

Written evidence submitted by Prisoners' Education Trust

1. About Prisoners' Education Trust

Prisoners' Education Trust (PET) offers distance learning courses, advice and guidance to people in prison and uses policy and advocacy work to improve prison education and show policymakers and the public the impact that education can have for people in prison. We offer 125 different courses - including GCSEs and A-levels, Open University Access modules and a wide range of professional courses - and enable 1,400 people each year to access distance learning, giving them the skills to build brighter futures. Analysis by the Ministry of Justice's Justice Data Lab shows that people supported by PET to study distance learning courses in prison are more likely to get a job after release and less likely to reoffend.

2. PET's work in Wales

PET has had a team based in Wales since 2015 focusing on the needs of distance learners in Welsh prisons and the staff that support them. We have built an increasingly robust picture of the challenges and this has informed the information, advice and guidance we provide. It has also led to PET hosting regular group meetings with the distance learning co-ordinators from all Wales prisons. This work has given PET specific insight into education provision in prisons in Wales.

3. Response to the inquiry's Terms of Reference

How does a lack of Wales-only data impact upon the understanding of prison provisions in Wales?

Data on education provision in Wales

Detailed data on education provision in prisons in England is published annually by the Ministry of Justice.¹ This enables external scrutiny of participation and achievement by learners in prisons in England. However, there is no equivalent data available for Wales. This lack of data for Wales means that:

- There are limited opportunities to understand educational provision and progression specifically in Wales.
- It is difficult to see patterns in and understand the impact of staff shortages and the growing prison population.

As there is no published data, the only source of publicly available information on education provision in prisons in Wales is contained in individual prison inspection reports, which provide useful insight into the education provision in each Welsh prison. Appendix A provides a summary of the Estyn judgements in recent inspections, which are broadly positive.

Data on distance learning provision in Wales

At PET we collect data on demand for distance learning courses in prison. The tables below show the number of applications received and the most popular courses for learners in prison in Wales.²

¹ The statistics for 2022-23 are available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/prison-education-and-accredited-programme-statistics-2022-to-2023>.

² PET currently offers more than 125 different distance learning courses to people in prison in Wales. Our prospectus is available at <https://prisonerseducation.org.uk/get-support/prison->

Number of applications received from prisons in Wales for distance learning courses

Prison at point of application ↓	Record Count
Parc	127
Prescoed	44
Usk	42
Berwyn	24
Swansea	14
Cardiff	11

Top distance learning courses applied for in prisons in Wales

Course ↓	Recor...
NEBOSH HSE Award in Managing Risks and Risk /	53
IOSH Managing Safely (Paper-based)	18
NEBOSH Level 3 National General Certificate in O	13
NEBOSH Certificate in Health and Safety Manage	11
Business Start-Up parts 1&2	9
Agile Project Management	9
Nutrition for Physical Activity (16 REP Pts)	8
Drug and Alcohol Counselling	8
Canine Science	6
PropertyMark Award in Residential Lettings (work	5

PET is keen to ensure that the data that we have available is used by prisons and prison education providers in Wales to ensure that distance learning is an integrated part of the prison education landscape.

Is the Welsh prison estate fit for purpose in terms of the provision of education and rehabilitation facilities for Welsh prisoners, and Welsh language facilities?

Physical infrastructure

Infrastructure is a problem across the Welsh prison estate for different reasons. HMPs Cardiff and Swansea are both Victorian prisons. These aging establishments struggle to provide environments which support and encourage learning. The infrastructure also limits access to digital technology and the potential that brings for educational development. In HMP Usk the education department is on the third floor of one of the prison buildings and as such is available but not accessible to all, for example older prisoners or those with physical disabilities.

Prison transfers

There are challenges supporting people in prison as they move through the Welsh prison system. Typically people are transferred from HMPs Cardiff and Swansea in the early part of their sentence and move to HMPs Parc and Berwyn. There are four key issues related to the transfer process:

1. When potential learners are initially held in local prisons, there are limited opportunities for them to engage in education. Often there is a sense they are given activities because they are short things to do, rather than because they are the right thing to do.
2. Often only prison security is aware of an impending move, and so learners and the education staff that support them are unable to plan and prepare for a move, for example ensuring a course is completed before transfer.
3. Little information is provided about the education provision at the establishment a person is moving to, and so no planning can be undertaken as to educational progression moving forward. PET is currently working on a leaflet with HMPs Swansea and Cardiff regarding distance learning educational opportunities in Parc, but this is just one element of the prison's education and training programme which may be relevant to a learner in prison.
4. There is no uniformity in education provision across the Welsh prison estate. This exacerbates the challenges of continuing education around prison transfers, as what may be available in one prison may not be available in another. In addition different establishments recognise the value of education to differing degrees, with some establishments placing greater emphasis on specific vocational or work opportunities. This can be challenging for people in prison who want or need to follow a different path. ROTL opportunities (including those to study in the community) are limited.

Though this inquiry focuses on adult men in prison, it is important to note that prison transfers are also an issue for Welsh women held in HMP Eastwood Park. It is often unclear where they will be transferred to, and what educational opportunities will be available for them.

Digital technology

Attitudes towards and access to digital technology varies across the Welsh estate. HMP Berwyn has in-cell devices and there are laptops available in some establishments. The Welsh Government has continued to invest in the Virtual Campus (VC, the prison intranet), but we are aware of computers with access to the VC going unused for a variety of reasons including:

- Prison staff do not know the password.
- Prison staff don't know what is available on the computers or who the content is for.
- Anxiety over who should have access and when.

A 2021 inspection of HMP Usk and HMPYOI Prescoed also noted that “The prison had acquired a few laptops to help them complete work in their cells. However, staff found that these computers were unsuitable”.³

There are tensions between devolved education provision and the security requirements as set out by HMPPS. Though there is often co-operation at a strategic level, there needs to be a digital strategy which clearly outlines who is responsible for what at an operational level.

These practical issues and the anxieties over digital access need to be addressed to enable people in prison in Wales to develop their digital skills generally in readiness for release, but also to allow them to access a broader range of better quality digital educational opportunities.

Education providers

Education providers struggle to deliver prison education contracts with the available funding. When the contracts are retendered, there can be challenges whether the provider remains the same or changes. If the same provider wins the contract, there are often significant changes made to alter provision. This has been the case in HMP Berwyn. Equally, changes to education provider can be unsettling for learners and educators in prison. This has been the case in HMP Parc where G4S had been the provider since the prison opened, but the provision is now going through a period of flux as a new partnership settles in. Staff changes and a change in priorities can leave learners uncertain as to what opportunities will still be available for them. This, alongside existing issues such as staff sickness, has affected access to further education with the priority being the delivery of classroom-based education.

There are also challenges where prison education is provided in partnership with a local college provider:

- In some instances the profile of a prison population can change and so the local connection is less relevant. This has been the case in HMP Berwyn which was originally intended for the local population but now holds people coming from far further afield. These individuals will not be released to or continuing their education in the community local to HMP Berwyn.
- The limitations of prison contracts, infrastructure and security mean that college provision in prison is still fundamentally different to that in the community. This creates challenges for delivery, resources and budget, as what works in one setting cannot be automatically applied in the other. It can also mean learners remain unprepared for continuing their studies on release as the community education landscape is so different to their experience in prison.

Conclusion

Evidence shows that the provision of education in prison can help to reduce reoffending and improve the chances of people leaving prison securing employment. To ensure that people in prison can best access education and the benefits that come from this, a clear strategy should be put in place to increase access to digital devices to support learning, there should be a greater focus on ensuring that people who transfer between prisons have a coherent learning experience, and structures should be put in place to manage the disruption caused by changes in education provider. Data on participation in education in prisons in Wales should also be published to enable external scrutiny.

³ p.42 () Report on an unannounced inspection of HMP Usk and HMP and YOI Prescoed

Appendix A - summary table of the most recent inspection outcomes for education provision in each Welsh establishment

Prison name	Publication date	Inspection date	Education provider at the time of inspection	Estyn inspection areas					Link
				<i>Standards</i>	<i>Well-being and attitudes to learning</i>	<i>Teaching and learning experiences</i>	<i>Care, support and guidance</i>	<i>Leadership and management</i>	
Berwyn	6 September 2022	16-17 and 23-27 May 2022	Novus Cambria	Good	Good	Good	Adequate and needs improvement	Adequate and needs improvement	Link
Cardiff	5 November 2019	15-26 July 2019	HMPPS Wales	Good	Excellent	Good	Good	Good	Link
Parc (HMP)	11 October 2022	21-22 June and 4-8 July 2022	G4S	Good	Excellent	Good	Excellent	Excellent	Link
Parc (HMYOI)	20 July 2022	28 March-8 April 2022	G4S	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent	Link
Swansea	20 June 2023	21 February-10 March 2023	HMPPS Wales	Good	Good	Adequate	Good	Adequate	Link
Usk and Prescoed	1 October 2021	14-25 June 2021	HMPPS Wales	No formal results due to Covid					Link
Usk and Prescoed ⁴	20 February 2018	9-19 October 2017	HMPPS Wales	Good	Good	Good	Good	Adequate and needs improvement	Link

13 October 2023

⁴ As the most recent inspection of HMPs Usk and Prescoed, in 2021, did not lead to a formal outcome due to Covid-19, the previous inspection is also included here.