses in education with a teacher.
- Almost half of respondents were involved in training in a prison industry.
- Over a third of the sample (38%) was undertaking distance learning including Open University courses, which is excellent because it shows that progression onto higher levels of learning is taking place. For more information on distance learning see Chapter Two: Learning Support.
- Encouragingly a little under half (44%) of the sample was involved with teaching other prisoners such as on the Shannon Trust reading programme or as a classroom assistant. 29% had completed a peer mentoring course such as Shannon Trust or another peer mentoring course through the prison. This will be discussed more in relation to the benefits of learning in Chapter 6: Why Learn?.
- In qualitative responses, respondents mentioned a broad range of learning experiences they engaged with such as; a range of music qualifications including teaching other prisoners to play instruments such as the guitar; vocational related courses such as; gym instructor, bricklaying, Health and Safety, First Aid, COSHH and IT courses such as PICTA.

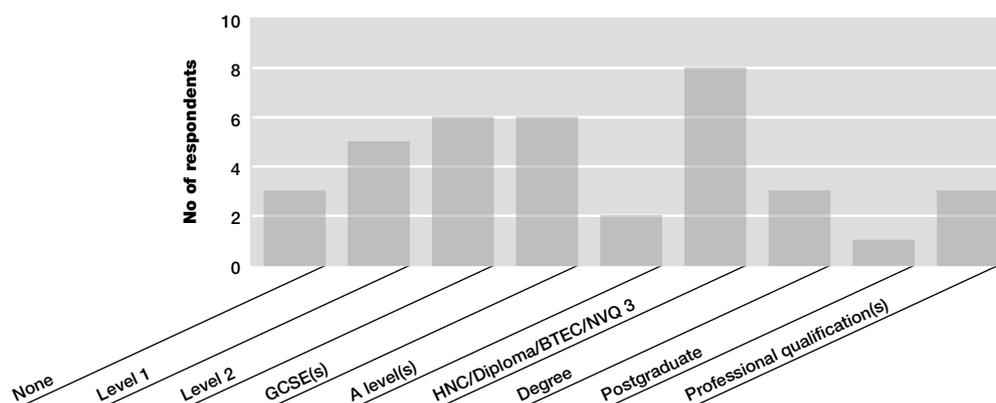
## Areas For improvement

- Only 4% of the sample was attending college or training on ROTL.
- Only one in 10 respondents had completed learning and training using the Virtual Campus. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

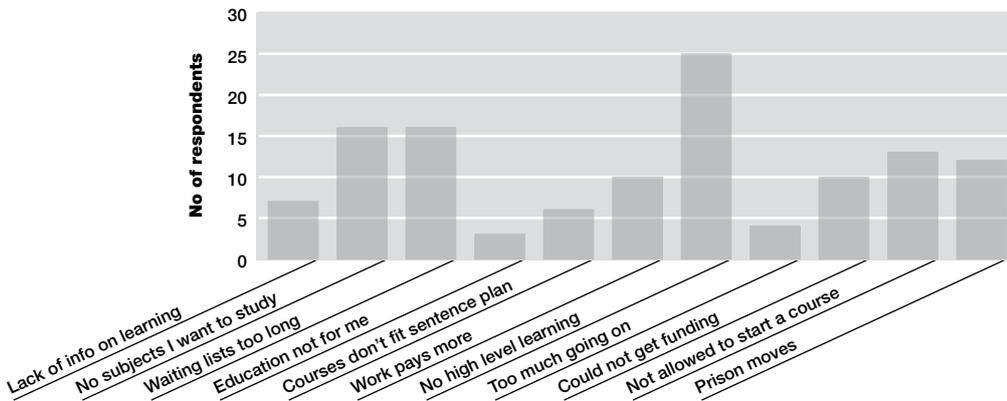
These two areas are of particular relevance to longer sentenced prisoners who are most likely to need support in reintegrating back into society, including engaging with modern technology.

### Not engaging with learning

The graph below shows a breakdown of the prior qualification levels of those not achieving qualifications in prison. The results clearly show that those with a standard level of education and above (level 2 and 3), were the biggest group not engaging.



The responses below suggest that the reason for this is that learning is not available to meet their needs rather than because they lack interest in further learning.



The main reasons given for not engaging with learning were:

- Courses not available at a high enough level (47%).
- Subjects of interest not available to study (27%).
- Waiting lists for courses were too long (27%).
- Interestingly only 5% said 'learning is not for me' (similar to 1 in 10 respondents in SPCR research).

These findings tell us that where respondents are not engaging with learning it is not due to lack of interest or because they do not think learning is for them; rather it is a combination of barriers outside their control. Respondents do understand the value of education and are willing to learn. Their learning needs should be better supported so that they can progress, rehabilitating themselves whilst in custody leading to reduced re-offending and long term desistance from crime.

### Higher level learners – Running out of opportunities

The majority of this sample had some qualifications, with only a small number of respondents not engaging with learning. However, a consistent finding was that many were studying courses well below their level:

- 43% of respondents with a degree and 41% of prisoners with A-levels before prison took level 1 qualifications whilst in prison.
- 70% with a previous degree and 68% with A-levels took qualifications at level 2.

Whilst there may be valid reasons for this, such as needing to update skills after time away from studying, qualitative responses to this question revealed a dissatisfaction with the current prison education system, including:

- Frustration with the level and range of courses on offer – in effect running out of opportunities.
- Repeating courses each time they moved prisons.
- Being influenced by education staff to take lower level courses to fill up classes.

*I was forced to do Level 2 English and Maths while here but to me it was a waste of time as I am at a higher level.*

---

*Despite achieving a BA and MA whilst in custody I still get asked to do Level 1 and 2 literacy courses, just to tick a box for the education department. What a waste of time and resources.*

---

*I have attended courses because I wanted to pass the time in prison - but there has been no education above Level 2 maths/English and vocational qualifications.*

---

*I began to study IT at Level 3 but unfortunately I was unable to complete due to the recent withdrawal of funding.*

*During 6 weeks in here I did courses well below my level as nothing else was available.*

*The education in this prison is fine until you are at a higher level than the courses available so it would be good to have a wider range of courses you could study at higher level.*

### Long term prisoners

As highlighted, the majority of respondents to this survey were those serving longer sentences. Many of them had comments about how their needs were not being met under current arrangements:

*At the moment there is no support for anyone seeking funding for post graduate qualifications except through the student loans route which many prisoners here (myself included) will not be eligible for, for many years (some prisoners never) due to the length of their sentences. How can it be right to deny someone access to higher/further education when they could apply that knowledge/skill set to their rehabilitation?*

*It's all about Level 1 and 2, no more GCSEs or A Levels etc. This is good for short term prisoners but when you are in long term prison doing life you complete them within a couple of years then there is nothing left to do.*

These findings are similar to Ofsted's findings when they evaluated learning and skills for longer serving prisoners and found that the programme of learning and skills on offer was not appropriate for those on long sentences and the range of programmes was narrow, with prisoners quickly exhausting the programmes available<sup>9</sup>.

### Women

Female respondents tended to be educated to higher levels prior to prison than male respondents, although it needs to be remembered that women made up a much smaller percentage of the sample than men (7% - 25 respondents in total):

- 16% had level 2 qualifications compared with 15% male respondents.
- 56% had GCSEs compared with 44% of male respondents.
- 32% had A-levels compared with 19% of male respondents.
- 32% had a level 3 HNC/Diploma/NVQ compared with 23% of male respondents.
- Additionally, 16% reported having no qualifications, compared with higher levels of male respondents at 20%.

Women also achieved well educationally whilst in prison:

- All female respondents achieved some qualifications whilst in prison compared to 7.2% of male respondents who achieved none.
- 13% of female respondents achieved A-levels compared with 4% of men.
- 29% of female respondents achieved a level 3 HNC/Diploma/BTEC/NVQ compared with 18% of male respondents.
- The only area where women did not achieve at all was degrees, in comparison to 8% of men who gained an undergraduate degree and 2% a post-graduate degree.

Women raised similar issues to men in terms of limited availability of course level and content, for example:

*I have been (in education), but not as much as I wanted to do, due to lack of courses I wanted to do and the ability to do anything above a Level 2 which is ridiculous.*

### Vulnerable prisoners

Vulnerable prisoners said that their access to learning opportunities were more restricted than for the rest of the prison population as the quotes below highlight:

## Areas For Improvement

*"Being on the VP side of the prison, we have a very limited access range and access to mainstream work facilities as well as what's on offer via the education department."*

*"On VP Wing – opportunities are very limited."*

*"As a VP wing prisoner I cannot go near the education block at all and have very limited classes on wing. I would like more creative arts and personal development courses to be supported by staff."*

In some cases prisoners spoke about the difficulties in not providing separate education opportunities:

*Although it probably could not be done, I would stop mixing education classes as it makes prisoners from a VP wing or a main wing reluctant to sign up. I think a lot more would consider taking classes if it was not mixed.*

*Some of the educational courses are mixed VP/mains which causes many prisoners to be reluctant to sign up.*

### Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) prisoners

Overall, BAME respondents were more likely to have qualifications than non-BAME respondents, following a similar trend to Brain Cells 2 and findings from the SPCR research, which found that 64% of prisoners from BAME backgrounds had a qualification compared to 51% of prisoners from non-BAME backgrounds<sup>vi</sup>.

However this finding was not consistent across all types of qualifications. Additionally, BAME respondents made up only a small proportion of the overall sample (17%) and were not a homogenous group being made up of a number of different ethnic groups. The small sample sizes of some ethnicities mean that in some cases it was difficult to make generalisations to the wider population.

We must be particularly cautious about drawing statistically robust conclusions about the wider population as the numbers of BAME respondents in our sample was low. That said, BAME respondents were:

- More likely to have some qualifications prior to prison (13% had no qualifications compared to 20% of non-BAME respondents).
- More likely to have GCSEs (50% compared to 46% of non-BAME).
- Less likely to have A-levels (17% compared to 20% of non-BAME).
- Less likely to have degrees (5% compared to 11% of non-BAME).
- Less likely to have professional qualifications (5% compared with 22% of non-BAME).
- However, there are differences between different groups, for example; those who identified themselves as Black Africans, Pakistani, Asian other and mixed were more likely to have A-levels.

However, although they were more likely to have qualifications prior to prison, within prison, BAME respondents as an overall group were:

- Less likely to achieve any qualifications than non-BAME respondents (16% achieved no qualifications compared with just 6% of non-BAME respondents).
- Less likely to achieve across all levels of qualifications (apart from A-levels where both BAME and non-BAME came out at 5%).

These findings are similar to findings in our previous Brain Cells report. However, again caution needs to be used when interpreting results because some BAME groups actually scored higher than non-BAME respondents. For example, those identifying as Black Africans, Indians and Pakistanis were more likely to achieve level 2 qualifications and again Black African, Black other and mixed race respondents were also more likely to achieve level 3 qualifications whilst in prison than white respondents.

**Response to the data from Mark Blake, Project Development Officer at Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG):**

*The findings of PET's latest instalment in the Brain Cells series, highlights the need for greater focus across the offender management system on outcomes for BAME groups who are generally over-represented in the prison population.*

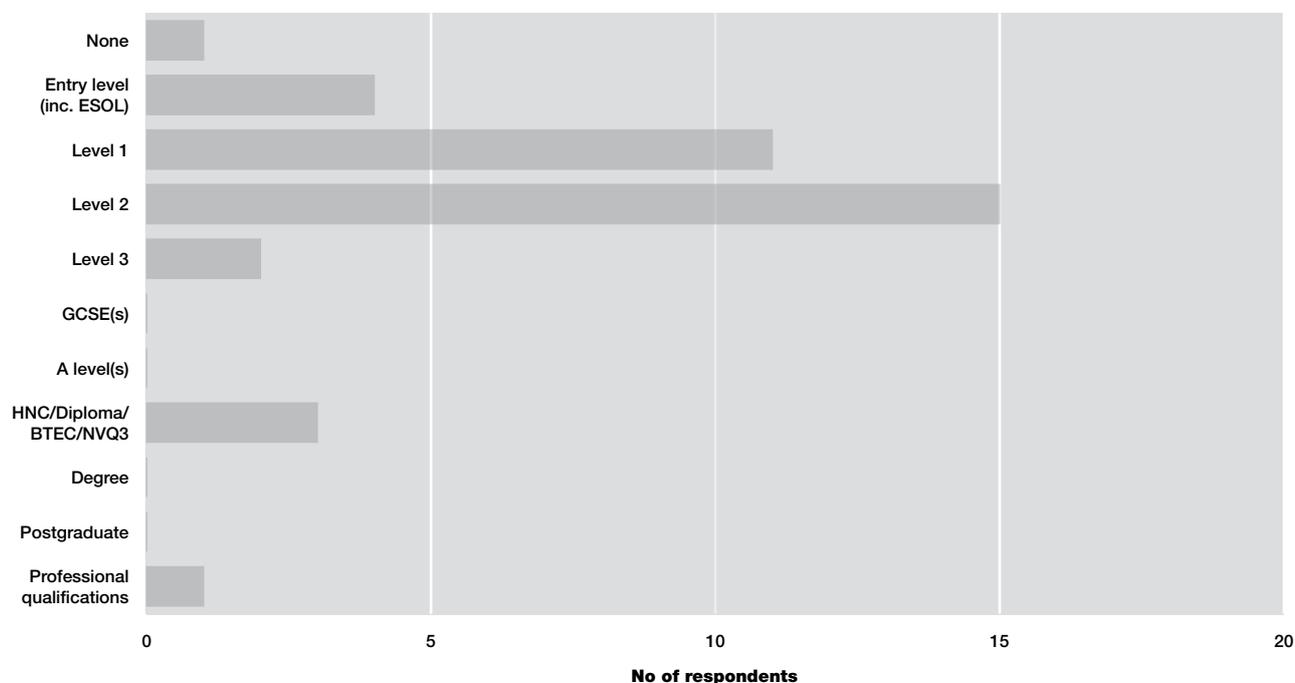
*We need to provide opportunities for higher level learning which we understand are diminishing and will further diminish under the next phase of OLASS. This will clearly hit BAME offenders hard as they are more likely to come into prison with previous qualifications.*

*Beyond the issue of levels of qualifications there seems a bigger problem concerning BAME offenders which is engagement. Brain Cells 3 suggests a real problem getting BAME offenders to get involved in prison education. This is a serious matter particularly in the context of Transforming Rehabilitation and the huge emphasis now placed by the system on reducing re-offending and rehabilitating offenders. Education is a proven driver towards better rehabilitative outcomes and desistance.*

*We need the National Offender Management Service to explore further why BAME offenders are rejecting the education offer in prisons to better inform how we can improve rehabilitation outcomes for BAME offenders.*

**Young people**

18-21 year old respondents made up only a small percentage of the overall sample (6% - 21 respondents in total), with the majority serving longer sentences between 2 and 5 years, in comparison to the majority of young people in the wider population spending an average of 107 days in custody<sup>vii</sup>. This means that the young people who responded to our survey had longer to engage with education than the average young person in custody, and encouragingly, only 5% (one respondent) said they had gained no qualifications whilst in prison. The graph below shows the levels of achievement.



What is interesting (and concerning) when interpreting this graph is the extent to which the rate of learning drops off after level 2 to level 3 by almost 70%. We know that education is compulsory for under 18s in the youth estate and would expect some drop off upon entering the adult estate but not to this extent. With the current focus on putting education at the heart of the youth estate under the Transforming Youth Custody agenda<sup>viii</sup> we would like to see more young people being encouraged to continue progressing to higher levels within the adult estate. Research carried out by the Transition to Adulthood Alliance found

that young people were frustrated that their aspirations for a better future were not always recognised<sup>ix</sup>. A young person who responded to a questionnaire for a consultation about young adults<sup>x</sup> said this:

*I feel that the learning needs of prisoners here are limited because of the short courses done here. If you are 18 and just been sentenced to a long time you could complete all the courses before you are 20.*

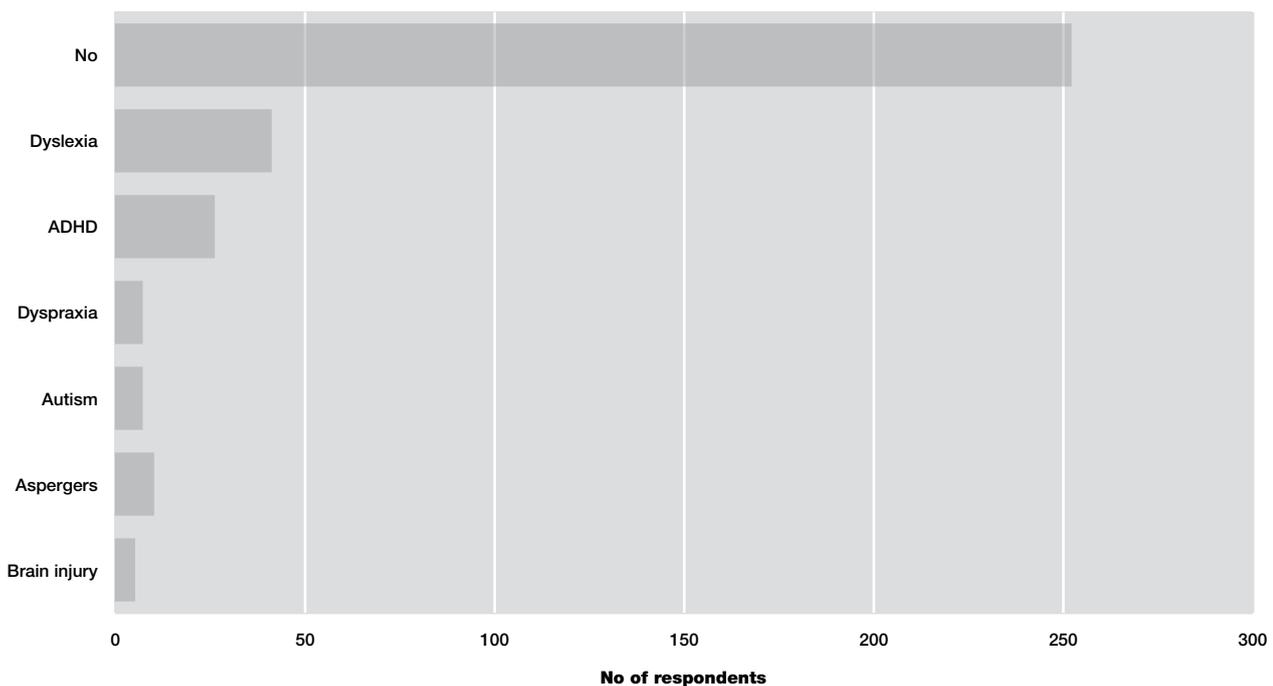
Although the majority of young people spend relatively short amounts of time in custody there are a significant proportion serving longer sentences, therefore the range of courses should reflect this. Between the years 2000 and 2010 the numbers of young adults (18-20) sentenced to life imprisonment increased by 310%<sup>xi</sup>. Young adults have the largest potential for improvement; they are the group 'most likely to desist and 'grow out of crime', thereby making it particularly important that criminal justice interventions for young adults are carefully selected and appropriately tailored<sup>xii</sup>. Research suggests that using inappropriate interventions can slow down the desistance process for young adults, leading to long term negative repercussions<sup>xiii</sup>.

Despite the importance of the need for tailored approaches, young adults in the criminal justice system have been described as a 'forgotten group' once they turn 18 and lose statutory support and protection<sup>xiv</sup>. 52% of young offenders were permanently excluded from school<sup>xv</sup> meaning that many will need targeted, specific interventions, rather than a generic one size fits all approach. There is also a need to acknowledge the developing maturity of young adults and how this will affect their learning needs. A prison teacher we spoke to said:

*The big focus under OLASS 4 is employability but many young people need pre-employment training, they don't have any of the life skills and will never have done things such as shopping, cooking, budgeting and are lacking in maturity. They need more focus on these age related needs to help them develop independence as well as pro-social modelling.*

### Learning Disabilities and Difficulties (LDDs)

28% of respondents self-identified themselves as having an LDD, a breakdown of which can be seen below. This figure falls within the estimated 20-30% of prisoners within the prison population reported to have a learning difficulty<sup>xvi</sup> and puts the numbers reporting conditions higher than the previous Brain Cells report (20%), which could be attributed to the format of this survey being more accessible.



Interpreting information from the graph tells us the most common form of learning difficulty reported was dyslexia (13%), which is also the most commonly screened for learning difficulty in prison and the community. One respondent said the following about his condition:

*Even though I've got dyslexia I've never had any support during schooling and college so I've had to learn to cope and don't ask for help any more.*

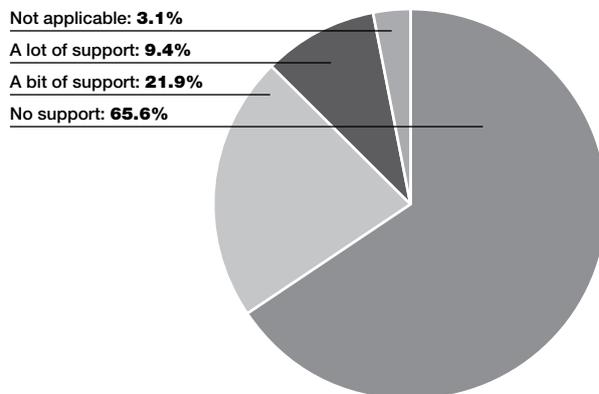
Although a number of prison-based tools have been developed to assess people's need for additional support, none have been universally accepted as 'gold standard'<sup>xvii</sup>. Jameson (2014)<sup>xviii</sup> advocates for the expansion of early screening assessments to assess learning needs and it appears that progress is to come, as Justice Minister, Jeremy Wright MP has indicated that from August 2014 a mandatory assessment of learning needs will be introduced for all prisoners on reception, which will pick up LDDs and help to ensure those with the greatest need will not slip through the net. The Skills Funding Agency is working with NOMS to roll this out in two regions. More information is due to come about this later in the year.

This question about LDDs also gave respondents the option of revealing more about their conditions in a text box, which 35 people did. Quite a number of respondents mentioned mental health issues, short attention spans and issues with being able to concentrate and how these affected their ability to engage with learning:

*I have mental health problems and I found teachers or tutors would not want me cos I am 'hard work' and think I would be a problem because of my past.*

### Support for LDDs

Of those who did identify as having an LDD, 66% told us that they were receiving no support for this.



One respondent said:

*This prison has been bad from the beginning. I cannot sit in a classroom it makes me mad.*

However, there were also other respondents who reported just how big a difference even a little support could make:

## Positive Findings

*"I from suffer dyslexia and my English Teacher does a lot of one to one with me twice a week and it's brilliant. It has helped me a lot."*

*"The adult support class where learners receive 1:1 support is the best course in the prison. Learners often come in unable to read or write and leave at Level 1 or 2 and ready to move on within weeks. Volunteers from the community, peer tutors and the staff members are all dedicated to what they do and it is a constructive motivated environment."*

The positive comments above may reflect the fact that OLASS 4 has allocated specific funding to provide more learning support to learners with LDDs. Consequently there has been a high take up by OLASS providers. PET welcomes this. PET has learnt that despite an under-estimate in the original forecast, OLASS 4 now gives providers greater flexibility about the amount of money that can be spent on LDD support. With the introduction of the mandatory screening tool in August 2014, together with greater flexibility in spending for LDDs, we would expect to see more good work to come in this area in the future and a higher proportion of learners reporting receiving support for their LDD in our next Brain Cells report.

## Physical disabilities

A number of people also reported barriers to learning resulting from physical disabilities, as mentioned below.

***The buildings here are not 'fit-for-purpose' due to design and age. No stair lifts or ramps for wheelchair users. No wing mentoring for those who are disabled.***

***I am currently in a wheelchair and have been told there is not enough staff for me to be taken to education.***

***I do Level One English but there is no BSL Sign Interpreter provided to me and the course is very limited.***

With the over 60s being the fastest growing group within the prison population<sup>xx</sup> it is important that provisions are made for physically disabled prisoners. Where possible when new prisons are being designed, facilities should accommodate less abled bodied prisoners so they are able to access learning too. One prisoner spoke about good practice:

## Positive Finding

*"A short time ago I enrolled on a 'Be your own boss' business course. But because it was held on the 4th floor of my wing and I have osteoarthritis in both legs, it was not easy for me to attend/continue. However the tutor of the course went out of his way to enable me to complete it in cell and even managed to find some time to afford me some one to one tuition".*

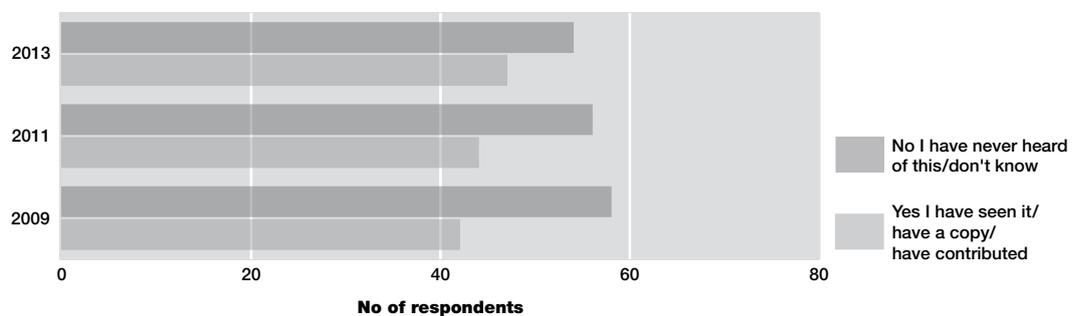
NOMS is subject to the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and required to promote disability, equality and eliminate unlawful discrimination in all the prisons in England and Wales. Disability, as defined in the Act, covers a range of impairments, both physical, mental and learning disabilities<sup>xx</sup>. The physical environment of the prison should allow prisoners with physical disabilities to access a full range of learning facilities.

## Chapter 2: Learning Support – Building social capital

This chapter focuses on the one-to-one support people need to progress in their learning journeys. Secondary desistance is a process whereby over time, people can develop an identity and perception of themselves as a non-offender<sup>i</sup>. Much has been written about the importance of relationships in the process of desistance; building social capital and supportive networks, for example with family members, a partner or a positive peer group. Developing such relationships can provide sources of emotional and practical support for a person on their journey to non-offending and help them to find anchors of meaning or purpose, to maintain motivation to move away from crime<sup>ii</sup>. This chapter breaks down some of these elements, highlighting positive findings and areas for improvement.

### Individual learning plans (ILPs)

In the six years since Prisoners' Education Trust started the Brain Cells report series there has been a gradual improvement in feedback about Individual Learning Plans (ILPs). The chart below shows the progress that has been made:

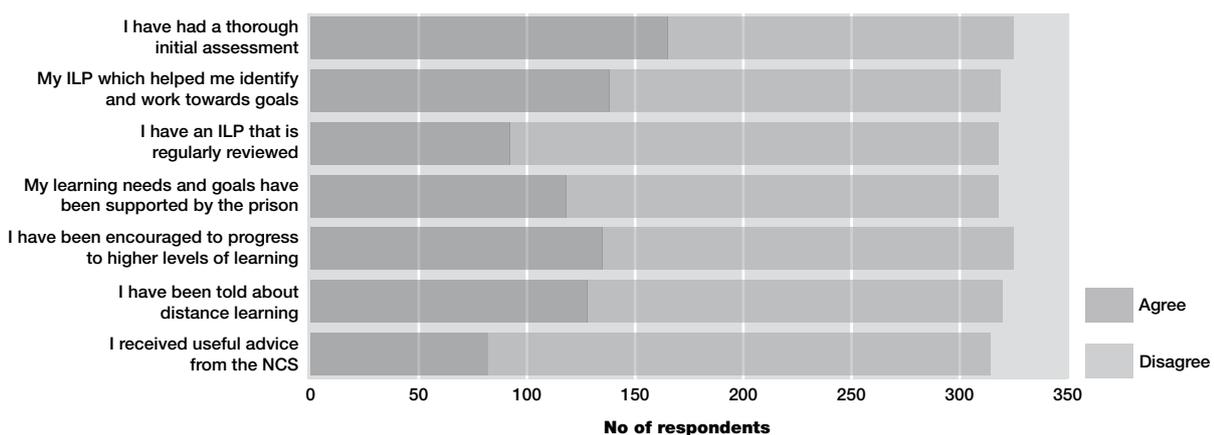


### Positive Findings

- Over half of respondents (54%) to our current survey did not have or did not know if they had an ILP. However this was an improvement from 56% in 2011 and 58% in 2009. We hope that when we publish our next Brain Cells report the balance will be tipped in the opposite direction, with more learners having ILPs than not.
- A further improvement found between this current survey and the previous one in 2011 is that there was an 8% increase in respondents who said they had actually contributed towards a learning plan, 26% compared to only 18% in 2011, indicating an improvement in a participatory approach to ILPs.

PET welcomes these improvements, no doubt in part influenced by, for example the increasing emphasis Ofsted places on Learning Journeys and OLASS 4 place on ILPs. However, whilst acknowledging that progress has been made, there is still much work to be done. PET would like to see bigger improvements being made at a faster pace of change, as highlighted on page 5 of this report.

We also asked more specific questions about learning plans, needs and opportunities:



## Areas For improvement

- Just over half of the sample (51%) said that they had received a thorough initial assessment of their learning needs.
- Less than 30% of the sample reported having an ILP that was regularly reviewed.

Some respondents commented on this further in a separate comments section:

*ILPs should be a useful resource but as they are not reviewed properly they can easily just become more paperwork collecting dust in filing cabinets.*

### Teacher Voice

The results of an Institute for Learning (IfL)<sup>iii</sup> survey which consulted with prison teachers working with young offenders, focused on the qualities of effective individual learning plans. Collaborative working relationships were seen to be paramount; particularly with careers and guidance professionals, counselling, mental health services and with further education colleges. The most effective individual learning plans, teachers said, were those which took account of not only individual learning needs but also social, behavioural and emotional needs and were regularly reviewed.

Some respondents to our survey commented that this collaborative working in relation to ILPs did not occur:

*National Careers Service staff do not liaise with the education department to review individual learner progress.*

### Good practice example

At HMP Swaleside, in order to improve collaborative working within the prison, the National Careers Service relocated to a room within the education department where they are now based. This fosters a joined up approach to working between the two departments, encouraging closer working relationships which benefits learners too.

In the Prisoner Learning Alliance's (PLA) report Smart Rehabilitation<sup>iv</sup> a joined up approach to learning was put forward as a key guiding principle, involving improved co-ordination between different departments within individual prisons. As part of this, rather than a prisoner ending up with multiple plans from different stakeholders (sentence plan, education plan, NCS plan etc) one plan with input from all the relevant departments should be kept and regularly reviewed.

When respondents were asked if they wanted to comment further on learning plans 62% chose to do so and provided a range of interesting comments. There were many who felt that ILPs had little value, particularly for anyone above level two education and were often a tick-box exercise:

*ILPs for any studies above Level 2 are practically non-existent.*

*Any individual learning plan is just a paper exercise for level 1 education classes.*

*ILP = a box ticking exercise for prison.*

*I was not present when the initial induction was conducted (name not on the list). When I addressed this I was told they would arrange an assessment. Later I received a score for English/maths without ever having taken the test!*

However, there is some good practice happening in prisons, which some learners were keen to highlight:

*Generally ILPs are good, but more should be done to express to learners that these are for them. As many people tend to see them as a tool for the prison rather than a document they feel is important to themselves.*

*My hairdressing tutor is very good at using the ILPs as a teaching aid; they are regularly checked and kept up to date.*

The PLA Smart Rehabilitation report also recommended that the more personalised the learning plan is, the more likely the individual needs of the learner will be in resulting in better outcomes. It will be increasingly important in the new regime of resettlement and non-resettlement prisons to ensure that the outcome of reducing re-offending is in mind and planned for from day one, rather than left to the final three months of the sentence. There is a case for recognising the importance of learning plans for reducing re-offending as on a par with that of the overall sentence plans. However, it is also important to acknowledge that at different points in a prison sentence there will be issues, such as addressing substance misuse or offending behaviour, which will need to take priority.

### National Careers Service (NCS)

Only just over a quarter (26%) of respondents said they had received useful information from the National Careers Service. One respondent said:

*The NCS advisor turnover is too high - I have now seen 4 different ones in 10 months. They do not review the previous one's notes and the service received is inconsistent.*

However, there were more positive comments, including this one from a learner who rated them very highly:

*National Cheers [sic] Service always achieves what we ask them for or gets the info we've asked them for 100% of the time.*

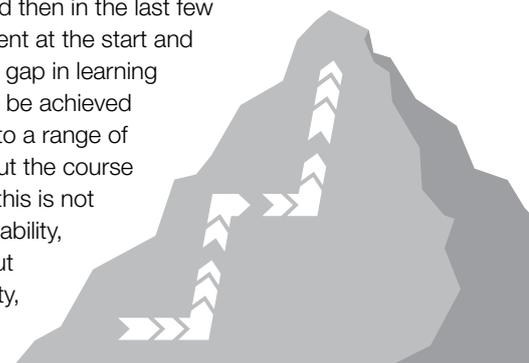
### Progression

#### Areas For improvement: Supporting progression

- Only 42% of the sample said they had been encouraged to progress to higher levels of learning.
- Only 40% that they were aware of opportunities to study distance learning.
- Only just over a third (37%) said that their learning goals and needs had been supported by the prison.

It is clear that many learners did want to progress to higher levels of learning but faced barriers in doing so. Under OLASS 4 contracts, an emphasis is placed on basic skills at the start of the sentence and then in the last few months on employability skills. The PLA described this as a 'bathtub', reflecting investment at the start and end of the sentence but leaving prisoners, especially those with longer sentences, with a gap in learning in the middle. A preferred model is of enabling prisoners to 'climb mountains', which can be achieved

by providing continued access to a range of learning opportunities throughout the course of the sentence. The benefit of this is not just limited to improving employability, which is of course important, but also helps develop a new identity, promoting desistance.



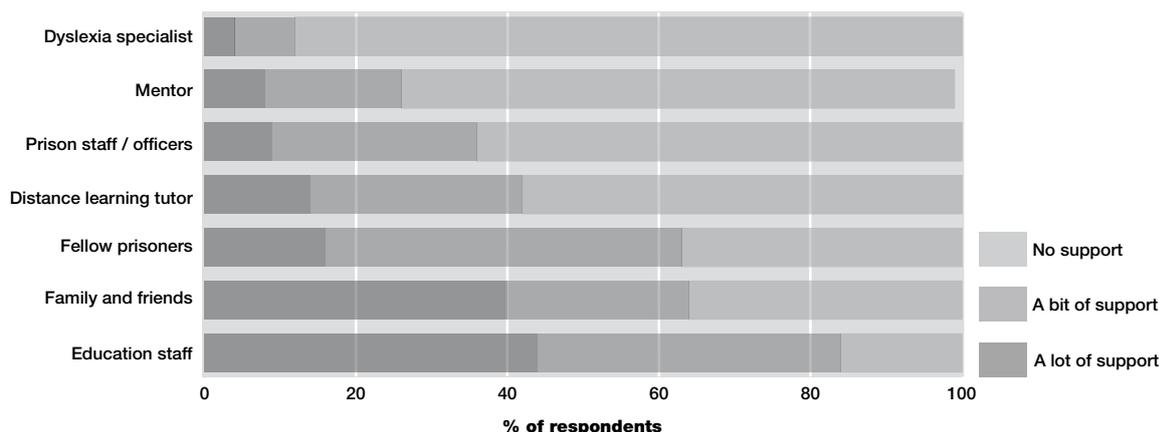
**Good practice example: HMP Parc**

The distance learning department at HMP Parc began in November 2010 with just one member of staff. Three members of staff now facilitate distance learning programmes, supporting over 170 learners. Parc presently have two classrooms designated just for distance learners, one which is available on a full time basis during the working week, evenings and weekends. Success stories include men who have gone on to complete degrees in Law, Chemistry and Formula One Motor Mechanics after release. In July 2013, a HM Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) and Estyn Inspection gave HMP Parc an excellent in prisoner achievements in learning, skills and work including for Distance Learning and Open University (OU). The inspectors commented on the high standard and level of learning achieved.

A new Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) report published in April 2014<sup>vi</sup> focused specifically on factors associated with employment after release for prisoners sentenced to between 18 months and four years. They looked at the correlation between taking prison education courses (in the main basic skills, ICT and 'other' courses) and employment and found that there did not appear to be one there. Less than 1 in 10 respondents had attended courses above GCSE level. This would appear to provide further evidence that the provision of basic skills does not adequately meet the educational needs of prisoners or by itself lead to employment. The SPCR report recommended that robust, individual evaluations of courses delivered in prisons are needed to look at quality and targeting, which PET recommends too.

**Sources of support**

We asked respondents to tell us who had given them support whilst in prison, the results of which can be seen below:



**Education staff**

- Respondents told us they received the most support from education staff (84%) This is the same result as in 2012. However, this time slightly fewer respondents reported gaining 'a lot of support' than in Brain Cells 2 report (44% compared to 47%).

*Positive Findings*

*"To be honest here most of the teachers are very good at teaching which helps a lot and they understand that too much in a lesson without breaks kills. One of my teachers is great at playing games that are very educational without people realising that we are still learning. Brilliant!"*

*"I was encouraged by teacher to pursue an MA in Classics; I would not have achieved it without her support and encouragement."*

*"From my own personal experience, I am fortunate having received good support from my Education Department who have enabled my progression. Their commitment should be congratulated given their own barriers and lack of resources. Without its assistance, I would not have achieved what I have."*

These comments highlight just how important the role of teacher is in supporting people in their learning journeys. This is important given that evidence from studies of desistance suggest that forming strong relationships with people who can provide emotional and practical support can help people on their journey to non-offending, motivating them to move away from crime<sup>vii</sup>.

However, there were others who were more critical, not only of the quality of teaching but of the current system within which education staff have to operate:

### Areas For improvement

*"I would like to see properly trained educators in their various speciality subjects involved in prison education. Qualified teachers - retired or on holiday should be recruited for prison education."*

*"Teachers need to be more engaging and not sit reading newspapers or playing scrabble, if they could motivate and educate it would prevent crime in the future and rehabilitate."*

*"I would like there to be extra teaching support within each class, I feel that one teacher cannot provide me and the class with enough individual support."*

*"Students are forced at a pace to get through course work/exams to satisfy 'learning evidence' instead of receiving in-depth tuition on the subject matter. Staff are very open about their business model and recognise how payment by results has impacted the quality of their teaching."*

### Teacher Voice

A report published by University College Union (UCU)<sup>viii</sup> based on 278 survey responses from prison educators found that 51% of respondents were critical of the training provision for prison teachers with 64% saying it was not relevant to the subjects they were teaching. Given the importance of the role of prison educators in supporting prisoners in desistance, it is crucial that they are valued, well trained and supported.

### Prison staff

- Just over a third of respondents said that they had received learning support from prison staff/officers. However, only 9% of those said that they had received a lot of support which is a decrease in 4% from responses to Brain Cells 2:

### Areas For improvement

*"Information about/or accessing any extra-curricular activities is very hard to come by. Other things happen and no one knows they are happening. Basically there is no support for education on the wings, which undermines everything."*

*"We need to have access to education on the wings and encouragement from staff on the wings."*

Over the last twelve months as part of their research the PLA heard from a wide variety of professionals, including prison officers, about the difficulties they were facing in getting prisoners to education due to cuts in prison staffing levels. Similar concerns were echoed in the HMIP Annual Report 12-13<sup>ix</sup>, where the Chief Inspector of Prisons said that staff shortages were undermining prisoners' chances of making the most of learning opportunities and rehabilitating themselves.

A study carried out by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies<sup>x</sup> researched how prison officers viewed prison education. Many thought it was important, although they had different priorities from learning and skills professionals. They felt they had a role to play (and would like opportunities to do more) but they did not think that they were given either enough time or enough training to fulfil their existing job description properly. There were others who felt that they had skills which were not being utilised.



*I have a [relevant] degree and nobody has ever said to me, "How can we use that?" There's no personal development.*

*There are lots of officers with lots of talent, degrees, so why don't we use and encourage specialisms?*



### Distance Learning Co-ordinator

- 42% of the sample reported receiving learning support through a Distance Learning Co-ordinator but only 14% said this was 'a lot of support'. 58% said that they had not received any support. Elsewhere in the survey, 60% of respondents said that they were unaware of opportunities to study distance learning. Many people left comments about how much support for distance learning was needed:

### Areas for improvement

*"More help with applying for OU/distance learning courses; help with the forms not just have them sent to you with no advice or prior knowledge on what to do."*

*"We need a dedicated distance learning Open University tutor as it is hard to get your assessments sent off and get information."*

*"I would like to see the reinstatement of OU Co-ordinator as we had before."*

*"More info on distance learning courses please. I have repeatedly asked about various courses but cannot get any help or advice!"*

These comments are similar to responses from 63 members of education staff who responded to a PET survey in August 2012, when new OLASS 4 contracts which were just being introduced:

### Teacher Voice

*"I found out today that Distance Learning will no longer be supported, so I shall be made redundant in a few weeks' time and there will be no-one in the prison to help the men obtain funding and support them through their courses. Open University courses will continue but I don't know who will administer them from this end. It's a sad day for the prisoners and for me. However, thank you for all the support you have given in the past and I just hope things turn out to be less gloomy than they appear to be at the present moment." (Region not specified).*

*"I think it is very important that prisoners should be encouraged to continue studying beyond what the Education Department can offer. Very few prisoners have the necessary study skills to complete distance learning courses. Acquiring these skills and being successful reflects a growing independence which will be so valuable on release." (London region).*

*"I'm very concerned that prisoners will suffer if this service is lost altogether and have worked hard (with CIAS) to get things up and running and a system in place. Although I have to say it can be very time consuming for CIAS and myself so with the changes anticipated for my own role there simply won't be time enough remaining to adequately support Distance Learning." (North East region).*

Further comments from respondents to our study highlighted just how important the role of distance learning co-ordinator is in supporting prisoners to ‘climb mountains’ and why it is imperative that funding for this role be reinstated:

### Positive Findings

*“Without doubt the best support I received was for my MA. The distance learning co-ordinator fought to get me internet access and my superstar at work (Shelter) gave me time to study and almost daily encouragement. I am very grateful to all who helped me.”*

*“The best support I received was in the early stages of my degree, when there was a dedicated distance learning co-ordinator who understood the issues regarding distance learning in prisons and was able to smooth out any difficulties.”*

Distance Learning Co-ordinators are crucial to ensuring that longer sentenced prisoners can ‘climb mountains’ instead of ‘sink in the bathtub’. There should be specific funding available for one full-time Distance Learning Co-ordinator in each non-resettlement prison. Distance learners within prisons do not have access to the same resources as they would on the outside, making the role of Distance Learning Co-ordinator a particularly important one.

### Mentor/Peer support

- Just over a quarter reported receiving any mentor support but only 8% said that they had received a lot of support.
- However, 63% of respondents reported receiving learning support from fellow prisoners (16% a lot of support) so it could be that a greater proportion of learning support happens informally rather than through trained mentors.

In qualitative responses prisoners spoke of supporting other prisoners with a range of activities, formally and informally, including; literacy through Shannon Trust’s reading project, playing instruments, filling in forms and wing applications, and housing advice among others. Responses indicated that although prisoners are willing to help, more training and support could improve the impact. In some cases it appeared that respondents felt like a wasted resource; they were keen to give back and use their knowledge and skills to the benefit of other prisoners and the prison service but a lack of opportunities prevented them from doing so:

### Areas For improvement

*“Education in prison does not seem to be very good at involving people like myself with professional qualifications and a lifetime of experience. I am keen to help but the opportunities seem hard to find.”*

*“The education department here needs more mentors. Unfortunately the rate of pay offered is far below the wages that can be earned in different departments within the prisons.”*

However, some learners had clearly experienced the benefits of mentoring:

### Positive Findings

*“Peer mentors provide the much needed link between teaching staff and students for a lot of reasons. Other prisoners can identify with many learning blockages some prisoners will have and are able to reach out to students in ways teaching staff are not able to whilst teachers can still maintain discipline and integrity.”*

*“Being a peer tutor has given me responsibility, trust and a chance to be a productive member of society/community. When your mentee progresses and realises he’s not stupid it’s better than all the drugs and alcohol in the world as I know that I have made a genuine contribution to someone else’s life.”*

Mentoring has a long history within the Criminal Justice System in the UK, being implemented as an intervention both to reduce re-offending and to increase positive life outcomes such as greater levels of education, training and employment<sup>xi</sup>. However, research looking at the evidence available on 'offender peer mentoring interventions'<sup>xii</sup> found that the evidence base for these approaches is limited.

The Coalition Government suggested when they announced plans for Transforming Rehabilitation in 2012 that mentors would form a large part of plans to ensure continuity of support for those being released. In a House of Commons debate on 9th January 2013, Justice Secretary Chris Grayling said,

*In my view the former offender turned good – the former gang member gone straight – is the best way of making sure that a young person coming out of jail does not go back to the same ways.....this is about getting a mix of high qualifications, of the kind we find in our public protection service, in people who have turned away from crime and who are helping those who might end up in a place where they once were.*

Since this time, however, there has been very little said about the use of mentors. PET would like to see an open discussion around peer mentoring taking place; one which acknowledges that mentoring is not simply cheap or free labour and that it needs to be valued, invested in and mentors seen as a valuable resource.

PET agrees that high level qualifications for peer mentors working within prisons and post-release are needed to ensure they are able to fulfil the role. Trainee probation officers are required to have at least level 3 qualifications (A-level or equivalent) and then work towards a level 4 diploma<sup>xiii</sup>. At St. Giles Trust their mentors have a level 3 qualification in Advice and Guidance. As highlighted throughout this report, level 3 qualifications are now rarely available under OLASS 4 contracts and even level 2 can be hard to find<sup>xiv</sup>. The following quote from a respondent highlights the lack of high quality mentoring qualifications available in prisons:

*Most courses offer worthless qualifications which are so easy to get you don't actually have to do any work. All you have to do is turn up make a few notes and suddenly you are a qualified mentor.*

In order to have best qualified prison and ex-prison mentors and to ensure they have the appropriate skills and expertise to carry out the role of mentor most effectively, access to higher level qualifications through distance learning is essential. Popular distance learning courses that PET regularly funds are; Drug, Solvent and Alcohol Abuse Counselling, Introducing the Social Sciences (OU), Starting with Psychology (OU) and Counselling Skills. We also fund courses enabling progression into the education sector such as; Preparing to Teach in the Life Learning Sector (PTLLS) (Level 3) and Certificate in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) (Level 4). However, in order for prisoners to access these courses there must be information available about distance learning within prisons, support with the application process and support once they begin studying.

PET would like to see effective use of mentors being made both inside and outside of prisons. Longer sentenced prisoners are prime candidates for in-prison mentoring due to their sentence length and have huge potential which is not being utilised. How mentoring is likely to work in resettlement prisons where the population will be more transient and have a higher rate of churn due to the population being made up of shorter sentenced prisoners is less clear. One solution may be to train longer sentenced prisoners as learning mentors in resettlement prisons.

## Family and friends

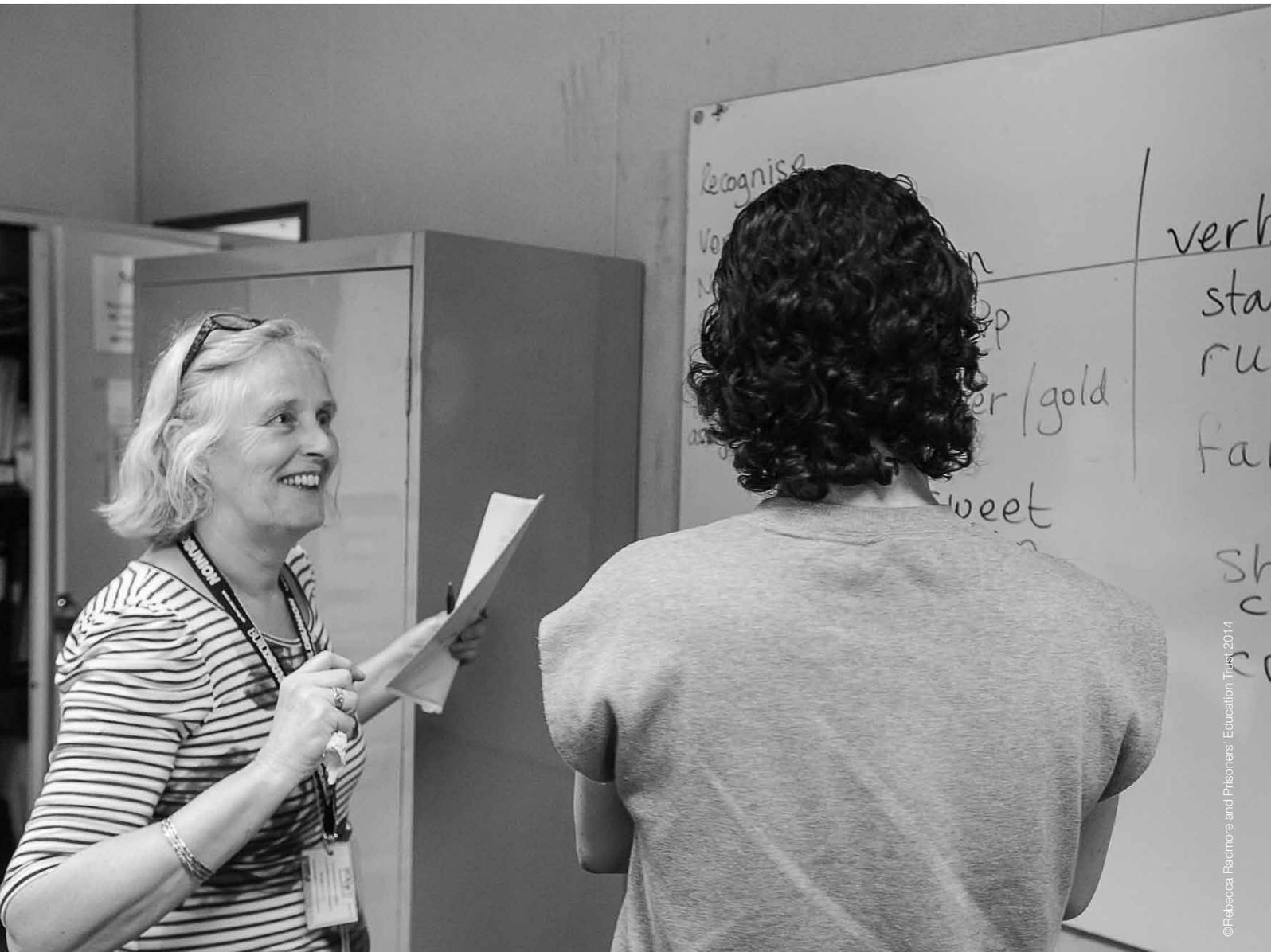
- 64% of respondents said they had been supported by their family and friends. This is a significant increase from Brain Cells 2 where only 45% reported this was the case and from 30% in 2008.

This increase may reflect a need to access support from external sources due to less support for learning now being available in prisons. However, we hear from the sister of a prisoner who PET previously funded, which highlights just how important learning is in developing those bonds and supportive networks which are key to achieving desistance.

**Family Voice**

*"I really do think that education is fundamental to completing a long sentence. My brother is currently in year 8 of a 16 year sentence. I'm very proud to say that, after 6 years, he's now completed a BSC Degree in Mathematics. As a family, we have been there to support him whenever we can and help him through that process. Studying has broadened his knowledge and helped us become closer as a family; we no longer just talk about what's on television, which has made our visits a lot more interesting. Education has also opened other doors for him within the prison, for example becoming a mentor. It has also gained him the respect of his fellow inmates and the prison staff which is great.*

*We are proud that his name is being used in a positive light rather than the negativity he carried around for some time. Prison carries a stigma and reputation, and any prisoner will spend the rest of their life trying to change it, as will their family when trying to defend them. His achievements so far have given him a head start.... When people ask me about him, I can say "he is studying for a degree/masters" which is true...he just isn't at Oxford doing it!"*

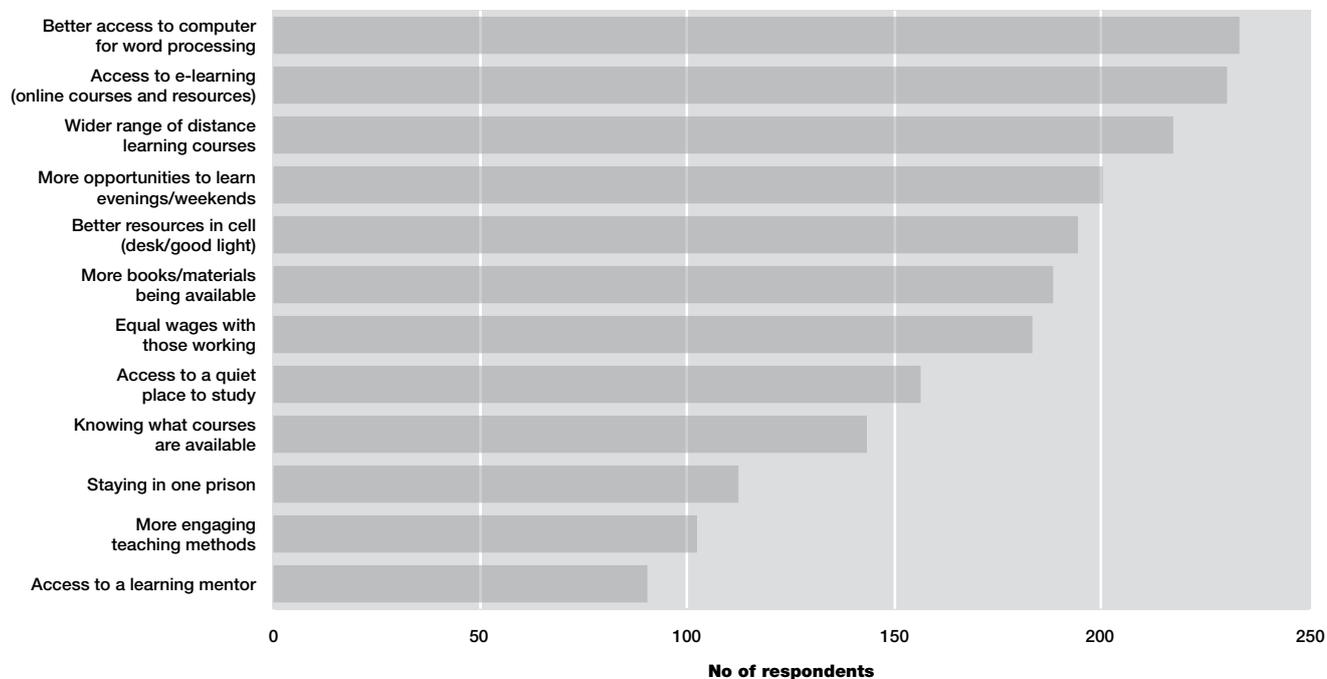


*A teacher encourages a student to complete exercises on the board at HMP Pentonville*

## Chapter 3: Access to facilities and resources

### Removing barriers to learning

Respondents were asked to indicate which potential factors would have made their learning easier. As in our previous Brain Cells survey, respondents could tick multiple answers. However, in this survey we included different categories so we are not able to make comparisons with all findings from our last report. The top five answers will be discussed below.



### ICT

The most frequent answers for making learning easier were ICT related.

- 72% indicated that better access to a computer for word processing would be useful, a slight increase from 70% in 2012.
- 71% of respondents indicated that access to e-learning and online courses would be beneficial.
- Lack of access to some kind of computer (laptop and word processor) was a particular issue for many studying distance learning and OU courses, some reporting it was becoming increasingly more difficult to continue their studies when their access to computers was either not allowed at all or greatly restricted.

### Areas for improvement

*"Use of laptop computer for educational purposes would help."*

*"I would want access to computers for the study of my OU course to be easier. As it stands lots of obstacles were put in my way when I first arrived here."*

*"Currently, there is no tutor or PC access for DL/OU students."*

*"It's the 21st century; not being able to use a computer is a serious hindrance to future employment. Certain prisons have in-cell computers to order canteen, phone, credit, why not have office, word excel etc?"*

*"The last prison was very progressive, even allowing us to purchase laptops (albeit with USB/Wi-Fi disabled) to use in-cell. There is no reason why this could not happen across the prison estate."*

*"Although facilities are generally very good, these can only be used if you are assigned to one specific workshop or in education. Many people here undertake distance learning whilst doing other employment, and there are several vocational workshops that require full time assignments and therefore have no access to VC."*

## Opportunities to learn during evenings and weekends

- 61% of respondents said that they would like more opportunities to learn outside of standard work and education times.



*I would like to see more lessons in evening/weekend for prisoners who want to learn. If you have a fulltime job you can't access education.*



A report by Civitas (2011)<sup>j</sup> about some of the practical challenges to Working Prisons, argued that in order to achieve effective rehabilitation, the entire prison regime should be reorganised to impose real-world expectations on prisoners, with work programmes replicating real working conditions. In the community employees would have access to annual leave and could use their evenings and weekends to undertake learning. Learners within prisons should have access to these same opportunities too, if effective rehabilitation is to be achieved. Support for evening and weekend learning needs to come from the top down with prison governors playing a key role in promoting a learning culture.

## Wider range of distance learning courses

- 67% of respondents said that they would like to see a wider range of distance learning courses available.

Since our last Brain Cells report in 2012 PET published a distance learning curriculum featuring over 200 courses, which we can fund learners to study. We initially sent copies to all prisons in England and Wales and continue to take copies each time we visit individual prisons. Despite this some respondents raised issues with accessing information about distance learning, highlighting that the withdrawal of funding for Distance Learning Co-ordinators is having an impact. One respondent said:



*More info on distance learning courses; I have repeatedly asked about various courses but cannot get any help or advice!*



There are also particular issues for longer sentenced prisoners who may be interested in studying higher level academic qualifications but under new current guidelines, cannot apply until much later in their sentence.

## Books and materials

- 58% of respondents (2% more than 2012) said that better access to books and materials would help them learn.

These findings are backed up by half of last year's HMIP reports, which found that 21 libraries needed to improve provision or access. The 2012-2013 HMIP annual report<sup>i</sup> gave an example of one prison where over 100 sessions had been cancelled in recent months due to staff shortages, which had impacted severely on prisoners on vocational training programmes.

### Areas for improvement

*"Library access in most prisons is non-existent as the population has to be rotated to ration access to library time."*

*"The lack of access to the library/ICT is appalling and renders distance learning near impossible. The prison give the impression the library is more accessible than it is. It is very hard to get to."*

Also relevant to this issue is the new Incentives and Earned Privileges Scheme (IEPS), which was being introduced in November 2013 when responses to this survey were still coming in. The new IEPS states that prisoners must; *'demonstrate a commitment towards their rehabilitation, engage in purposeful activity, reduce their risk of re-offending, behave well and help other prisoners and staff members'*<sup>iii</sup>. However, it (counter-productively) prevents family and friends from sending books in to prisons and also limits the number of books prisoners are allowed in their possession, affecting their ability to study and hence impacting on their rehabilitation and risk of re-offending.

Since publishing the survey, we have also received some letters from prisoners about this matter, including the following comment:

*PSI 30/2013 restricts access to books (limited to 12) and art materials (no acrylics, oils or thinners) under the new National Facilities List - part of the new IEP scheme. This is affecting students enrolling on various courses.*

### Equal wages with those working

- Over half of respondents (56%) said that equal wages with those working would make learning easier. This is a 3% increase from Brain Cells 2 and 13% increase from Brain Cells 1 indicating that this is becoming more of an issue for learners over time.

### Areas for improvement

*"Wages should be equal to those of other jobs - there is no financial incentive...I think if this was implemented then the number of prisoners achieving qualifications would rocket, maybe even leading to a noticeable decrease in re-offending rates."*

*"Most prisoners want and need to learn but because they only get a few pounds for it they get a job instead cos they can buy more canteen. I think they should bring in earn while you learn. I know after spending 12 years in jails, your class rooms would be full."*

*"Education should be the number one need. It should pay higher than working in other jobs which are offered. This would encourage most prisoners to educate themselves more."*

*"At the moment, people aren't bothered with education and quit it for menial prison work that often pays more than double the education rate."*

This is an important issue, particularly as conditions become more difficult for prisoners with restrictions under the new IEPS scheme. As prisoners are no longer allowed to receive items through the post such as books from family and friends, they will have to save up for and pay for more items themselves, impacting on people's decision to engage with learning. Those with no family members to send in money to pay for items (who may often be those most in need of education) are less likely to engage in learning because it does not offer as much money as work.

#### Good practice example – HMP Brixton: Flipped pay structure model

Ed Tullet, Governor at HMP Brixton has recently revised the pay structure so that any work with a vocational based qualification is the highest paid within the prison. This type of approach is encouraging prisoners to think long term rather than short term by promoting the value of learning and rewarding prisoners for choosing skilled over unskilled work.

### Mentoring

- Almost a third of respondents said that access to a learning mentor would have made learning easier. However, we already know that only just over a quarter reported receiving any mentor support (and only 8% received a lot of support).

## Response to the data about mentoring: David Ahern, Shannon Trust

More than 40 percent of prisoners have literacy skills so low that they are ineligible for more than 90 percent of jobs. Those who are unable to read on release will be frustrated in their hopes for a new and different life. Shannon Trust is addressing this cycle through the Shannon Trust Reading Plan, a peer-mentored reading plan that gives prisoners a vital skill and the opportunity of a fresh start in life.

The one-to-one peer mentored approach of Shannon Trust Reading Plan appeals to prisoners who are reluctant to engage in classroom learning. It allows them to progress at their own pace and grow in self-confidence as they realise that they too can successfully learn to read. There are benefits too for the mentors in terms of raising their self-esteem and improving their communication skills. Our peer-mentored approach is fundamental to the success of the reading plan. It is important that prisoners taking part have a sense of ownership but equally necessary that prison regimes ensure strategies are in place so that the reading plan is available across the whole prison and mentoring can take place regularly.

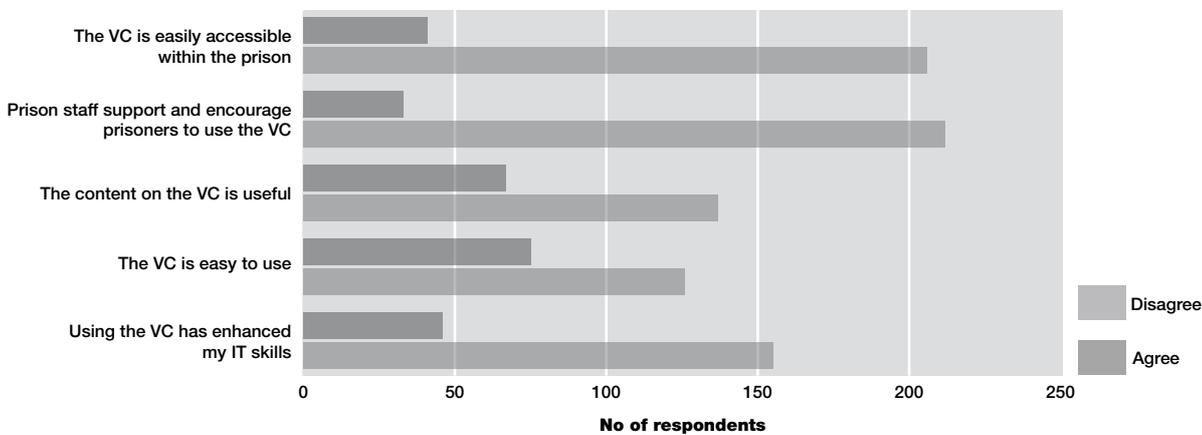


Progression routes for learners are advertised on one of the classroom walls at HMP Pentonville

# Chapter 4: Virtual Campus

In this year's survey we introduced a new question asking specifically about respondents' experiences of the Virtual Campus (VC) including; accessibility, support, content, usability and skills development. The VC is a secure prison intranet, with potential to support education, training, employment, resettlement and family ties<sup>i</sup> and was born out of the December 2005 green paper: Reducing Re-Offending Through Skills and Employment: Next Steps<sup>ii</sup>.

In terms of supporting education, the VC was introduced in prisons as a way of engaging 'hard to reach' learners; 'moving away from a one dimensional teaching style, towards a stimulating, innovative and creative model of Education, Training and Employment (ETE) provision'<sup>iii</sup>. The two overarching aims of the VC are to 'reduce re-offending through a joined-up, streamlined system of ETE provision, whilst modernising the delivery of that provision'<sup>iv</sup>. The last Review of Offender Learning in 2011, published before OLASS 4 came into force, said that the VC 'can be particularly motivational for some offenders, giving them the tools to take more control of their own achievements so seeding responsibility'. The VC therefore could be a great tool in assisting the desistance process and particularly in preparing longer sentence prisoners for release and engaging with up to date technology. The findings below highlight that whilst there is huge potential to be gained from using the VC, in reality there are significant improvements needed.



- 83% of respondents felt that the VC is not easily accessible within their prison.
- 87% felt that prison staff did not support and encourage prisoners to use the VC.
- There were slightly more positive results for content and usability but still over two thirds of respondents disagreed that the content on the VC is useful and just over 60% that it was easy to use.
- Only 23% of respondents felt that the VC had enhanced their IT skills, no doubt partly influenced by issues around limited or no access.

Qualitative responses to these questions revealed more about what prisoners really thought about the VC. Responses were split into four main categories:

## 1) Respondents reporting having never heard of, seen or used the VC:

*I have spent over a year in education and have not even heard of Virtual Campus, let alone used it.*

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*I don't know what VC is. It does not exist in high security prisons.*

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*I have never ever seen it and I have been in 10 prisons! I love the idea but just not been able to get to use it.*

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*I have never heard of Virtual Campus. It is not mentioned by inmates or staff.*

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*Don't know anything of Virtual Campus. This survey is the first I have heard it mentioned.*

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*I have been in prison 28 years and most of that on education. I have never seen the Virtual Campus.*

**2) Respondents reporting problems with access, some mentioning staffing issues as a barrier:**

*Sadly this prison does not provide a Virtual Campus or anything remotely close. One just about gets to use a PC.*

---

*This prison does not have Virtual Campus and any non-ICT students would struggle to access a word processor to aid their studies never mind VC.*

---

*VC not available; trying to get onto Virtual Campus is impossible. No one seems interested in ensuring that it works or have access to it. I have tried since Feb '13 to get access to no avail.*

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*We don't actually have a VC as it has been closed due to cut backs. We now use the library who are very helpful, however it is a small library and has to cater for a range of peoples needs.*

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*Prison has no budget for staffing even though the hardware has been installed.*

**3) Respondents who raised problems with using the VC and ICT for Open University and distance learning courses as well as for vocational learning:**

*We have no access and the content is not much good for lifers. There is no O.U. virtual library which would be useful.*

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*As I am currently doing my Level 2 hairdressing, there is a lot of useful information on there for me to view, (that's when I am allowed to use it) which isn't very often.*

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*Our VC room for O.U. is only open twice a week, this is not enough sessions for typing O.U. essays.*

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*Virtual Campus is severely underused in this establishment. The only course to access this is PSD to build CVs/look for jobs etc. VC is not available to OU students which would be greatly beneficial - especially for submitting assignments/receiving feedback and gaining support and contact with OU tutor. I heard about VC in previous establishments and feel let down by the reluctance to use this fantastic tool here.*

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*The prison does not even want to give access to ICT for HE/DL/OU students, let alone the VC.*

**4) A number of comments highlighted that there are individuals and groups who feel they are being excluded from using the VC:**

*Vulnerable prisoners have no access to this!*

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*I do not have access to a Virtual Campus. I reside in the high security estate.*

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*This prison does not have this facility yet but I can see problems for older users.*

There were also other comments which did not fall into any of these four categories but did raise interesting points. It has to be said that many prisoners did see the potential of the VC but were frustrated with barriers to using it effectively:

## Positive suggestions for improving the use of the Virtual Campus

*"Ensure people know it exists at the start of their sentence so they can make the most of it - by the time I found it I didn't have enough of my sentence remaining to achieve anything from it."*

*"Make it available on weekends and somehow make limited/supervised internet research possible."*

*"The content of our virtual campus needs updating - the courses are not useful."*

*"The facilitator (person) of Virtual Campus is helpful and supportive but the IT accessories and educational resources are very limited and in some cases not sufficient; we need more choice."*

*"Access to computers and e-books in the current high technology climate will help prisoners get more motivated to learn. Library access in most prisons is non-existent as the population has to be rotated to ration access to library time. VC is not available to all prisoners and this should be improved for all prisoners across the national prison estate."*

*"Access to VC is restricted to just two hours a week (unless this has changed recently). Inmates spent more time logging on than actually doing any work. However, used regularly and correctly it could be a great asset to those seeking work on release."*

*"The VC is rarely used in this prison other than for testing and by Peer Mentor training as no specific class room is designated for them. It is an underused facility and should be encouraged as part of learning and resettlement to prepare prisoners for release."*

*"The Virtual Campus is a wasted resource - it should be either in the prison library or any suitable place other than in the education block accessible by only a few for a very limited time."*

*"The lady here can only get a small time slot and does all she can to get us in there to use it but cut backs mean less time and the PCs sit there unused. We need more staff."*

The findings above echo previous research, 'Through the Gateway: How Computers Can Transform Rehabilitation'<sup>v</sup> carried out by PET and Prison Reform Trust (PRT). The report, based on survey responses from prison governors and Directors as well as roundtable events, focus groups and prison visits, argues that the digital divide between those in prison and the community is rapidly widening, as advances in technology develop at ever increasing rates. The report sets out the potential for ICT and e-learning to be used to empower prisoners in education, resettlement and maintaining family ties and as an important tool in reducing re-offending. However, the lack of a clear co-ordinated strategy for using ICT to improve rehabilitation created significant barriers despite there being widespread support for it:

- Nearly three quarters (74%) of the prison governors and managers who were consulted agreed that prisoners should have secure and controlled access to the internet.
- 94% agreed ICT skills were necessary for everyday living.

Additionally, research carried out by the UCU<sup>vi</sup> asked prison teachers how the security regime impacted upon their work as teachers. 21% mentioned negative impacts due to the lack of availability of ICT.

Respondents to this survey have indicated that much needs to improve in relation to the VC. However, we already know from the previous chapter that access to even more basic level IT, such as computers for word processing is restricted. With technology changing at such a rate, longer sentenced prisoners are more likely to be disadvantaged post-release if they are not allowed access to new technologies. It is therefore important that they can keep up to date, through initiatives such as the VC, so that they are able to participate in society on release.

## Chapter 5: Learner Voice

Learner Voice is defined as ‘the involvement of learners and potential learners in shaping the learning opportunities that are available to them’<sup>i</sup>. In Brain Cells 2 we put forward recommendations around developing a ‘Learner Involvement Strategy’ in prisons. As part of our commitment to this, we launched a learner voice toolkit, titled ‘Involve, Improve, Inspire’<sup>ii</sup> in July 2013. The toolkit includes good practice examples of different models of learner involvement in a range of custodial establishments, which can be used as a guide for other establishments implementing learner voice activities. A copy of the toolkit was sent to every prison in England to support them in developing a Learner Voice Strategy appropriate to their needs.

PET is now taking this work a stage further with a year long pilot project, funded by the Ministry of Justice. Specialist training and support will be given to up to eight prisons so they can successfully develop learner voice activities appropriate to their institutions needs and develop a rehabilitative learning culture. The project will be fully evaluated throughout the year with a final report, including a good practice guide and key recommendations published in 2015.

In this survey, respondents were asked what opportunities they had been given to express their views about education and learning in prison.

- 62% responded, indicating that 38% had not been given this opportunity, a slight improvement from 40% in 2012.

Some qualitative responses from respondents specified that they had not been given this opportunity, for example:

### Areas For improvement

*“I would express more views if I had an opportunity to do so but none of the options have been available to me.”*

*“This is the first education survey I’ve done in this facility and I’ve been here since Dec 2011.”*

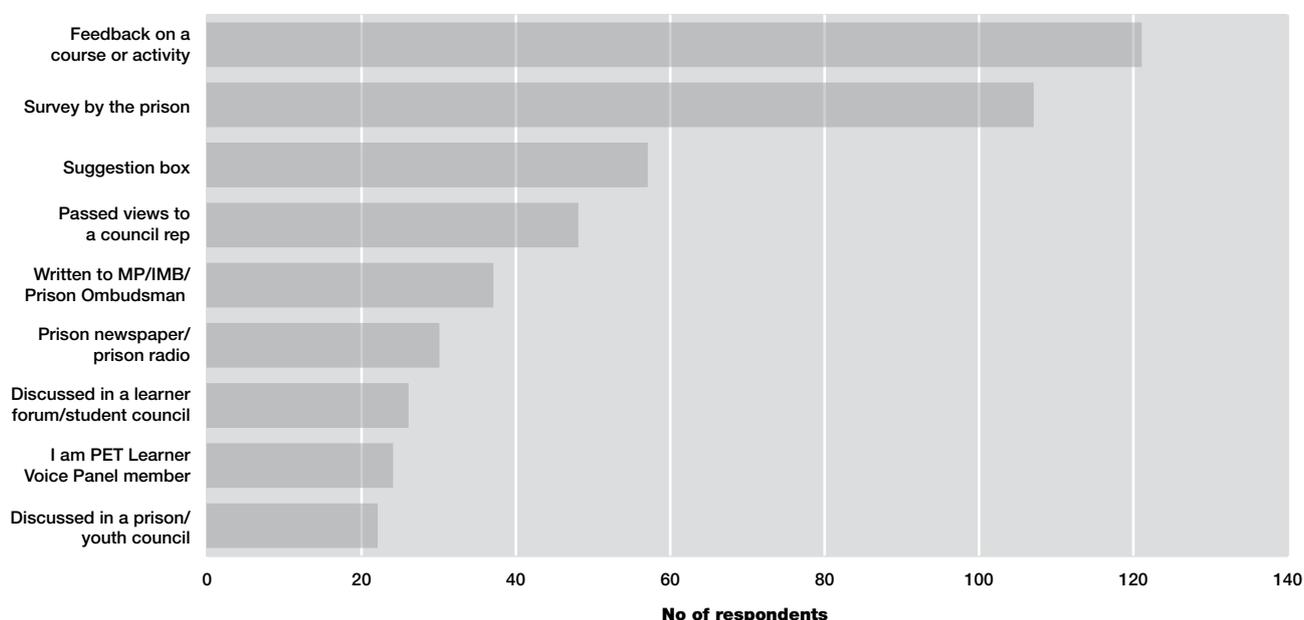
There were others who spoke about the difficulties of expressing their views openly in the prison environment:

*“It is very difficult to speak overtly about how the process is managed, to do so will instantly bar any further opportunity to study higher education.”*

*“I only wish half of these options were available, however trying to be constructive with education results in being given a behaviour compact.”*

*“You can’t give your view here on education because they either think you are undermining them or they need more money.”*

*“The Education Manager came round to class expecting us to come out with our honest open views in front of everyone else”.*



## Positive Findings

- Over half of respondents (57%) said that they had expressed their views through giving feedback on a specific course or activity. This is positive as it is over a 50% increase from previous findings in 2011 where only 25% of respondents had expressed their views in this way.
- Exactly half of respondents said they had expressed their views through completing a survey given to them by the prison. Again, this was an improvement from 2011 where only 29% of respondents had fed back in this way.

Although this is welcome progress, some comments revealed that learners who did give course feedback and completed surveys, often did not feel they were learner focused or led to change. Respondents were also dissatisfied with what they saw as a lack of range in opportunities to express their views, for example:

*They do surveys with prisoners but never take on board anything that is said they just run the same courses year after year, it is time to change.*

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*Feedback is rarely acted upon each suggestion is answered by one of two responses:  
1) we don't have funding for that 2) it is not in our business plan.*

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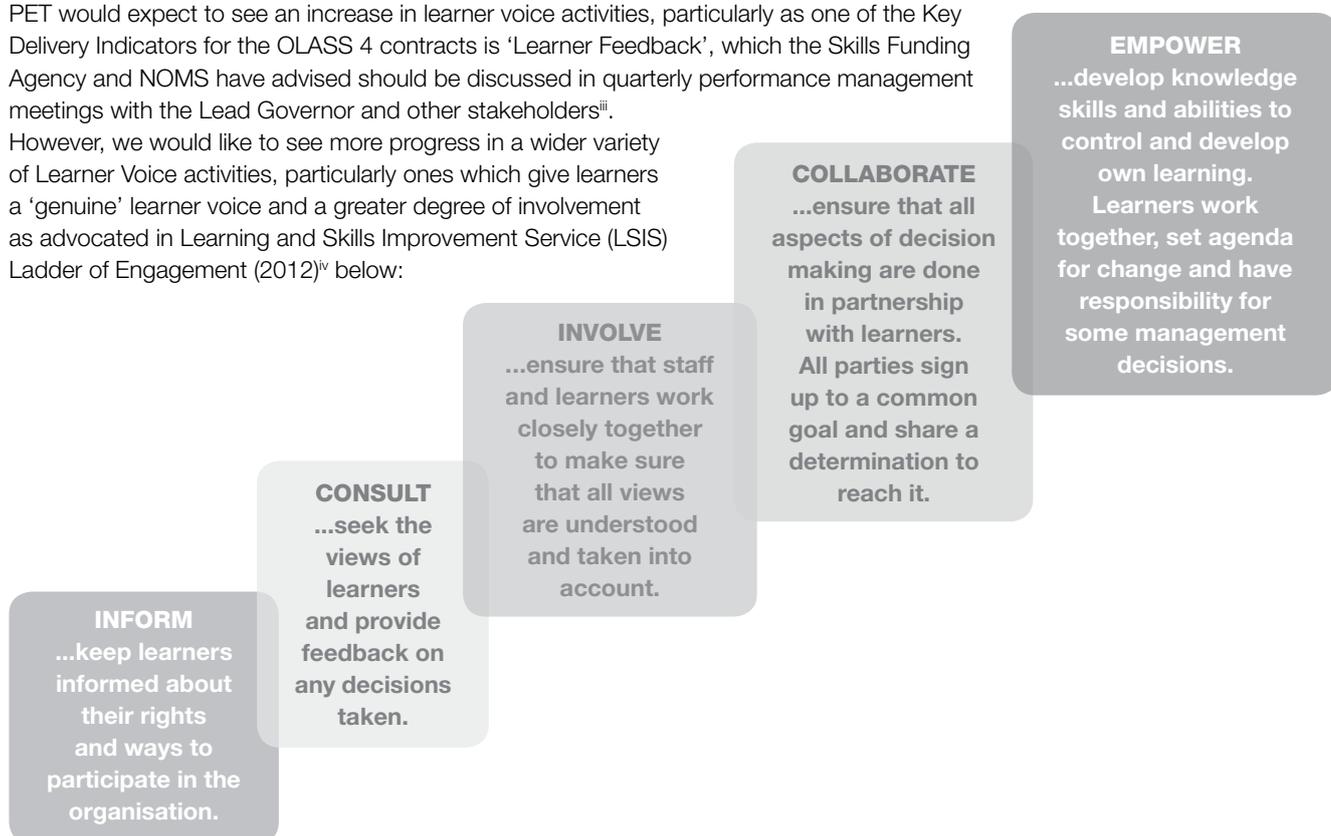
*There is no other way to express ones views other than feedback about a course that one is currently attending.*

As further results show below, there has been a much less noticeable improvement in other more participatory forms of learner voice feedback, although there has still been some progress:

- 12% of respondents told us that they had expressed their views in a learner forum/student council. This is a slight increase of 3% from 2011.
- 10% said they had discussed learning and education in a prison council, a slight increase from 9% in 2011.

PET would expect to see an increase in learner voice activities, particularly as one of the Key Delivery Indicators for the OLASS 4 contracts is 'Learner Feedback', which the Skills Funding Agency and NOMS have advised should be discussed in quarterly performance management meetings with the Lead Governor and other stakeholders<sup>iii</sup>.

However, we would like to see more progress in a wider variety of Learner Voice activities, particularly ones which give learners a 'genuine' learner voice and a greater degree of involvement as advocated in Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS) Ladder of Engagement (2012)<sup>iv</sup> below:



In PET's Learner Voice toolkit<sup>4</sup> we provide evidence from a number of case studies that although surveys and course evaluation forms are a good starting point, in order to achieve lasting change and develop a learning culture in a prison there should be a mix of learner voice activities, some of which engage with learners in a more meaningful and empowering way.

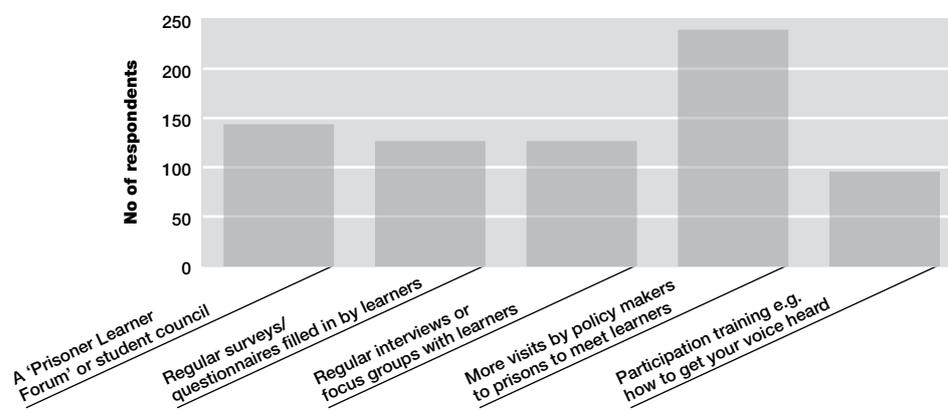
The comments below highlight the benefits of introducing Learner Voice activities into the prison:

**“** *As a prison council member I am always promoting better access and availability to educational courses.*

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*Here we have a prison council. I am a member, we try to improve the education and prison and our involvement is positive.* **”**

### How learners would like their voices to be heard



### Positive Findings

- Over three quarters of respondents (76%) wanted to speak directly with policy makers - a 20% increase from 2012.
- 46% of respondents wanted to take part in a learner forum - an 18% increase from 2012.
- 30% wanted participation training to help them better communicate their views - an increase of 3% from 2012.

These findings suggest that learners are even more eager to engage with the wider policy agenda than they were two years ago. This is perhaps not surprising given the rate and scale of policy changes currently taking place. One respondent said:

**“** *Policy makers need to interview prisoners in private as staff tend to be conscious of impressions and prisoners feel obliged to say or do certain things in front of staff and may not give genuine opinions.* **”**

Learners also demonstrated they wanted to be part of solutions and shape learning in a participatory way:

## Areas for improvement

*"There are no education representatives at this prison. An education rep on each wing could get opinions from prisoners more truthfully. Also with wing education reps information can be collected."*

*"I believe each prison should employ one prisoner to be an education rep to go in to inductions but also to go round each week/month into each class to talk to the teachers and the prisoners to get honest feedback on all courses etc. I don't mean the helpers in classes."*

### What learners most want to change and why

We gave respondents the opportunity to respond to the question with their own ideas and in their own words; 'If you could change one thing about learning and education in your prison, what would you most want to change and why?' We received a wide range of answers, some replicating answers given to the question of what would make learning easier. Content analysis of the data revealed the following top five answers:

- **Better access to ICT**, including access to more and higher level ICT classes, as well as access to PCs and in-cell computers to assist with distance learning:

*To be able to go and learn more in IT subjects, including online, websites and e-mail for when leaving prison in hope of a better chance of employment.*

- **Higher level educational and vocational courses available to meet a wide range of learning needs.** These responses again highlight the need to invest in Distance Learning Co-ordinators in non-resettlement prisons:

*The finishing of offering level 3 courses for over 25s is a disgrace.*

*The courses provided in education by the local education provider are too basic. Only distance learning courses are sufficiently challenging.*

- **Wider range of both educational and vocational courses.** This supports recommendations by the PLA that learning should go beyond the narrow focus of employability and give learners the opportunity to develop 'the whole person'<sup>vi</sup>.

*English and maths are very helpful but I think there should be more emphasis on courses that give people different skills, like music and art.*

- **Wider availability of information about courses and learning opportunities in prison, including distance learning opportunities.**

*There is no 'central point' where we are informed of changes/updates with all things education at the prison. The staff are keen and do a good job, however just some simple basics would be helpful. There should be inmates as education reps who could act as sources of information and persuade attitudes towards education to change in their fellow prisoners too.*

- **More education.** Many respondents were vocal about wanting increased hours of education, longer courses and increased access to learning in the evenings and at weekends. They also wanted greater flexibility, for example being able to work and study part time.

*To be able to do 3 or 4 different subjects a day. In a 4 hour education day do IT for an hour, then maths, English, art. This will break up the day and allow people who have got short concentration skills to work fully.*

*Allow AM education, PM industries instead of only part time education or only full time industries.*

### Best thing about learning

We also gave respondents the opportunity to tell us in their own words ‘What is the best thing about learning and education in your prison and why?’ Again, there were a wide range of responses, the following top five being listed below.

- **Supportive, encouraging and motivational tutors and learning support staff** was the most frequently cited response by a long way.

*Very good support from tutors who sometimes can’t seem to do enough to help, with very limited resources.*

*The staff here are amazing in the education department! They are very, very good but frustrated by the ‘for profit’ mentality.*

- **High quality IT courses.**

*We had IT up to level 2 in Word, Access, Excel and then some introduction to HTML and web design. This done by a superb teacher but just as it became most interesting it was not continued beyond Level 2.*

*I.T. - it is needed more and more in this day and age.*

- **Good quality vocational training.** Many respondents told us about vocational training in a wide range of industries and sometimes quite specialist areas. These included; stone masonry, carpentry, French polishing, BICS training, light vehicle body repair, barbering/hairdressing, Rail Track course, brickwork, painting and decorating, plumbing, cookery and catering. However, there was still a demand for courses to be provided at a higher level in order to give learners a realistic chance at gaining employment.

*The light vehicle body repair course although only level 1 is run well in this prison and is run over 6 months. If the qualification was to level 2 I think that there would be a fair chance of gaining employment with this qualification.*

*The Rail Track course is one of the only courses that will actually make a difference when we are released. Completing this course pretty much guarantees a well paid job upon release. 10/10 best course available in prison.*

- **Creative courses** (accredited and non-accredited) in subjects such as art, music, drama, creative writing and pottery. There were learners who told us about creative projects they were involved in and in some cases set up themselves:

*I enjoy art and it is a great environment and the tutor is great.*

*The art class I attend on Fridays is one of the best I have done in prison. You are given all the help you need to develop the skill and improve your skills in A Levels.*

*At my last prison I was a learner assistant in a music class and taught the basics on guitar to a number of women who wanted to learn to play and found it very rewarding.*

*I have instigated an informal musical theatre pilot project which has the full support of the activities, learning & skills Manager and which we are currently seeking financial support for. The prison is very supportive of me using my skills and qualifications in this way, which has boosted my self-esteem immeasurably as it shows that my efforts in my studies and Koestler entries have been recognised and valued. If we can secure the necessary funding, this project could be ground-breaking.*

- **Mentoring** was mentioned by a large proportion of respondents and has already been discussed in further detail in Chapter 2: Learning Support:

*Prison mentors are important as education officers seem to not have enough time to see all learners.*

*Learning how to be a mentor and then getting support from a number of different tutors to make sure I got my functional skills qualifications and then a job as mentor in a functional skills class.*

These responses show that there are clearly pockets of good practice across the prison estate but still a long way to go in meeting the diverse range of needs. Whilst the findings do not reflect the whole prison population, they do indicate that there are some gaps in provision which need to be addressed if the learning needs of all prisoners, and especially those held in non-resettlement prisons, are to be met. We would reiterate the recommendation that a specific learning strategy for longer sentenced prisoners needs to be developed.



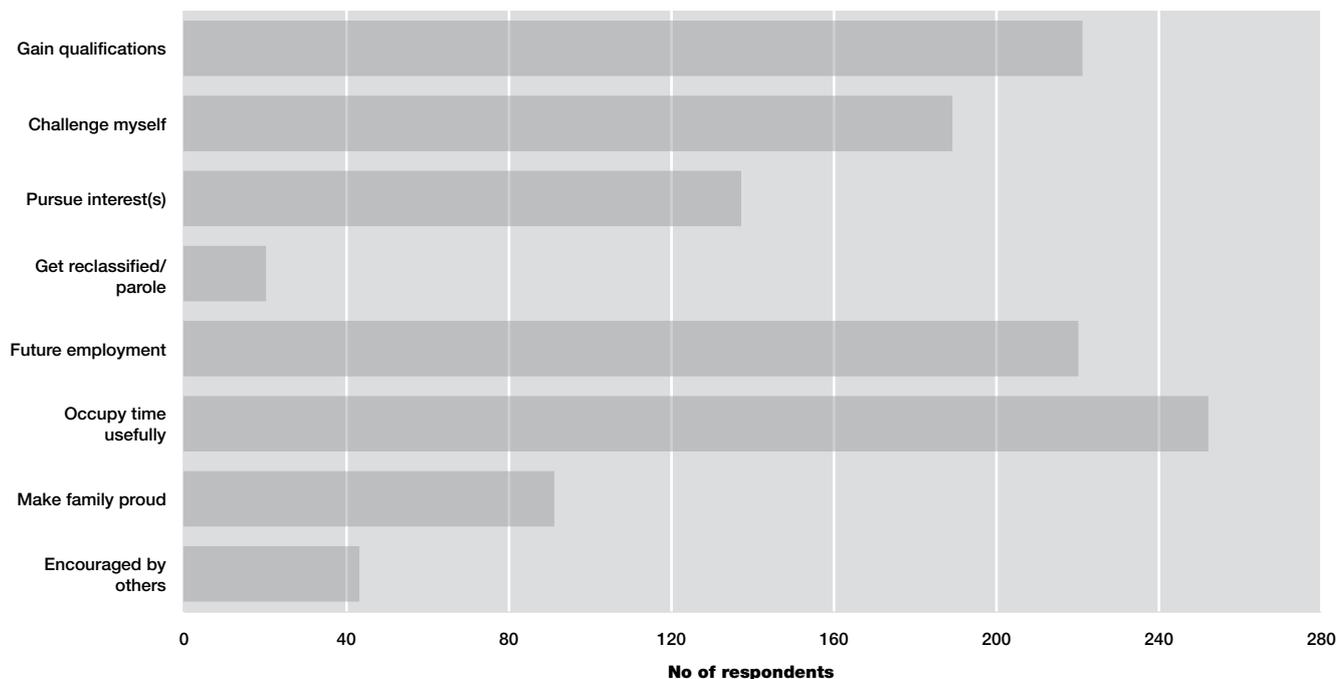
© Rebecca Radmore and Prisoners' Education Trust 2014

*A group of learners work on projects in the art room at HMP Pentonville*

# Chapter 6: Why Learn? Aspirations beyond custody

## Motivations for learning

We asked respondents to tell us what motivated them to get involved with learning. 91% of the sample responded and respondents could tick as many options as appropriate.



The findings were similar to Brain Cells 2, although answers indicated that respondents were even more motivated to learn and there were specific differences relating to age and gender:

- 81% wanted to occupy their time usefully – a 2% increase from our previous survey.
- 71% wanted to gain qualifications compared to 65% in our previous survey; a 6% increase.
- 70% wanted to improve their employability – the same result as last time. However, female respondents were more motivated by this than males (78% of women compared to 69% of men). Young respondents were particularly motivated by this at 74%.
- 60% were motivated by the challenge of learning; a 4% increase from our last survey.
- 29% were motivated to learn to make their families proud, a slight decrease from 33% in our last survey. However, female respondents rated this as more important at 44%.
- Only 14% of respondents said being encouraged by others was a motivation to learn. However responses from women were twice as high at 28%, almost 20% higher than female respondents to our last survey.

When analysing qualitative responses to this question, two additional motivations emerged.

### 1. University

A number of respondents talked about being particularly motivated to gain a degree and/or secure a place at university, again indicating that they valued progression and the challenge which comes from higher level learning. This finding highlights the importance of learning being ‘aspirational’ and providing learners with opportunities to quench their thirst for learning, which was also a key recommendation from the PLA Smart Rehabilitation report<sup>i</sup>. This finding also links in well with desistance literature which highlights how important overcoming the negative identity ‘offender’ is in the process of secondary desistance<sup>ii</sup>. By developing a more positive pro-social self-identity as a degree/university student and cultivating self-belief that they can achieve this, prisoner learners are already on the path to desistance. The higher up the ladder they go in their learning journey, the more they can identify with alternative identities than offender.

*I always wanted to be the first member of my family to go to University and have a degree.*

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*To improve my A Level results so I can go to University when released.*

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*I am studying for a BSC in Criminology & Psychology because I want to contribute.*

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*I want to gain a degree so being in prison has not been a waste of time.*

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*I am currently studying A Level Maths to improve my grade with the aim of attending university after release. The education staff have been helpful in helping me with this venture and I couldn't say a bad word about them.*

However, since the survey was published in Inside Time we have received follow on letters from a number of respondents on specific issues. One said this about the situation regarding funding for Open University courses:

*I obtained PET funding to start studying an Open University degree in business and I am one of the lucky ones who doesn't pay fees as I started my degree before the deadline in 2012. Any prisoners who want to study a degree now have to take out a student loan. Once the existing Open University degree students in prison finish their free degrees there is likely to be only a handful of prisoners willing to pay for their degree. Open University degrees will almost die out in prison unless grants/sponsorship is available to prisoners. Education plays a big part in rehabilitation, self-esteem and future career prospects for prisoners. Over the years I have seen prison budget cuts slash education to the bone. It will not be long before the only education available to prisoners is maths, English and IT. Any prisoners wanting to do more will rely on PET like never before. Society will pay the price of less education in prison.*

In our Brain Cells 2 report, we presented findings about prisoners' views towards taking out student loans for courses over level 3 and above. 59% said that they would take out a student loan for certain courses, which would only be repayable when earning over £21,000 per year. Following on from Brain Cells 2, PET published a leaflet entitled 'Student Loans: Myths and Facts' to support prisoners in making the right decision. Copies of the leaflet were sent out to all prisons in England and Wales. However, this relies on education staff giving out that information to prisoners so that they can make an informed choice about continuing to higher levels and it is unclear whether or not that does happen.

## **2. Negative situation into a positive**

A number of respondents also talked about turning a negative situation into a positive one:

*My aim was to turn a negative situation into a positive one and become an asset to society as opposed to an alleged nuisance.*

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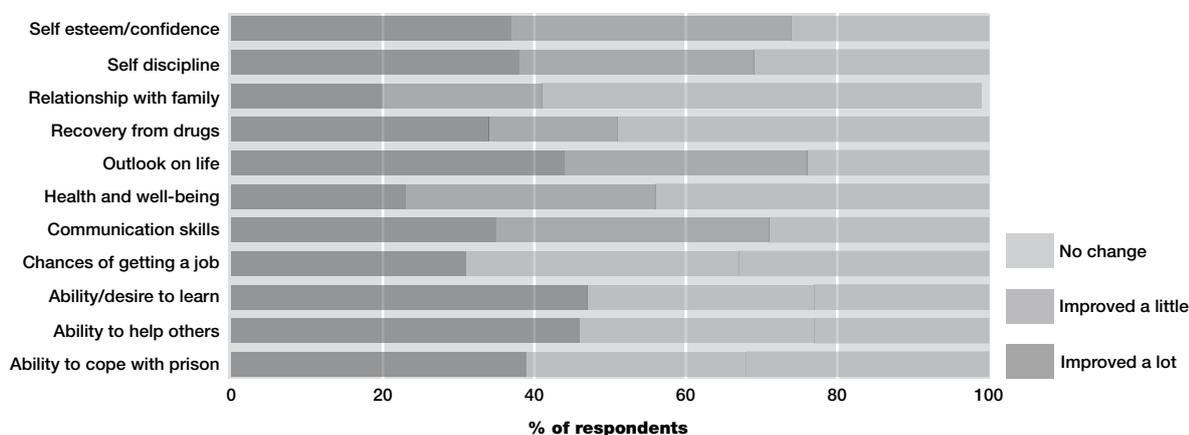
*To make something positive come out of negative.*

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*To make my experience of prison a positive one...so far I have felt let down and discouraged.*

## Benefits of learning

Respondents were asked about a wide range of benefits to learning in prison, which cross cut the reducing re-offending pathways. The same questions were asked in the previous Brain Cells so we are able to track changes across years. The overall findings tell us that in 8 of the 11 categories, over half of respondents said learning had led to improvements in these aspects of their rehabilitation, similar to findings in Brain Cells 2.



## Ability and desire to learn

- Positively, 77% of respondents reported improvements in their ability and desire to learn; although slightly less than the 82% in our last survey. Because of the wording of the question, it is unfortunately impossible to tell whether this change reflects motivation or other factors influencing 'ability to learn'.

The quotes below highlight how prisoners get 'hooked' into learning, developing a thirst for more learning and a positive pro-social identity as learner as opposed to offender:

*My learning whilst serving my sentence has opened my eyes to possibility and my aspirations have equally improved. My passion for writing, politics and history are all heightening.*

*When I first got a life sentence I thought it was the end of the world. Then I decided to use my time to better myself. Now I am on my second year doing a degree in sociology.*

Research by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills also reported that gaining qualifications does increase people's appetite for learning and the possibility of acquiring qualifications at a higher level<sup>iii</sup>. This finding would support a recommendation for an increase in higher level learning as well as support (e.g. distance learning co-ordinator) to enable learners to access opportunities. This recommendation is particularly relevant to longer sentence prisoners who will be held in non-resettlement prisons.

## Coping and wellbeing

- 69% of respondents said that learning had improved their ability to cope with prison, with 40% saying that it had improved a lot.

This is an important finding and one which has been found elsewhere too. For example Nichols (2013)<sup>iv</sup> suggests that the short term benefits of prison education are extremely important in helping to prevent 'prisonisation' and increasing people's chance of successful resettlement. Also, Hughes (2012)<sup>v</sup> found that education can provide a coping strategy for prisoners and counteract what they see as the negative consequences of life in prison, such as wasted time and deteriorating mental abilities. Clearly this will apply to all prisoners, however is likely to impact more on prisoners in non-resettlement prisons particularly, many of whom will be facing multiple years and decades inside.

Qualitative responses to our survey supported these arguments and reveal just how important learning is for longer sentenced prisoners and people with mental health issues:

*Having the opportunity to use my time productively in prison has saved my sanity. I genuinely mean that. I think I'd be on anti-depressants at the very least without it.*

---

*Keeping my mind occupied helps to lessen the frequency and severity of my bi-polar episodes. This in turn means that I am more able to cope with the stresses of prison life. My studies may well have saved my life.*

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*The course I am doing is to help me with self employment on release, health and well being - I am suffering PTSD it keeps me occupied so helps me to cope.*

---

*By learning, I give a sense of purpose to these many years locked in a box. Serving a lengthy IPP sentence, education gives me a reason to wake up in the morning and breathe.*

The PLA Smart Rehabilitation report<sup>vi</sup> recommends that there should be a broad range of outcomes for learning in prison, as opposed to a narrow focus on employability. The PLA asks for the reframing of the purpose of prison education to include the ability to cope with life both in and out of prison and so enabling the development of resilience. Learning for well-being should be seen as a genuine benefit in its own right and will be much needed within non-resettlement prisons with prisoners who find it harder to cope with long sentences. Giving prisoners opportunities to develop new coping mechanisms and build resilience will be essential in assisting the desistance process through the gate.

A recent thematic report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman for England and Wales<sup>vii</sup> which looked at the risk factors in self-inflicted deaths in prisons, found that almost a fifth of 361 self-inflicted deaths between 2007 and 2013 had been carried out by prisoners on life and IPP sentences. Also 76% of the prisoners in their sample were identified as having mental health issues. However, whilst the report sets out the risk factors, it does not talk about possible solutions in preventing self-inflicted deaths, such as learning as a way to promote well-being of high risk members of the prison population. A broad range of learning opportunities should be provided to enable prisoners to build positive coping strategies and resilience.

#### **Good practice example: Prison Reading Groups at HMP Holloway**

Prison Reading Groups started their work delivering shared reading groups in prisons in 2000 and now deliver over thirty groups in a wide range of prisons. PRG highlight the importance of being flexible and responding to the specific needs of different groups of prisoners, including those with mental health issues. At HMP Holloway they deliver four different reading groups. Responding to the specific needs of women with mental health issues, they now actually go on to the mental health wing to run reading groups with the women. A volunteer from the project said:

*"I see how [the women] open up and can articulate their views and listen to each other...When the officers pick me up they say the women have been talking about the group".*

#### **Self-esteem and self-confidence**

- Almost three quarters of respondents (74%) reported an increase in self-esteem and self-confidence.

*Being encouraged to push myself increased my self-esteem. Even though I enjoyed the subjects, I obtained additional skills such as organisational logical thought and motivation.*

---

*Open University has been a challenge but has been very rewarding. Without being able to pursue my interest in science, I think I would have succumbed to depression/isolation. Instead, studying has given me goals to work towards and real benefits to my self-confidence.*

---

*I had always referred to myself as shy & retiring but now through education, I am able to talk to people with confidence and through being a Learning Support Assistant, can support others with skills and knowledge I have gained.*

This reflects a finding in research conducted by BIS<sup>viii</sup> where 82% of people reported significant gains in self-confidence or self-esteem compared to 65% of people who did not complete a course.

### Employability

- 67% of respondents thought that learning had improved their chances of getting a job but only 31% said that it had improved their chances a lot.

This is a decrease from our previous Brain Cells findings where 73% felt it had improved their chances and 40% it had improved their chances a lot. This is surprising given the focus of OLASS 4 is firmly on improving employability. However, this finding may lend support to another of the PLA's recommendations, that a broader understanding of employability skills, outside of basic literacy and numeracy or CV writing is needed. Furthermore, where occupational skills are given, higher level or niche skills are much more helpful in securing sustainable careers in an increasingly competitive jobs market, as this quote from a respondent makes clear:

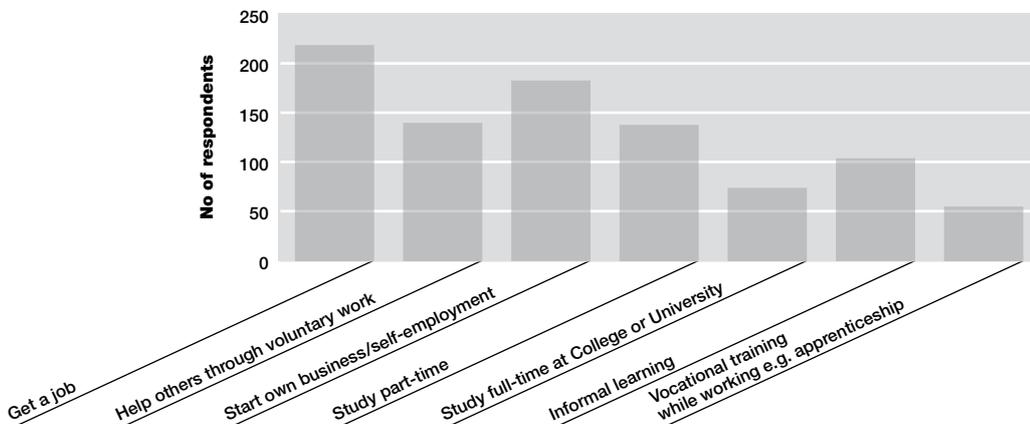
*I would like education and vocational training at a higher level or as a minimum, at a level that would enable someone to get a job on release. Most courses are only offered at a basic/entry level and people who are keen on subject/have aptitude and could develop a career are blocked and they become demoralised.*

It is estimated that 'by 2020, 16 million more jobs will require high level qualifications, while the demand for low skills will drop by 12 million jobs'<sup>ix</sup> making it even more important that prison education supports learners in progression to achieve a level of knowledge or skills that employers are looking for and to achieve industry recognised qualifications. Furthermore, according to the MoJ Evidence on Reducing Re-offending<sup>x</sup> 'evidence suggests that steady employment, particularly if it offers a sense of achievement, satisfaction or mastery, can support offenders in stopping offending'. An evaluation of the Work Programme<sup>xi</sup> shows that it only achieved 5% of the 8% target set for helping ex-prisoners into employment. Therefore a distinct, broader approach to developing 'employability' is required both in custody and after release.

### Hopes and plans post-release

Respondents were asked to name their hopes and plans post-release and covered the same categories as our last Brain Cells survey so comparisons could be made. Findings were similar to those in Brain Cells 2.

- 70% of respondents cited getting a job as most important compared to 76% in Brain Cells 2.
- Slightly higher numbers expressed an interest in continuing studying in some way post release than our Brain Cells 2 previous findings (68% compared with 65%) with the highest proportion wanting to study part time (44%).
- Over half of respondents were interested in starting their own business/being self-employed (59%).
- Almost half (45%) wanted to help others through voluntary work.



Respondents were also given the option of providing further qualitative information in a comments box with this question. Some responses indicated how qualifications obtained in prison have impacted on the progression plans post-release, for example vocational qualifications gained in prison leading to plans for further study, apprenticeships or employment in the area of the vocational training, and academic qualifications leading to plans for further study, again indicating the importance of investing in a wide range of courses.

***My hope is the Open University will fund me outside of prison to carry on with education.***

***Hopefully an adult apprenticeship with the Council, industrial cleaning, bio-hazard, as I am fully qualified industrial cleaner and need bio ticket to start my own business.***

***Find work as a barber and go to college to do women's hairdressing. This will help me to widen my opportunities for work.***

However, there were a number of respondents who also expressed feelings of uncertainty about the future and being prohibited from employment due to criminal record, disability, age and illness.

***As much as I appreciate being offered the chance to learn and achieve a certificate, I can't help but think that it could all be for nothing. I mean, who in their right mind is going to employ someone of my age (if first parole is successful), who has a criminal record and has served time in prison. And that's without the current unemployment figures. Most people in society don't give ex-convicts a second chance in life nowadays.***

With the ageing prison population in general and particularly those represented as respondents to this survey, more prisoners will be past the national age of retirement when they are released and will need a focus on other outcomes other than employment.

Volunteering was part of 45% of respondents' plans for after release and is an activity that should be seen both as a valuable stepping stone to work but also as something separate from work, forming part of the desistance process, enabling ex-prisoners to continue to forge a pro-social identity. As many respondents have highlighted already, they want to gain employment but some do not feel that learning in prison has adequately prepared them for employment. Volunteering will therefore be something that will be needed in order to help them to build on work already started in prison.

***I will be around retiring age by my release date but having always worked throughout my adult life I will be looking for part-time work/voluntary work plus part-time I.T. and cookery classes amongst other things. I feel I have a lot to offer society despite my prison sentence and I still have hopes and aspirations for the future.***

***I would like to do voluntary work to further my experience.***

On release, the Work Programme should be amended to ensure ex-prisoners participating in learning and volunteering do not lose their benefits as evidence shows that employment programmes without combined educational and personal, social development support are not as effective in reducing re-offending as those which do<sup>xii</sup>.

Upon release probation officers should also be encouraging people to engage with learning and other activities such as volunteering in order to achieve reduced re-offending rates and better desistance outcomes. A recent London Inspection probation report found that in only 53% of cases, work to reduce the likelihood of re-offending was done well enough. It was found that work with individuals did not always consist of constructive interventions designed to encourage them to take responsibility for their actions; likelihood of re-offending reviews were either insufficient in number or not completed. Many were 'pulled' through with little or no changes having been made<sup>xiii</sup>.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

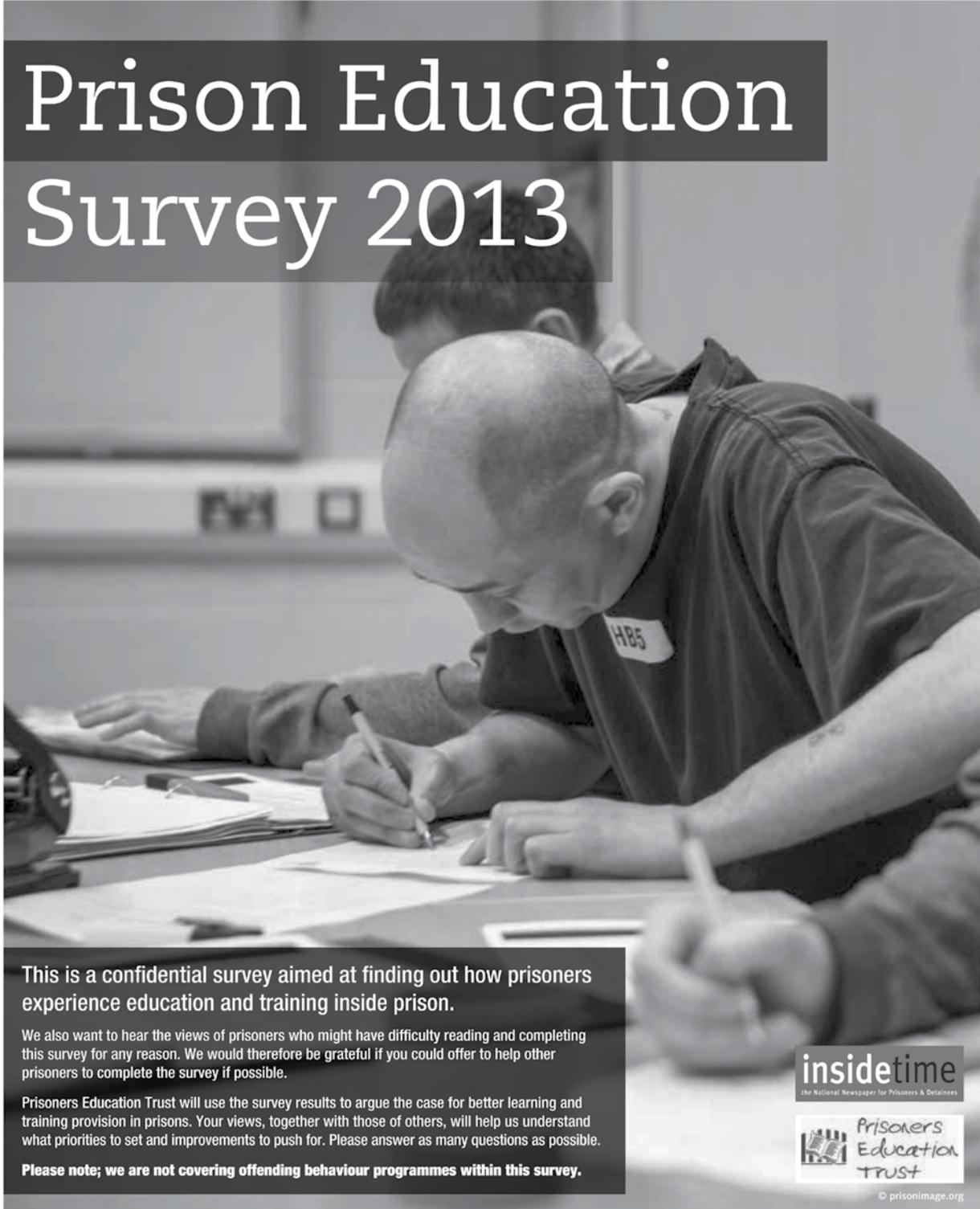
This report highlights many important issues to consider in relation to education provision in prisons. The education and training provided for prisoners should meet their learning needs, helping to improve their skills to enable them to have a greater chance in gaining employment or further training on release. Education and training in prisons plays a significant part in helping prisoners achieve a positive resettlement outcome. Education and training provision for prisoners needs to be individualised and must reflect the time they will spend in prison to fully maximise their time in a productive way. The correct assessment of individual prisoner's needs at the start of their sentence is paramount in helping them overcome any barriers that may prevent them from developing relevant skills. Developing better ways to understand prisoners' individual learning needs is essential in this process. Many prisoners have specific learning needs and require a high level of support from tutors who should have the right expertise and knowledge. Provision for more capable prisoners needs to challenge and motivate them to progress beyond their starting point. All prisoners should be engaged on courses that improve their education and training and not completing work that is below their capabilities. The range and variety of activities needs to include opportunities for prisoners to progress to higher-level qualifications. One way is through better information and access to distance learning courses, which encourages them to think wider and further in terms of their learning and provides motivation to progress. The co-ordination and support for learners studying distance learning courses is fundamental to their success.

All prisoners should have a well-constructed individual learning plan that provides them with ambitious and relevant, short and long term goals. Prisoners benefit from having a clear understanding of what steps they need to take to help them move forward, it is equally important that they can recognise the progress they have already made. When prisoners are moved between prisons the information on their progress and prior attainment must be available to the new provision: understandably prisoners become frustrated when providers are not aware of their previous achievements. Careers advice and guidance needs to provide prisoners with clear steps in their education, training and employment with the ultimate focus on a resettlement goal. The impact of good quality education and training is irrefutable. As prisoners develop new skills and recognise the progress they have made they develop in confidence and self-esteem. This cannot be under estimated in helping prisoners prepare for life in a modern complex society.

**Stephen Miller**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector: Ofsted.**

# Appendix A

## Prison Education Survey 2013



**This is a confidential survey aimed at finding out how prisoners experience education and training inside prison.**

We also want to hear the views of prisoners who might have difficulty reading and completing this survey for any reason. We would therefore be grateful if you could offer to help other prisoners to complete the survey if possible.

Prisoners Education Trust will use the survey results to argue the case for better learning and training provision in prisons. Your views, together with those of others, will help us understand what priorities to set and improvements to push for. Please answer as many questions as possible.

**Please note; we are not covering offending behaviour programmes within this survey.**

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Education  
TRUST**

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# About you

1. Are you?  Male  Female

2. How old were you on 1st September 2013?

15-17  18-21  22-30  31-45  46-60  Over 60

3. How would you describe your racial/cultural origin?

White  Black / African  Black / Caribbean  Black / Other  Asian / Indian  
 Asian / Pakistani  Asian / Bangladeshi  Asian / Other

Mixed (Please state)  Other (Please state)

4. Which prison are you currently in?

5. What is the length of your current sentence?

Less than 3 months  3-6 months  7-12 months  1-2 years  2-5 years  
 5-10 years  Over 10 years  Life / IPP  I am on remand

# Learning prior to prison

6. Were your early experiences of education generally negative or positive? (Please tick one)

Negative  Positive

Please explain your answer; (if you need more space please use a separate sheet but don't forget to include your details)

7. What qualifications did you have before coming to prison? (Tick all that apply to you)

None  Level 1  Level 2  GCSE/s  A Level/s  HNC/Diploma/BTEC/NVQ3  
 Degree  Post Graduate  Professional qualification/s

# Learning journey in prison

8. Have you started or completed any learning or training activities during your current prison sentence? (Tick all that apply to you)

- Formal courses in education with a teacher
- Distance learning course(s), including Open University
- Learning using the Virtual Campus
- Vocational training courses, e.g. brickwork, painting and decorating, fitness
- Training in a prison job e.g. kitchen, industries, gardens, cleaning
- Informal learning e.g. shared reading group, theatre project, art project, family relationships course, working in prison radio etc.
- I have been mentored by another prisoner e.g. Toe by Toe
- I have completed a peer mentoring course e.g. Toe by Toe, Peer mentor
- I have helped teach other prisoners e.g. as a Toe by Toe mentor, classroom assistant, teaching assistant, peer mentor
- College courses or training while on ROTL

Other? (please give details)

No, I have not attempted any learning during this sentence (go straight to Q.10)

9. What level qualifications have you achieved whilst being in prison?

None  Entry level (inc. ESOL)  Level 1  Level 2  Level 3  GCSEs  A Levels  
 HNC/Diploma/BTEC/NVQ3  Degree  Post Graduate  Professional qualifications

10. If you haven't been involved in learning whilst in prison, why was this? (Please tick all that apply and go straight to Q13)

- I didn't know what learning was available
- No subjects available that I want to study
- Waiting list for course I want to do is too long
- Education is not for me
- Courses and classes don't fit my sentence plan
- I decided to work instead as it pays more
- Nothing was available at a high enough level
- Too much else going on at the moment
- I could not get funding
- I haven't been allowed to start a course
- I keep being moved from prison to prison
- Other reasons? Please state

Other? (please give details)

11. What motivated you to get involved in learning? (Please tick all that apply to you)

- To get a qualification
- To challenge myself/see if I could do it
- I wanted to pursue a particular interest
- To get reclassified/early parole.
- To improve my employment prospects on release
- To occupy my time usefully
- To make my family proud of me
- I was encouraged by; teacher, another prisoner, officer etc

Other? (please give details)

12. What have been the benefits of your learning experience? (Please tick all that apply to you)

	No change	Improved a little	Improved a lot
My ability and desire to learn	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My self discipline	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My ability to help others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My outlook on life and my future	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My communication skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My self esteem / confidence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My chances of getting a job	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My relationship with my family	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My health and well being	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My ability to cope with prison	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My recovery from drugs / alcohol (if relevant)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please use this space to further explain your answers

13. Tell us what you think about these aspects of education in your prison?

	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent
Guidance on which course to choose	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Range of courses on offer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Level of courses on offer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities and support for distance learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities for vocational learning in work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities for informal learning (e.g. art, drama, reading groups, family courses)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff encouraging prisoners to take up learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access to the prison library	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities to feedback your thoughts and suggestions about education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities for ROTL to college, training or work placements	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
National Careers Service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

14. What would have made learning easier? (Please tick all that apply to you)

- Access to a learning mentor
- More books/materials being available
- Having more opportunities to learn during evening or at weekends
- Access to e-learning (e.g. online courses and learning resources)
- More engaging teaching methods
- Staying in one prison
- Access to a quiet place to study
- Better resources in cell (e.g. a desk/good light)
- Having better access to a computer for word processing
- Knowing what courses are available
- Equal wages with those working
- Access to a wider range of courses through distance learning

Other? (please give details)

## Learning support

15. Who has given you support while learning in prison? (Please tick all that apply to you)

	No support	A bit of support	A lot of support
Education staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other prison staff e.g. prison officers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fellow prisoners	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My family and friends outside	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A distance learning tutor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A specialist for dyslexia or other needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A mentor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

16. Do you consider yourself to have a learning difficulty or learning disability?

No (Please tick and go straight to Q.18)

Yes (please tick all that apply and go to Q. 17)

- Dyslexia
- ADHD
- Dyspraxia
- Autism
- Aspergers
- Brain injury

Other? (please give details)

17. Have you received specific support while in prison for your learning difficulty?

- No support
- A bit of support
- A lot of support

## Individual learning plans

18. Do you have an Individual Learning Plan (ILP)? This may be held in the Prison Education Department. (Please tick one only)

- Yes and I have seen it/have a copy
- Yes and I have seen it/have a copy and have contributed to it
- No; never heard of this
- Don't know

19. Do you agree with the following statements?

	Agree	Disagree
I have had a thorough initial assessment of my learning needs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have a learning plan that has helped me to identify my learning goals and work towards them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have a learning plan that is regularly reviewed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My learning needs and goals have been supported by the prison	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been encouraged to progress to higher levels of learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have been told about opportunities to study by distance learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have received useful advice from the National Careers Service	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

20. Please use this space to say anything else about Individual Learning Plans and your prison's education/careers induction process

If you need more space please use a separate sheet but don't forget to include your details

## Learner voice

21. Have you had any of the following opportunities to express your views about education and learning in prison? (Please tick all that apply)

- I have completed a survey given to me by the prison
- I have passed on my views about education by using a suggestion box
- I have passed on my views about education to a learner rep or student council rep
- I have discussed education/learning in a prison council or youth council
- I have discussed education/learning in a learner forum or student council
- I have given feedback on a specific course or activity
- I have written to my MP, the IMB, Prison Ombudsman or other outside organisation about education issues
- I have written to a prison newspaper or spoken on prison radio about education issues
- I am a member of the Prisoners Education Trust Learner Voice Panel

Other? (please give details)

22. Prisoners Education Trust believes it is important for learner voices to be heard by prisons and policy makers. How could prisoner learner opinions, ideas, suggestions and complaints be best heard? (Please choose **TWO** only from the following list)

- A 'Prisoner Learner Forum' or student council
- Regular surveys / questionnaires filled in by learners
- Regular interviews or focus groups with learners
- More visits by policy makers to prisons to meet learners
- Participation training e.g. how to get your voice heard

Other? (please give details)

23. If you could change one thing about education and learning in your prison, what would you most want to change and why?

If you need more space please use a separate sheet but don't forget to include your details

24. What is the best thing about education / learning in your prison and why? (e.g. the best course/ learning activity you have been involved with, the best support you have received etc.)

If you need more space please use a separate sheet but don't forget to include your details

## Virtual campus / ICT

25. Do you agree with the following statements about the Virtual Campus (VC)?

	Agree	Disagree
The VC is easily accessible within the prison	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Prison staff support and encourage prisoners to use the VC	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The content on the VC is useful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The VC is easy to use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Using the VC has enhanced my IT skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

26. Please use this space to tell us anything else about the Virtual Campus you consider important, including what content you find useful and what other content you would like to see on it.

If you need more space please use a separate sheet but don't forget to include your details

## Post release

27. What are your hopes and plans after release? (Please tick all that apply to you)

- To get a job
- To help others through voluntary work
- To start my own business / be self employed
- To continue studying part-time
- To continue studying full-time at College or University
- To continue informal learning e.g. reading, art, creative writing, acting, music
- Vocational training while working e.g. an Apprenticeship

Other? (please give details)

28. If you hope to continue learning after release, what support would you find most helpful (please tick all that apply)

- Advice about funding for courses, course materials and books
- Advice about colleges / universities / adult learning centres in my area
- Advice about libraries, sports clubs, arts organisations in my area
- Advice about distance learning / online courses
- Advice about what courses I should take for a particular career
- Support of a mentor
- Help with accessing a computer/printer/internet
- Help with how to use the internet
- Advice about childcare provision while I study
- Advice about fitting learning alongside work or Work Programme requirements
- ROTL to college or training as I near release

Other? (please give details)

29. To join the Prisoners Education Trust Learner Voice Panel and be contacted about other opportunities to express your views, please provide your name and prison number here (and ensure you have told us which prison you are in). The answers to this survey will remain confidential

Thank you for taking part in this survey. Completed forms should be put into an envelope and posted to: Freepost: PRISONERS EDUCATION TRUST. No stamp needed.

Responses must arrive by 4th November 2013 at the latest.

Inside Time will publish extracts from the results in February 2014 and a full report will be published soon afterwards.

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## Organisations

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## Prisons

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All the prisoners who completed the surveys

Prison and education staff





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