

Getting prison education right

Priorities for the new government

September 2024



About Prisoners' Education Trust

At Prisoners' Education Trust (PET) we believe that everyone in prison, wherever they are and whatever their background, should have access to education.

We offer distance learning courses, advice and guidance and help around 1,400 learners each year to study, giving them the skills and qualifications to build brighter futures. We offer 130 different courses including GCSEs and A-levels, Open University (OU) Access modules and a wide range of professional courses.

We also use our policy and advocacy work to improve prison education and show prisons, policymakers and the public the impact it can have — for people in prison, their families, and society.

PET believes that people with lived experience of prison education should be at the centre of our work. We aim to work co-productively and ensure that people with lived experience inform our thinking in all that we do.

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Executive summary

This briefing makes 10 recommendations to the new ministerial team at the Ministry of Justice on how to improve prison education, ensuring that people in prison can access education provision that meets their needs and helps them to thrive on release.

The briefing focuses on education provision in adult prisons and on changes that can be made at a national level. As education is a devolved issue, it primarily covers issues related to provision in England and not in Wales.

Why does prison education matter?

Prison education is important for three key reasons.

Firstly, there is a high level of educational need among people in prison. The majority of people in prison have literacy and numeracy levels below those expected of somebody leaving primary school.

Secondly, participating in prison education improves people's experiences of prison. It improves mental health and wellbeing and enables them to better engage with the prison regime.

Thirdly, participating in education in prison improves outcomes on release. There is extensive, robust evidence that people who have participated in education are more likely to secure employment on release and are less likely to reoffend.

Education is the engine of rehabilitation and can make a real and substantial difference to people's lives, providing them with the skills, qualifications and attributes that will help them in prison and on release.

What does prison education currently look like?

Prison education in public sector prisons in England primarily focuses on literacy, numeracy and vocational skills up to Level 2. This is delivered by specialist providers, through contracts with HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS).

In addition, prison governors have some funding available to bring in additional provision via the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). This is used for a wide range of educational activities, including sport, art activities and peer reading schemes.

Alongside this, people in prison can access distance learning courses, provided by Prisoners' Education Trust (PET), and higher education, primarily with the Open University (OU).

Employers also work in prisons to provide training and employment opportunities.

Recent reforms to prison education

In recent years a number of reforms have been made to prison education.

These included the introduction of Heads of Education, Skills and Work, a new senior role focused on education, and Neurodiversity Support Managers, to support neurodivergent people in every prison.

Programmes were introduced to support businesses to work within prisons to provide training and Employment Advisory Boards were set up to act as a link between prisons and employers. The New Futures Network was established to work with employers to help create job opportunities for people leaving prison. The government also legislated to enable people in prison to undertake apprenticeships.

In addition, the Literacy Innovation Fund was created to test new reading and writing programmes.

A commissioning process was also begun for the next generation of prison education contracts, while plans were announced to give governors in five prisons more autonomy to develop their own approach to education provision to test new approaches and drive innovation. This latter programme has been put on hold.

Why is further reform to prison education necessary?

Despite these changes, however, it is clear that further reform is needed to drive improvements.

Nearly half of Ofsted inspections find education provision to be inadequate. The vast majority of the rest are judged to be "requires improvement". No prison has been judged outstanding for five years. This is reflected in the views of HM Chief Inspector of Prisons Charlie Taylor, who has described prison education as "nowhere near good enough",¹ and the former Ofsted Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman, who has described it as "extremely poor".²

Not only is education in prison not of good enough quality, but not enough people can access it. The number of people who participated in a course in prison last year was 37% lower than a decade ago, while the number participating in a functional skills course – primarily English and Maths – has fallen by 27% since 2014–15.

Moreover not enough of those who do access education in prison make sufficient progress. Last year, only 1,582 people achieved Level 2 in English. Prisons too often also fail to achieve the basics, like teaching people to read.³

Prison education is too important to be allowed to fail. We can and must do better.

Broader challenges facing the prison system

While the primary focus of this briefing is specifically on education provision, it is important to recognise that prison education is not delivered in a vacuum.

The broader challenges facing the prison system – including managing population pressures, overcrowding and staffing shortages – all impact on the delivery of education. In addition, living conditions have an impact on education. For example, learners consistently tell us that the poor quality of prison food affects learning.

While this briefing does not look to provide solutions to these issues, it is important to note that the recommendations set out below will have a greater impact if improvements are also made to the broader prison system.

What changes are needed?

The following 10 recommendations set out how we can improve prison education, benefitting people in prison and wider society.

With a new government in place in Westminster, these recommendations focus on the changes that must be made by the Ministry of Justice and HMPPS nationally to make prison education work.

Recommendation 1: Make it clear to everyone in the prison system that education is a priority for the new government

To achieve this:

- Within the next three months the ministerial team at the Ministry of Justice should make a clear statement that they see education as a priority and that steps will be taken to secure improvements over the lifetime of this parliament.
- The Ministry of Justice should carry out a review of the progress made on the recommendations of the Education Select Committee's inquiry on prison education and take action where insufficient progress has been made.

Recommendation 2: Embed recent reforms to prison education to secure improvements in delivery

To achieve this:

- HMPPS should review the Heads of Education, Skills and Work role after one further year of implementation and consider how the role – and the structures supporting it – could be improved and strengthened.
- The Ministry of Justice should ensure that Employment Advisory Boards consistently play an active role in the design of the education offer.
- HMPPS should work with Ofsted to consider how prisons can be better supported to implement the findings of inspections.

Recommendation 3: Review the new prison education contracts before they are finalised

To achieve this:

- Before they are finalised, the Ministry of Justice should review the proposed new contracts for education provision in prisons to consider whether improvements could be made.
- Within the next six months, HMPPS should recommence the programme of work whereby five prisons would be enabled and supported to commission their own education provision.

Recommendation 4: Increase funding for prison education to meet the needs of learners

To achieve this:

- Within the next six months, the Ministry of Justice should commit to increasing funding for prison education, through the new contracts, through the DPS, or both.
- The Ministry of Justice should provide additional funding for prisons specifically to support those with the lowest literacy levels.

Recommendation 5: Improve access to digital devices and secure access to the internet

To achieve this:

- The Ministry of Justice and HMPPS should publish within the next year a strategy to make secure access to the internet available across the prison estate, with a focus on making in-cell access available where possible. This should include a clear timetable for implementation.
- Building on the content created through the Digital Innovation Fund, HMPPS should continue to develop high-quality educational resources that are compatible with the digital devices and platforms available in prison.

Recommendation 6: Invest in prison education staff and prison education infrastructure

To achieve this:

- The Ministry of Justice should develop a strategy in partnership with education providers to ensure that we recruit, retain and develop the prison teachers that we need to deliver high-quality education in prison.
- HMPPS should commission an independent assessment of the physical condition of prison education departments and develop a prioritised plan for refurbishments and improvements. They should commit to addressing all its recommendations within a decade, in line with plans for a “decade of national renewal”.

Recommendation 7: Take steps to engage learners in prison education and broaden the curriculum

To achieve this:

- The Ministry of Justice should develop a pilot, working with a cohort of prisons and education providers, to test more flexible prison regimes and evening classes to maximise access to education.

- HMPPS should mandate that pay for participating in education should be at least equal to the highest-paid work within the prison.
- HMPPS should work with the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance to create guidance for prisons on commissioning high-quality art and creative activities.
- The Ministry of Justice should review the implementation of the recommendations of the independent review of sport in prisons and consider what more could be done.
- The Ministry of Justice should publish guidance that endorses prison-university partnerships, while setting out where responsibility for risk management lies and how they can safely be managed.
- The Ministry of Justice should develop a strategy to encourage and support prisons to enable people to access education via Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL).

Recommendation 8: Improve support for distance learning in prison

To achieve this:

- HMPPS should amend the relevant prison policy framework to specify that distance learning should be made available.
- HMPPS should produce guidance for prisons on how best to support the delivery of distance learning in their prison.
- The Ministry of Justice should work with the Department of Education to abolish the “six-year rule” for eligibility for student loans in prison.

Recommendation 9: Ensure that different groups within the prison population can access education that meets their needs

To achieve this:

- The Ministry of Justice should ensure that where any disproportionality is identified in who is accessing education and the progress that is made, action is taken to address it.
- The Ministry of Justice should make supporting neurodivergent people in prison an ongoing priority, including ensuring prisons consider how their needs can best be met in the provision of education.
- HMPPS should review the curriculum in women’s prisons and ensure that it is aligned to the needs and aspirations of women in prison.

Recommendation 10: Carry out a full review of the current prison education delivery model

To achieve this:

- Within the next six months the Ministry of Justice should commission a full review of the delivery model for prison education, to be carried out over the next two years.
- To accompany this, a full review should be carried out of the funding required to deliver high-quality prison education that meets the needs of people in prison.
- A prison education strategy should then be developed to guide reform over the next five to ten years.

Conclusion

Education in prison transforms lives. It gives people the skills that they need to unlock their potential, gain employment and become assets to their communities. It also builds social capital and improves the wellbeing of people in prison, both during their sentences and once released.

We look forward to working with the new government to improve prison education. This report is intended to support improvements in the delivery of education in prisons in England, helping to reduce reoffending and support people in prison to achieve their potential.

1

Introduction

In the two months since the general election, the new ministerial team at the Ministry of Justice has been focused on tackling the immediate crisis in prison capacity. Having inherited a system that was on the brink of simply running out of space, this focus was inevitable. This crisis is by no means resolved, and prisons remain under significant pressure. But there are also broader areas of prison policy that need to be addressed, among them prison education.

Prison education has the potential to be transformative for people in prison, enabling them to turn their lives around and thrive. Robust evidence is clear that it helps people to secure employment on release and reduces reoffending. At present, however, there are significant challenges in the delivery of prison education. Ofsted and HM Inspectorate of Prisons are clear that what is available is not good enough.

Moreover, decisions on prison education that are taken in the next few months will have significant long-term implications. We are in the latter stages of the procurement of new contracts for the delivery of prison education, which are due to commence in 2025 and run for at least four years. Decisions that are taken now will affect not only these contracts, but what is possible to do when they come to an end.

Within this context, this briefing sets out a series of recommendations to improve prison education. If implemented, these improvements would benefit people in prison and, by reducing reoffending and improving the life chances of our citizens, broader society.

2

About this briefing

This briefing is written for the new government in Westminster. As education is a devolved issue, it therefore focuses primarily on provision in England and not in Wales. It also focuses on changes that can be made at a national level by the Ministry of Justice and HMPPS, rather than changes that can be made locally by prisons and education providers.

The briefing focuses on the provision of education to adults in prison. Education provision in the youth estate is an important, distinct issue that is not addressed here.

In order to focus on priority areas, some additional issues have not been addressed here. For example, we have not looked in detail at how we can better meet the needs of different groups – such as older people or Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people – within the prison population.

In preparing this briefing we spoke to former learners and to prison education staff, as well as drawing on PET's 35 years of experience working in prison education. We ran an informal survey of our partners and supporters to gather ideas. We also reviewed key reports, including Dame Sally Coates's review of prison education, published in 2016,⁴ and the report of the Education Select Committee's inquiry on prison education, published in 2022.⁵

3

Why does prison education matter?

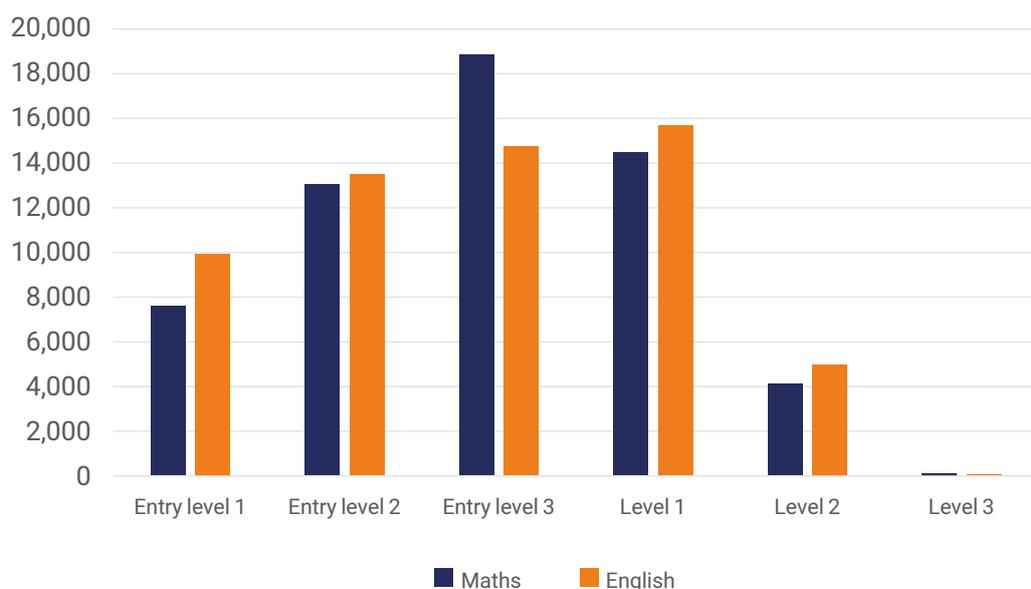
Prison education is important for three key reasons. Firstly, there is a high level of educational need among people in prison – literacy and numeracy levels are lower than for the general population. Secondly, participating in prison education improves people’s experiences of prison, improving mental health and wellbeing and enabling them to engage with the prison regime. Thirdly, it improves outcomes on release. People who have participated in education are more likely to secure employment and less likely to reoffend.

a) High levels of educational need

People who arrive in public sector prisons in England complete an initial assessment to determine their levels of English and Maths before they participate in education.

As shown in Figure 1, in 2022–23 the results of the majority of initial assessments – 68% of Maths assessments and 65% of English assessments – were at Entry Level 3 or below. Entry Level 3 is roughly the literacy and numeracy level you would expect of somebody leaving primary school. Around one in six (17%) – nearly 10,000 people – were at Entry Level 1 for English, the literacy level normally expected of someone aged 5–7. By contrast, less than 0.2% were at Level 3 (equivalent to A-level).⁶

Figure 1: Outcomes of initial assessments (2022–23)



The National Literacy Trust notes that adults below Entry Level 1, “may not be able to write short messages to family or read a road sign”,⁷ while the charity National Numeracy says that adults below Entry Level 1, “may not be able to select floor numbers in lifts”.⁸ This shows how difficult it will be for people with the lowest levels of literacy and numeracy to engage successfully with prison regimes, let alone employment or other activities in the community. The contrast in literacy rates with the broader population is particularly stark – only 14.9% of the adult population has literacy levels at or below Entry Level 3 (compared to 65% in prison). The equivalent figure for numeracy is 49.1% (compared to 68% of people in prison).⁹

Ministry of Justice data also shows that 28% of people in prison who took an initial assessment had a learning difficulty or disability (LDD) confirmed through a LDD assessment. However, this is not a comprehensive figure – the report notes that, “Learning difficulty/ disability assessments are not required for all prisoners; we do not know how many of the prisoners that were not assessed have an LDD”.¹⁰

Previous research has found that just 53% of people in prison reported having at least one qualification (including GCSEs/O Levels or equivalent and higher qualifications, and trade apprenticeships) prior to entering prison. By comparison around 85% of the general population had at least one qualification. 42% of people in prison reported that they had been expelled or permanently excluded from school.¹¹

b) Improved wellbeing and engagement

In addition, PET’s own experience and that of others providing education in prison is that participating in education has a substantial, positive impact on people while they are in prison.

In particular, participating in education helps to boost the mental health and wellbeing of people in prison by helping them to occupy their time positively and learn new skills. People have reported improved self-esteem, self-confidence, self-discipline and communication skills.¹²

With people spending more time in their cells than ever before, distance learning courses can provide them with something to focus on and a positive way to spend their time. As one learner told us, “[my course has] given me confidence to know I have a future. It has helped me with my mental health and ultimately made me feel more human”.

People who participate in education will also be more able to engage with the broader prison regime. Most simply, for example, people who cannot read will not be able to understand prison information that is given to them. Addressing this will improve their experience immeasurably. They may also want to take on additional roles and responsibilities within prison, with – for example – 47% of people who have completed one of our courses telling us that they have subsequently volunteered in prison.

c) Improved outcomes on release

There is extensive evidence from England and Wales and from elsewhere that participating in education while in prison reduces the likelihood of reoffending and increases the likelihood of prison leavers securing employment.

To summarise, a joint report by the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Education published in 2017 found that people who had taken part in education had a significantly lower reoffending rate on release from prison than their peers (34% compared to 43%).¹³ A second report, published by the Ministry of Justice in 2018, found that learners were approximately 7.5 percentage points less likely to reoffend within one year of release than people in prison who had not participated in education. They were also more likely to be in employment one year after release. In addition, this report showed that investment in prison education is cost-effective, noting that the benefits outweigh the costs by a ratio of approximately 5:1.¹⁴

This is supported by extensive evidence globally. For example, a rapid evidence assessment of the effectiveness of prison education in reducing reoffending and increasing employment, conducted by academics at Manchester Metropolitan University and published in 2017, found that participating in education has a positive impact on reoffending (reducing the likelihood of reoffending by approximately one-third) and on employment (increasing the likelihood of gaining employment by 24%).¹⁵

These positive findings are echoed in other research reviews. The evidence in support of the efficacy of prison education is set out in more detail in a 2024 report published by Clinks, the national infrastructure body supporting the voluntary sector working in criminal justice, and available at: www.clinks.org/publication/prison-education-review-evidence.

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What does prison education currently look like?

Recognising low levels of literacy and numeracy among people in prison, the core education provision in prisons in England and Wales focuses on literacy and numeracy up to Level 2 (roughly equivalent to a pass at GCSE), along with Information and Communications Technology (ICT), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and vocational training.

In English public sector prisons this is delivered by independent providers under contracts, known as the Prison Education Framework (PEF) contracts. They run until 2025 and the commissioning process for their replacements is still underway at the time of writing. Arrangements in private prisons and prisons in Wales differ but the focus of the core provision is broadly similar.

In addition to the core provision, PET provides access to distance learning courses on a wide variety of subjects – including OU Access modules, GCSEs and A-Levels, and a range of professional courses – purchasing courses on behalf of learners from specialist course providers. We fund this through a combination of a grant from the Ministry of Justice, charitable funding we raise independently, and a contribution from the prison. These courses are free to the learner.

People in prison can also participate in higher education. This is primarily through the OU and funded by a student loan (although student loans are only available during the last six years of a prison sentence – the so-called “six year rule”). Other universities are exploring the potential of providing courses and some have also set up prison-university partnerships, which bring universities into prisons to teach learners, although they are mostly on hold pending new guidance. This is discussed on page 28.

To complement core provision, prison governors can also buy in additional educational activities using a commissioning mechanism known as the Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). This may include, for example, sport, art activities and peer reading schemes. Other organisations provide educational activities without being funded. In addition, some businesses work within prisons to provide vocational training.

All people in prison should have access to a library, although in practice access varies significantly.

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Recent reforms to prison education

In recent years, some reforms have been made to prison education.¹⁶ They have included:

- The introduction of Heads of Education, Skills and Work, a new senior role in prisons to focus on education.
- The introduction of Neurodiversity Support Managers in every prison to support neurodivergent people.
- The creation of the Future Skills Programme and HMP Academies programme, funded from the Employability Innovation Fund, to support businesses to work within prisons to provide training.¹⁷
- The establishment of the Literacy Innovation Fund, which has funded two pilot projects to test new reading and writing programmes. They are provided by two charities, run for two years and were expected to work with around 750 people across 15 prisons.¹⁸

Employment Advisory Boards have also been introduced, to act as a link between prisons and employers and ensure that the education and training available will give people the skills that they need to secure a job on release.¹⁹ The New Futures Network was also established to work with employers to help create job opportunities for people leaving prison.²⁰

These changes were all positive steps that PET supports.

The government also legislated to enable people in prison to undertake apprenticeships. While this is a positive step in principle, problems have been reported with implementing this in practice.²¹

A commissioning process was also begun for the next generation of prison education contracts. These new contracts were due to begin from April 2025 but have been delayed. This is discussed on page 23.

In addition, plans were announced to give governors in five prisons “increased freedoms on how they organise prison education, skills and work opportunities in their prison” to test new approaches and drive innovation. This work has been put on hold²² and is also discussed further on page 23.

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Why is further reform to prison education necessary?

Despite these reforms, it is clear that prison education is still nowhere near good enough. As recently as July 2024, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons Charlie Taylor said that “the quality of education and training is almost universally poor”.²³

a) Ofsted inspection outcomes

This is backed up by Ofsted data from recent years. As set out in Figure 2, last year the education provision at 45% of the prisons inspected was judged to be “inadequate”, while 48% were judged to be “requires improvement”. Only 8% (three prisons) were “good” and none were “outstanding”. This would be unthinkable and unacceptable in any other sector.

Figure 2: Ofsted prison education inspection outcomes, 2015–16 to 2022–23

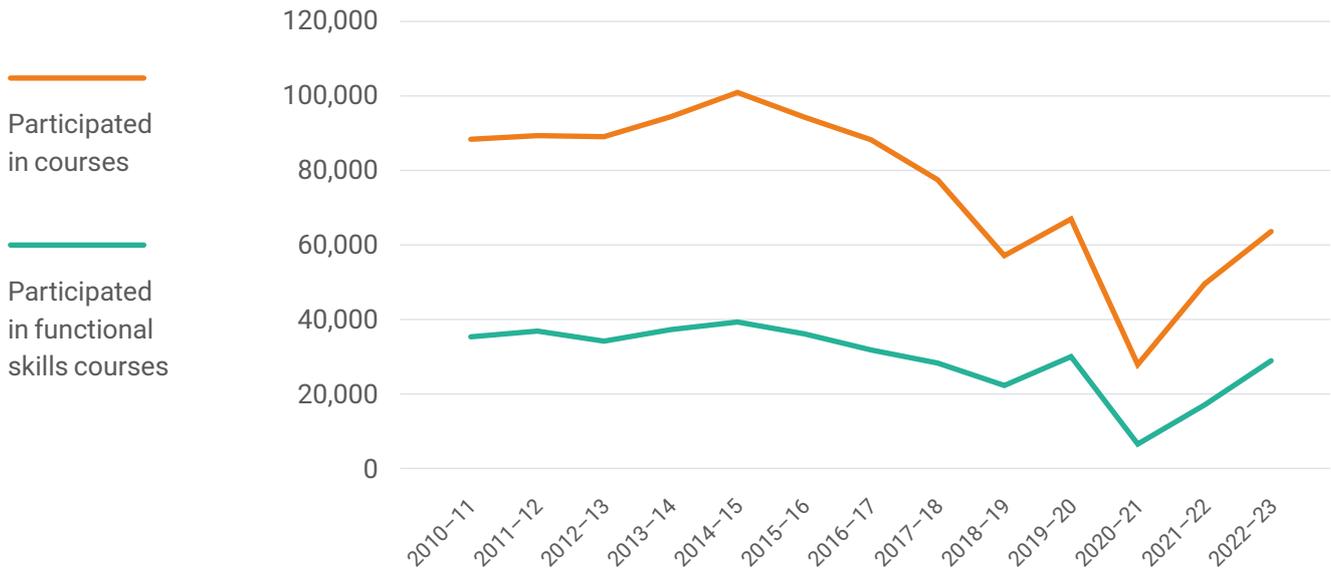
	Total number of prisons inspected	Outstanding	Good	Requires improvement	Inadequate
2022–23	40	0 (0%)	3 (8%)	19 (48%)	18 (45%)
2021–22	22	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	10 (45%)	11 (50%)
2019–20	32	0 (0%)	9 (28%)	19 (59%)	4 (13%)
2018–19	45	1 (2%)	17 (38%)	20 (44%)	7 (16%)
2017–18	41	0 (0%)	16 (39%)	20 (49%)	5 (12%)
2016–17	41	1 (2%)	22 (54%)	12 (29%)	6 (15%)
2015–16	42	2 (5%)	14 (33%)	20 (48%)	6 (14%)
Total	263	4 (2%)	82 (31%)	120 (46%)	57 (22%)

Reflecting this, the Ofsted Annual Report for 2022–23 noted that “the overall effectiveness of education, skills and work provision in prisons is poor and continues to decline”.²⁴ Their previous annual report similarly concluded that prison education was “the worst performing sector we inspect”, adding “if anything, it has become worse still”.²⁵

b) Participation in education

In addition, fewer people than previously are now able to access prison education. In total 63,744 people participated in a course in prison in 2022–23, including 28,832 people who participated in a functional skills course (primarily English and Maths, but also ICT and ESOL). This is significantly lower than the peak level in 2014–15, when 101,600 people took part in a course, including 39,300 people who took part in a functional skills course. While the pandemic has had an impact, the longer-term picture is of declining numbers of people participating even before the pandemic, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Participation in education in prison



The latest annual prison performance ratings also show that prisons are not making full use of the education capacity that they have available. Of the prisons that provided data, more than half (53%) had rates of attendance of less than 75%. Five prisons had attendance rates of less than 50%.²⁶

Not only are fewer people participating, but only a minority are achieving Level 2 in English and Maths. Of the 28,832 people who participated in a functional skills course in 2022–23, only 1,582 achieved Level 2 in English and only 962 achieved Level 2 in Maths.

Moreover prisons are too often failing to achieve the basics, with significant concerns about the teaching of reading in prisons. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons Charlie Taylor described it as “astonishing” and a “huge missed opportunity” that people can serve their sentence without being taught to read, adding that “it is a serious indictment of the prison system that so many prisoners are no better at reading when they leave prison than when they arrived”.²⁷

c) Election manifesto commitments

Recognising both the importance of prison education and its current failings, prior to the 2024 general election there was a cross-party consensus on the need to make prisons more rehabilitative and the role that education can play in that.

Labour’s manifesto stated that “Labour will act to reduce reoffending. We will work with prisons to improve offenders’ access to purposeful activity, such as learning”.²⁸ This is supported by the conclusions of Labour’s National Policy Forum, which said that Labour would “drive down reoffending by cutting drug use and violence on the prison estate and rehabilitating prisoners through reforming education and employment opportunities”.²⁹

In their manifesto, the Liberal Democrats pledged to “cut reoffending by...improving the provision of training, education and work opportunities in prisons”.³⁰ The Conservative Party promised to “turn criminals away from the cycle of reoffending, investing in rehabilitative services such as drug treatment, education and employment”.³¹

7

Broader challenges facing the prison system

Before setting out reforms that are needed to prison education, it is important to note that education provision does not and cannot operate in a vacuum, immune to the broader pressures in the prison system. Capacity issues, overcrowding and officer shortages all have a significant impact on the provision of prison education.

a) Prison overcrowding

Firstly, prison overcrowding creates significant problems for the delivery of prison education. With prisons holding more people than they were designed for, education departments are unlikely to have the capacity needed. This issue is exacerbated when Rapid Deployment Cells are used to increase a prison's capacity, without a commensurate increase in the size or capacity of prison education departments, workshops or other education or training opportunities.

This was noted recently by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons Charlie Taylor, who said that people in overcrowded prisons are "not able to get access to things like education, to training, to skills. We've got more prisoners, but we're not building more education facilities, so they just haven't got enough to do during the day."³²

Furthermore, the lack of headroom in the prison estate, and the need to manage population pressures, increases the risk that people will need to be moved around the prison estate, often at short notice. These decisions do not usually take into account their educational needs or their participation in a course.

This is particularly problematic when a learner is part-way through a course that is not offered at the receiving prison. Starting a course and then not being able to complete it can be particularly disheartening for learners and make it less likely that they will want to participate in education in the future.

b) Staff shortages

Shortages of prison officers also have an impact on education. It means that people cannot always be escorted safely around the prison or moved from their wing to their allocated activity. Given that the delivery of the majority of prison education and training depends on access to classrooms and workshops, if learners cannot get to them then activities cannot go ahead.

Even when learners can get to classrooms, staff shortages may lead to them arriving late or needing to return to their wing early. This disrupts the planned lessons and puts more pressure on prison teachers. Staff shortages can also affect prison libraries, which can be closed with little or no notice because there are no staff to oversee access.

With current staff shortages, officers also have less time to spend with people one-to-one. This has an impact on education. If they have the time to do so, prison officers can encourage people to engage with education, help them to recognise it as a way to use their time in prison productively and achieve their goals, and support them as learners. Current staffing levels make this extremely difficult for officers to do.

c) Prison food

Current and former learners have repeatedly told us that the quantity and quality of prison food is a significant barrier to learning for people in prison. Put simply, people who are hungry do not learn well; access to insufficient amounts of poor-quality food leaves people feeling listless and lacking in energy and focus.

Problems with prison food have been recognised by HM Inspectorate of Prisons, which has said that “too often the quantity and quality of the food provided is insufficient”,³³ and by the charity Food Behind Bars, which states that “the average prison meal is often repetitive, uninspiring and lacking in the key nutrients required to equip prisoners with a balanced diet”.³⁴ Addressing this would, among other benefits, leave people in prison better able to engage successfully with education.

The focus of this briefing is not on broader prison capacity issues or on prison conditions. But it is important to recognise that these issues have an impact on the delivery of education, and therefore on the potential to support people in prison to turn their lives around and acquire the skills and qualifications they need to thrive when released.

8

What changes are needed?

The next section of this briefing will explore the changes that need to be made to secure improvements in prison education.

Its primary focus is on changes that can be made by ministers, working with Ministry of Justice officials and HMPPS nationally. Clearly, prison governors, staff and education providers can make improvements to provision in the prisons they work in but that is not the focus of this briefing. This briefing focuses on the changes that should be made at a national level to enable and facilitate any work to make improvements locally.

a) Make it clear that education is a priority

There are longstanding concerns that education is not sufficiently prioritised within the prison system. It is important to be realistic – prison governors will always see safety and security as the top priorities – but it is also important to recognise and promote the value of education.

As a first step, the new ministerial team at the Ministry of Justice should make it clear that education is a priority for them and should be for the prison system as a whole. Ministers have a lot of influence, both direct and indirect. They should use it to promote education as a priority for every prison. This signalling matters. For example, Michael Gove's 2015 speech as Secretary of State for Justice on the importance of prison education made a clear statement that he was prioritising this issue.³⁵

In addition, to signal that prison education is a priority and to ensure that current progress does not slip, the Ministry of Justice should look again at the recommendations of the report of the Education Select Committee's inquiry on prison education³⁶ and, where the recommendations have been accepted, assess the progress made. Where progress has been insufficient, steps should be taken to remedy this.

Recommendation 1: Make it clear to everyone in the prison system that education is a priority for the new government

To achieve this:

- Within the next three months the ministerial team at the Ministry of Justice should make a clear statement that they see education as a priority and that steps will be taken to secure improvements over the lifetime of this parliament.
- The Ministry of Justice should carry out a review of the progress made on the recommendations of the Education Select Committee's inquiry on prison education and take action where insufficient progress has been made.

b) Embed recent reforms

Changes that have been made in recent years have the potential to improve prison education. But implementation is key. The Ministry of Justice should focus attention on ensuring that recent innovations are supported in the coming years.

Firstly, as mentioned on page 16, a new senior role has been introduced in prison to focus on education – Heads of Education, Skills and Work. Many of these people have been recruited from outside the prison sector to bring in fresh perspectives and new ideas. We welcome this and believe it has the potential to make a significant difference. In particular this role, working with prison governors, can help to ensure that education is embedded and integrated across the prison and not seen solely as the responsibility of education departments.

However, we understand that some postholders have found the role challenging, without the structures or support to drive improvements across the prison that they work in. The Further Education Commissioner has previously suggested that they might benefit from coaching and mentoring, potentially working with local further education colleges. HMPPS should review the role to consider whether it can be improved and strengthened and to ensure that it has the support that it needs.

Secondly, prison Employment Advisory Boards must play an active role in working with education and other training providers to ensure that education and training within prison delivers the skills and qualifications that employers need.

Thirdly, Ofsted has begun providing sessions for prison leaders to increase understanding of their expectations and how they can be met. This is wholly welcome and should continue. To build on this, HMPPS and Ofsted should consider how they can work together to support prisons to implement the findings of inspections.

At time of writing, in the 12 reports of independent reviews of progress published so far in 2024, Ofsted has assessed the progress made on 42 themes. Of these, “Insufficient progress” had been made on 16, “Reasonable progress” had been made on 25, and “Significant progress” had been made on just one.

This is a missed opportunity to use Ofsted’s findings as a catalyst for improvement. Prison leaders should be provided with more support to help them to address this, drawing on Ofsted’s expertise.

Recommendation 2: Embed recent reforms to prison education to secure improvements in delivery

To achieve this:

- HMPPS should review the Heads of Education, Skills and Work role after one further year of implementation and consider how the role – and the structures supporting it – could be improved and strengthened.
- The Ministry of Justice should ensure that Employment Advisory Boards consistently play an active role in the design of the education offer.
- HMPPS should work with Ofsted to consider how prisons can be better supported to implement the findings of inspections.

c) New prison education contracts

The Ministry of Justice is currently in the latter stages of the process for agreeing the next set of prison education contracts. They are due to start during 2025 (although there is a possibility this could be delayed until April 2026), so the window for making changes is relatively small. But there is still time to look at the proposed contracts, and particularly the performance indicators, and consider whether they are fit for purpose.

Consideration should be given as to whether they enable the providers to offer the best education possible to people in prison, based on their specific needs and aspirations. They should not be overly process-driven and focused on prioritising attendance at specified classes. Learners should be able to get the mix of skills and qualifications that they see as meeting their needs, and the contracts need to facilitate this.

In finalising the contracts – and in the appointment of common awarding organisations for some topics³⁷ – the Ministry of Justice should also ensure that learners who are transferred between prisons are able to continue their studies and to secure qualifications without having to repeat or redo elements of courses. This is frustrating and disincentivising for learners and a waste of limited resources.

In addition, when the tendering process for the new education contracts was published, it was announced that five prisons would be taken out of the standard education contracts and enabled to develop their own, bespoke education provision. This – the Prison Education Service Alternative Commissioning Models project – was a welcome initiative, that would provide an opportunity to test different approaches. However this programme was put on hold earlier this year. Getting it back underway should be a priority for the new government so it is up and running in time to inform the next generation of contracts.

Recommendation 3: Review the new prison education contracts before they are finalised

To achieve this:

- Before they are finalised, the Ministry of Justice should review the proposed new contracts for education provision in prisons to consider whether improvements could be made.
- Within the next six months, HMPPS should recommence the programme of work whereby five prisons would be enabled and supported to commission their own education provision.

d) Funding for prison education

It is widely recognised that prison education provision is currently chronically underfunded, with the Education Select Committee concluding that “prison education is in a perilous state due to a continual decline in funding”.³⁸ As Novus, one of the education providers, has noted “funding, and in turn resources available to deliver education, are not enough to support the complexity of need that is presented by the prisoner cohort”, adding that prison education is “underfunded compared to mainstream community provision”. This is limiting the work that prison education providers can do to meet the needs of the people who they work with.

Longer term, there is a need for a full review of funding for prison education. This is discussed on pages 32-33. In the meantime, however, immediate steps should be taken in recognition of what is a longstanding problem that has become increasingly acute in recent years.

Before signing off the new prison education contracts, the Ministry of Justice should explore whether any additional funding could be made available and what this would enable providers to deliver in terms of additional provision. However, this may be complex due to the fact that the procurement process is well-advanced and there is not time to run a new process.

An alternative would be to increase the funding made available through the DPS, enabling prisons to bring in additional education provision that meets the needs of their populations. This would also give more control to governors and the new Heads of Education, Skills and Work, enabling them to address the issues that are identified within their specific prisons. The Heads of Education, Skills and Work should collaborate closely with the education providers to ensure that what is bought in complements the mainstream provision, taking responsibility for ensuring that there is a coherent offer for learners.

Either way, an increase in funding would enable prisons to increase education capacity, enabling more people to access education, and also to deliver more flexible provision designed to meet individual learners’ needs.

In addition, the Ministry of Justice should continue to provide additional funding to support those with the lowest levels of literacy, building on the Literacy Innovation Fund. As noted on page 12, a significant proportion of people entering prison (around one in six) are at Entry Level 1 for English. This group should be the highest priority for prisons – basic literacy is essential for every facet of everyday life – and more funding should be made available to provide dedicated support to this group.

Recommendation 4: Increase funding for prison education to meet the needs of learners

To achieve this:

- Within the next six months, the Ministry of Justice should commit to increasing funding for prison education, through the new contracts, through the DPS, or both.
- The Ministry of Justice should provide additional funding for prisons specifically to support those with the lowest literacy levels.

e) Digital devices and access to the internet

Alongside the new contracts, the new ministerial team should also consider as a matter of urgency access to digital devices and the internet in prison.

While some progress has been made, there is still a long way to go to meet the Ministry of Justice's aim – set out in the 2021 Prisons Strategy White Paper – for the prison system to be “digitally enabled for prisoners and staff, by default”.³⁹ The roll out of Launchpad (a platform which provides people with secure access to a content hub via a laptop in their cell and is due to be available in 19 prisons by March 2025), the availability of 2,500 laptops provided by Coracle Inside, and plans for a new digital platform alongside the new education contracts are all welcome developments. But the majority of people in prison still lack access to a digital device and the internet.

This means that people in prison cannot develop the digital skills that are now essential for life outside prison. It also means they do not have access to the vast array of digital educational resources that are freely available in the community. It presents challenges for the provision of distance learning too. While PET continues to provide paper-based courses for people in prison, distance learning in the community is now largely provided online.

Addressing the lack of access is essential to ensuring that prison education keeps up with what is routinely available in the community. In-cell digital technology and safe and secure access to the internet should become standard, ensuring that people can choose from the widest range of high-quality courses and resources. While this may take time to implement across the whole prison estate, a clear strategy and timeline is needed as to how this will be achieved. This will help to ensure that consistent progress is made.

In developing this strategy, the Ministry of Justice should recognise that access to digital devices and the internet should complement, not replace, face-to-face teaching. It should not be used as an excuse to make people in prison spend more time in their cells.

In the meantime, there needs to be much more access to digital devices in education departments, libraries and on wings for people to study and to improve their digital skills.

High-quality digital content, designed to meet the needs of people in prison, is also needed. Some specific content has been commissioned as a pilot, through the Digital Innovation Fund, which will provide a basis to build on. Future content needs to cover different educational levels, recognising differing levels of attainment within the prison population, and also meet the specific needs of particular groups (for example those who speak English as a second language).

Recommendation 5: Improve access to digital devices and secure access to the internet

To achieve this:

- The Ministry of Justice and HMPPS should publish within the next year a strategy to make secure access to the internet available across the prison estate, with a focus on making in-cell access available where possible. This should include a clear timetable for implementation.
- Building on the content created through the Digital Innovation Fund, HMPPS should continue to develop high-quality educational resources that are compatible with the digital devices and platforms available in prison.

f) Investment in prison teachers and prison education infrastructure

As with education in any sector, prison teachers are key. But we are facing a workforce crisis. Teachers in prison receive lower wages than in the community, and there are concerns about the limitations of prison teaching as a career. There are few opportunities for progression, insufficient investment in training and little job security.

Taken together, these factors create a reluctance to join the prison education workforce. Retention is also an issue, with research carried out in 2021 by the Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA) and University and College Union (UCU) – the union for prison teachers – finding that seven in ten teachers were considering leaving prison education in the next five years.⁴⁰

The combination of an ageing workforce and people leaving due to elevated levels of stress, poor pay and conditions is a cause for significant concern. This should be addressed as a matter of urgency. And it is important that it is addressed in a co-ordinated way, which means that the Ministry of Justice should take a leadership role, working with the prison education providers.

The state of the prison estate is also a significant barrier to providing good quality education. Classrooms and other education facilities are too often in an unacceptable state. This was reflected in evidence submitted to the Education Select Committee for its 2022 inquiry on prison education, with one submission by prison teachers describing “rotting walls and doors, mould, leaking roofs requiring buckets, [and a] lack of adequate heating”.⁴¹ The inquiry’s report stated that “without significant investment in the prison estate, in buildings, classrooms, equipment and technology, prisoners will not be able to get the skills and qualification that they need to find employment to turn their lives around”.⁴²

Moreover, the layout of some prisons – with, for example, education departments only accessible from one wing – is not conducive to making education available to everyone. This is particularly the case given the more restricted regimes that are generally in place post-pandemic which, alongside staff shortages, make it more difficult for people to move around prisons. Access to libraries has also suffered.

Recommendation 6: Invest in prison education staff and prison education infrastructure

To achieve this:

- The Ministry of Justice should develop a strategy in partnership with education providers to ensure that we recruit, retain and develop the prison teachers that we need to deliver high-quality education in prison.
- HMPPS should commission an independent assessment of the physical condition of prison education departments and develop a prioritised plan for refurbishments and improvements. They should commit to addressing all of its recommendations within a decade, in line with plans for a “decade of national renewal”.

g) Engaging learners in prison education and broadening the curriculum

Many people in prison want to participate in education and it is important that they are enabled to do so, with barriers removed wherever possible. For those who are less immediately interested in participating in education, they should be encouraged to engage given its well-evidenced benefits.

The design of prison regimes is important in achieving this. At present, classes can be three-hours long to fit in with the structure of prison regimes. This is not ideal for people with little or negative prior experience of classroom-based education. Moreover, prison education providers do not routinely offer education during the evenings or weekends, so people have to choose between work or study.

While we recognise the pressure that prisons are under, as the new National Regime Model develops there should be a focus on maximising access to education, more flexibility to enable education providers to create appropriate timetables, and consideration of evening or weekend classes.

Pay is also an important issue. At present, there is a minimum wage in place in prison for everyone who is in work, education or training. Beyond that, governors have discretion in how they set pay within their prison. In some cases, pay for education is lower than for work. This means that even if they want to participate in education, some people may not be able to afford to do so. To ensure that this is no longer the case, pay for education should be at least as high as for work. This would recognise the value of participating in education and incentivise people to take part.

People in prison are also more likely to participate in education if there are opportunities that interest and inspire them. On that basis, while the focus on literacy, numeracy and vocational training recognises the primary needs of people in prison, wherever possible a broader educational offer should be made available.

The content of this broader offer should be designed in consultation with people in prison. However there are some key issues to consider.

Firstly, prison education should include opportunities for art and other creative activities. As the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance states, “arts and creativity in criminal justice settings can support improved wellbeing, awaken an interest in learning and can help people build new positive identities. Engaging in the arts can also lead to new skills and employment opportunities”.⁴³ Prisons should recognise this and use the DPS to ensure that people in prison have access to art and creative activities.

Secondly, prisons should provide opportunities for people in prison to participate in sport. As well as its broader benefits, participating in sport can be a route into education. As a 2018 Ministry of Justice-commissioned review said, “sport and physical activity have enormous potential...in motivating reluctant learners to engage in education when they would otherwise be unwilling or feel unable to participate”.⁴⁴ Participating in sports and activities in the gym can also provide opportunities for embedded learning, building on classroom-based education. Given this, the Ministry of Justice should revisit their response to the independent review of sport in prisons,⁴⁵ review what progress has been made, and consider what more could be done.

Thirdly, prison-university partnerships, which bring universities into prisons to teach learners, have the potential to engage higher-level learners and inspire them to consider participating in higher education. However these are mostly on hold, awaiting new guidance from the Ministry of Justice, following the tragic terrorist attack at Fishmongers' Hall in 2019.⁴⁶ In their response to the Fishmongers' Hall Prevention of Future Deaths report the Ministry of Justice said that they would design "a new framework to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of prisons and universities when they work in partnership to deliver learning where students study alongside serving prisoners or those released on licence".⁴⁷ This has not been published yet.

Fourthly, where the education needs of individuals or groups cannot be met within a prison, ROTL can be used to enable people to access broader education and training. This can include university degrees but also further education courses. This presents real opportunities to enable people in prison to engage with educational opportunities that would not otherwise be available. But at the moment it is not used enough.

Recommendation 7: Take steps to engage learners in prison education and broaden the curriculum

To achieve this:

- The Ministry of Justice should develop a pilot, working with a cohort of prisons and education providers, to test more flexible prison regimes and evening classes to maximise access to education.
- HMPPS should mandate that pay for participating in education should be at least equal to the highest-paid work within the prison.
- HMPPS should work with the National Criminal Justice Arts Alliance to create guidance for prisons on commissioning high-quality art and creative activities.
- The Ministry of Justice should review the implementation of the recommendations of the independent review of sport in prisons and consider what more could be done.
- The Ministry of Justice should publish guidance that endorses prison-university partnerships, while setting out where responsibility for risk management lies and how they can safely be managed.
- The Ministry of Justice should develop a strategy to encourage and support prisons to enable people to access education via ROTL.

h) Supporting distance learning

There will always be limitations in the breadth of what can be taught face-to-face in prisons. It is therefore important that this is complemented by distance learning. This enables people in prison to access a wider range of courses and qualifications, aligned to their interests and aspirations.

As mentioned on page 15, access to distance learning in prison is primarily via PET. We currently offer around 130 different further education courses and funded 1,340 courses in 2023. Access to university degrees is primarily via the OU, with fees paid through student loans.

Evidence from the Ministry of Justice's Justice Data Lab (JDL), which assesses the impact of organisations or programmes working in the criminal justice system by comparing outcomes for participants with otherwise similar non-participants, shows the impact that distance learning can have.

The latest analysis of the impact of taking a distance learning course funded by PET, published in 2021, found that 18% of the people who accessed distance learning through PET reoffended during the one-year period after release. This was significantly less than the comparison group (23%). They also committed fewer further offences, and those who did reoffend committed their first further offence later than the comparison group.

It also found that 40% of the people who accessed distance learning through PET were employed during the one-year period after release. This was significantly more than the comparison group (33%).⁴⁸ These findings echoed the findings of earlier JDL analyses published in 2014,⁴⁹ 2015⁵⁰ and 2018.⁵¹

The 2021 analysis also found that people who accessed distance learning through PET and did not get a job after release were less likely to reoffend than members of the comparison group who were also not in employment. The same is true for those in employment, with those in employment who accessed distance learning through PET less likely to reoffend than those in employment who did not. This suggests an impact on reoffending distinct from the increased likelihood of employment.

Analysis carried out by Pro Bono Economics of the outcomes of the JDL's analysis of PET's work, published in 2015⁵² and 2020,⁵³ confirmed that it is cost effective.

Analysis by the JDL on the impact of the OU's programme of higher education in prisons also found that 14% of the people who participated reoffended during the one-year period after release. This was significantly less than the comparison group (18%). It also found that participating in higher education with the OU decreased the number of proven reoffences during a one-year period.⁵⁴

The evidence is clear, therefore, that distance learning should be an important part of prison education provision. It is welcome that it is an established part of the current landscape and covered by the Prison Rules 1999. There are, however, some changes that could be made to strengthen this offer.

Firstly, at the moment it is not clear who, between the education provider and the prison, is responsible for ensuring that people in prison can access distance learning. It is also not

routinely looked at during Ofsted inspections. As a result, some prisons make very little use of it, disadvantaging people held in these prisons.

Secondly, it is important that there is a Distance Learning Co-ordinator in each prison with the time to do the role properly. This has largely been the case but as prison budgets have come under pressure, some prison education staff have reported that they no longer have time to do the role properly and we have seen sharp drop-offs in applications from some prisons following changes in staffing. This is a false economy given the well-evidenced benefits of accessing distance learning in prison.

To address these issues, HMPPS should amend the relevant prison policy framework, “Prison Education and Library Services for adult prisons in England”,⁵⁵ to require governors to ensure that distance learning opportunities are made available to, and promoted to, people in their prison. Guidance should then be developed for prisons – working with Heads of Education, Work and Skills and distance learning providers – to clarify what is required to support the provision of distance learning effectively.

In addition, at the moment the “six-year rule” prevents people in prison from getting a student loan until they are within six years of release. This is unhelpful. People in prison should be able to do a degree at the time that best suits their sentence plan and supports their rehabilitation. For many, that will involve doing their degree earlier in their sentence so they can focus on resettlement issues as their release date approaches and potentially take up opportunities to access employment via ROTL.

Six years may also not be sufficient time for people in prison to complete an OU degree part time (given the challenges of studying while in prison), meaning that they have to complete it in the community post-release when they could be securing employment.

In their 2022 report on prison education, the Education Select Committee said that “the Government must remove the “six-year rule” so that prisoners on long sentences can apply for higher education courses earlier in their sentence. This would give them motivation during their sentence and keep them focused on their potential employment opportunities following release”.⁵⁶ This recommendation should be implemented.

This is particularly important as the profile of the prison population has changed and continues to change. As the Prison Reform Trust notes, “in recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of people serving long sentences”.⁵⁷ For example, more than two and a half times as many people were sentenced to 10 years or more in 2022 than in 2010.⁵⁸ With people spending longer and longer in prison, doing a degree earlier in their sentence may allow learners to use their time in prison more productively.

Recommendation 8: Improve support for distance learning in prison

To achieve this:

- HMPPS should amend the relevant prison policy framework to specify that distance learning should be made available.
- HMPPS should produce guidance for prisons on how best to support the delivery of distance learning in their prison.
- The Ministry of Justice should work with the Department of Education to abolish the “six-year rule” for eligibility for student loans in prison.

i) Support for people in prison with diverse needs

The prison population is made up of people with diverse experiences and needs. If they are going to have a positive experience of education, then prisons need to be adaptable enough to meet these needs and create a suitable, supportive environment.

The Ministry of Justice already publishes data on who is accessing education and the progress that they have made.⁵⁹ This is welcome. To build on this, the Ministry of Justice should review this data on publication and ensure that where there is any disproportionality identified in who is accessing education and the progress that is being made, action is taken to address this on an “explain or reform” basis. An action plan should be published to enable external scrutiny of this.

In addition, it is well established that neurodivergent people are overrepresented in the criminal justice system and in prisons, despite limitations in the available data.⁶⁰ Research by User Voice has highlighted the challenges that neurodivergent people face while in prison.⁶¹

To address these challenges, Neurodiversity Support Managers have been introduced in every prison, while there have been positive initiatives such as the neurodiversity wings in HMP Pentonville⁶² and HMP Lewes⁶³ and the inclusion room at HMP Wakefield.⁶⁴ HMP Parc has been praised for its “whole prison” approach and was the first prison to receive the National Autistic Society’s advanced Autism Accreditation award.⁶⁵

Accessing education can present specific challenges for neurodiverse people. For example, people with autism can find busy and noisy classrooms particularly difficult to learn in. User Voice has recommended that “more one-to-one learning opportunities should be provided for neurodivergent individuals in prison who are not able to learn in group settings”.⁶⁶ Additional funding for prison education – as set out in Recommendation 4 – should make innovations like this possible.

Overall, though, it is important that prisons continue to develop a “whole prison” approach to meeting the needs of neurodivergent people in prison. This should include continuing to champion autism accreditation across the prison estate, as identified as a priority in the Ministry of Justice’s Neurodiversity Action Plan,⁶⁷ and ensuring the full implementation of the recommendations of the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection review of the evidence on neurodiversity in the criminal justice system.⁶⁸

The specific needs of women in prison also need to be considered in the delivery of education. Provision in women’s prisons is largely similar to that in men’s prisons, although the vocational training on offer tends to be more gender specific. While a recognition that women in prison may have specific needs and interests is welcome, Ofsted reports have criticised the vocational training available as insufficient to meet their broad aspirations.

While this may echo many of the problems facing men’s prisons, there may be particular challenges in women’s prisons in getting the balance right between providing opportunities that meet women’s aspirations and avoiding stereotyping and limiting the options available. Support should be provided to women’s prisons to help them to get this balance right. This should include considering the needs of young adult women, aged 18–24. We recently published research highlighting the importance of education to this group and how it could better meet their needs.⁶⁹

Recommendation 9: Ensure that different groups within the prison population can access education that meets their needs

To achieve this:

- The Ministry of Justice should ensure that where any disproportionality is identified in who is accessing education and the progress that is made, action is taken to address it.
- The Ministry of Justice should make supporting neurodivergent people in prison an ongoing priority, including ensuring prisons consider how their needs can best be met in the provision of education.
- HMPPS should review the curriculum in women's prisons and ensure that it is aligned to the needs and aspirations of women in prison.

j) Review of the current delivery model

The recommendations outlined so far could deliver significant improvements in prison education, enabling more people to access it and improving the quality of delivery. These changes all, however, work within the current delivery model, with outsourced provision complemented by services bought in by governors. This may be the best model but other options have potential benefits.

We therefore recommend that over the next two years the government should review the current approach to assess whether there is a better way to deliver prison education. Building on Dame Sally Coates's 2016 review of prison education,⁷⁰ this should consult widely – including with people with lived experience of prison education – and look beyond current approaches to consider proposals for different delivery models.

It could consider, at one end of the spectrum, individual partnerships between prisons and local colleges so prison education is fully integrated into local provision. This would give more control to individual governors, in line with the recommendations of HM Chief Inspector of Prisons Charlie Taylor, who has called for “a radical solution that reduces central control and cedes power and accountability to governors.”⁷¹

Alternatively, a national approach with all prison education staff directly employed in the public sector could be considered. For example, UCU has proposed replacing the current commissioning model with a longer term, secure offer, overseen by the Department for Education, and introducing a national contract for prison educators with transparent pay and conditions that are matched to the wider further education sector.⁷²

In line with this recommendation, consideration should also be given as to whether prison education sits within the Ministry of Justice, as it has done since 2019, or whether it is transferred back to the Department for Education. There are advantages and disadvantages to both approaches, which should be considered in more detail through the review.

Furthermore, as part of this review there should be a full assessment of the funding required to deliver prison education. As set out on page 24, prison education is chronically underfunded so the recommended increases would be welcome. But to genuinely understand what the necessary level of funding should be to deliver high-quality prison education

that meets the needs of people in prison , a full review should be carried out, ensuring that proposals for the current and different models of delivery are fully costed.

The outcomes of this review should inform a prison education strategy that would guide reform over the next five to ten years.

Recommendation 10: Carry out a full review of the current prison education delivery model

To achieve this:

- Within the next six months the Ministry of Justice should commission a full review of the delivery model for prison education, to be carried out over the next two years.
- To accompany this a full review should be carried out of the funding required to deliver high-quality prison education that meets the needs of people in prison.
- A prison education strategy should then be developed to guide reform over the next five to ten years.

9

Conclusion

Evidence demonstrates that prison education can enable people in prison to turn their lives around, helping them to secure employment and reducing reoffending. At present, however, what is available is too limited and not of sufficient quality. This is a missed opportunity to help people to transform their lives through learning.

To address these issues, we have set out 10 recommendations for the new ministerial team at the Ministry of Justice that provide a route to put prison education on the road to recovery.

If implemented, these recommendations would improve prison education, enabling people in prison to benefit from a high-quality education that supports them in achieving their goals. Access to education in prison can be transformative. Ministers should take action now to enable people in prison to change their lives.

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