

Justice Committee

Inquiry into purposeful activity in prisons

Written submission from Motherwell College

Introduction

Motherwell College currently holds a contract with the Scottish Prison Service to provide learning and skills in 7 Scottish prisons including:

- HMP Barlinnie
- HMP YOI Cornton Vale
- HMP Dumfries
- HMP Glenochil
- HMP Greenock
- HMP Low Moss
- HMP Shotts

Motherwell College has been involved in the delivery of prison education for over 20 years and has experience of delivering to all prisoner groups including long term prisoners, short term prisoners, young offenders and women. The College is one of the largest providers of Further and Higher Education in Scotland with a strong track record of addressing social exclusion and working with disadvantaged groups.

Given the complex emotional and learning needs of most prisoners, we believe it is crucial to ensure that our lecturing staff are experienced and qualified teaching professionals. Teaching in prisons is both rewarding and challenging and we are committed to the on-going development of our staff to ensure they are able to effectively meet the needs and aspirations of our learners.

Our programmes are designed to increase prisoners' skills, knowledge and self-esteem by ensuring learning is relevant and linked to prisoners' experiences and interests while at the same time broadening horizons and challenging them to achieve. We aim to ensure that activities are purposeful and have an 'end product' or outcome to make them more meaningful and to enable links with families and friends to be maintained and strengthened. At the same time we make good use of nationally accredited qualifications to support and encourage the learner. Our prison curriculum fits with Curriculum for Excellence and is designed to help prisoners become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens.

In our response to the questions posed by the committee we will focus our comments on prison education and its contribution to 'purposeful activity'.

What is meant by 'purposeful activity' and how can this be measured

The definition of purposeful activity in prison is very wide ranging and encompasses many different activities including cognitive behavioural programmes, education, vocational training, cultural activities, work etc. It is usually thought of as any activity

which contributes to the process of desistance and helps reduce reoffending. Motherwell College believes purposeful activity should be meaningful and actively engage the prisoner. By its nature, imprisonment requires prisoners to be subject to a regime which removes choice and the capacity for many aspects of self-determination. Where possible, purposeful activity should attempt to redress this balance while maintaining a safe and secure environment.

Measurement of purposeful activity

The recent report (2009) on offender learning in custody highlighted that “one of the most significant challenges in our work has been the lack of robust research evidence on impacts and outcomes” and called for better research evidence on outcomes.

The whole question of measurement of impact of activities within a prison setting (particularly if their aim is a reduction in re-offending) is fraught with difficulties. The success or otherwise of many interventions – if measured against the criteria of reduction in re-offending – will only become evident after release. Very few agencies who work in prisons have either the responsibility or the capacity to track individuals post release. Given that it is now widely accepted that desistance from crime is a process rather than an event, the assessment of the effectiveness of interventions is further complicated.

It is also important to be cautious about the extent to which education can make a significant and direct contribution towards reducing reoffending. Many of the causes of re-offending are serious and deep rooted and education and skills alone cannot address the many problems that individuals face on release.

Perhaps partly because of the complexities involved in evaluating impact, measurement currently consists primarily of the collection of data relating to inputs and outputs (numbers of hours delivered, number of qualifications delivered etc.) and tells us little about either the quality or impact (outcomes) of interventions.

The learning and skills contract is measured primarily in terms of:

- Number of prisoners undertaking a core assessment
- Number of prisoner learning hours (PLHs)
- Number of teaching hours spent on primary Literacy/Numeracy skills

While many prisoners clearly need additional support with literacy and numeracy, merely counting the number of teaching hours delivered tells us nothing about the quality of provision. It also tends to drive a mentality which assumes that any educational activity not labeled literacy or numeracy is somehow second rate or less valuable. This approach overlooks the potential effectiveness of embedding literacy and numeracy into other subject areas which may be more successful in engaging disaffected learners. (See section on good practice.)

Motherwell College believes it would be helpful for the learning and skills element of purposeful activity, if SPS were to move towards a framework for measuring impact that is more closely aligned with the current HMIE Inspection framework, albeit some

modifications will need to be made to take account of the particular restrictions on the delivery of education in custody. This would entail looking more closely at learner progress and achievement and examining the quality of learning and teaching processes.

http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/QFAug2012_tcm4-727419.pdf

What are the perceived benefits of purposeful activity and where are examples of best practice

It is important to note the transformative power of education at all levels – both at level of basic skills but also beyond that in the provision of degree courses. Education has the power to transform people and enable them to make different choices to those which may have defined their lives previously. Learning and progression in learning are crucial elements in the process of change which leads offenders away from further crime. It forms an important part of the pathway to resettlement and possible employment.

In delivering prison education it is crucial to make learning attractive, accessible and enjoyable. This can be done in a variety of ways including:

- building on the interests of the prisoners themselves in designing learning (the introduction of animation, rap and radio station initiatives for example);
- making effective use of awards ceremonies and student recognition to recognise achievement and encourage progress to the next stage of learning
- linking learning to families and encouraging and maintaining family ties (Storybook Dads, Homework Clubs etc.);
- giving learning a focus and making it as real as possible (STIR Arts magazine project);
- involving learners in their own learning and giving them a voice in the planning and delivery of the curriculum (learner forums);
- encouraging and supporting peer tutoring schemes which build the confidence of both the tutor and the tutee;
- ensure effective linkages between the learning centres and related services such a prison libraries.

Good practice examples from both education providers and SPS (published in 2008) is also available at http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/lsergpsp_tcm4-712868.pdf

There are also many examples of good practice from England and Wales. The RSA Report 'The Learning Prison' highlights several examples including:

The Clink, HMP High Down

In spring 2009 a new restaurant opened at HMP High Down. Its customers can expect dishes like pan-fried John Dory, paupiette of chicken with spinach mousseline, roast turbot with broad beans and pancetta, and lavender mascarpone with spun sugar. Organic ingredients are supplied directly from the restaurant garden, with the aim of making the business self-sustaining. The restaurant has attracted food critics to share their hard-headed assessments and invited members of the public to part with their cash. Many new businesses are currently facing tough

times; this venture has additional challenges: diners have to hand over their valuables, undergo a body search and pass through several reinforced steel doors before they are seated. Unlike other restaurants, this one is inside a prison and will be staffed by prisoners, who will continue to eat standard prison fare, serving up food to prison staff and invited members of the public. It offers prisoners an opportunity to gain catering qualifications, work experience within an exciting and operational business, and guidance to a full-time job upon release. The venture aims to encourage employers – through the high media profile of the restaurant and direct visits – to be more open to offering jobs to ex-offenders.

Source: www.theclinkonline.com

Electric Radio

Broadcasting since 2007 in a prison that had a high level of self-harm and suicide, this radio station won a prestigious national broadcasting award in 2009, even though its audience is limited to 800 prisoners. All programmes are pre-recorded and edited by civilians who run the station. Shows cover religion, poetry and music but programmes are punctuated with information and public service announcements rather than with advertisements. In the evening the station broadcasts interviews between inmates and a regular slot where the governor responds to prisoners' questions. The aim is to improve communication and build skills in broadcasting and in information and communication technology among inmates. Volunteers undertake full-time production courses, learn how to use editing software as well as the broadcast deck and are taught to work as if they were in a normal job.

Source: www.prisonradioassociation.org/

The Family Man

The Family Man course is one example of a successful project, operating across 22 prisons in the UK, providing male offenders – alongside their partners – with a programme of rating themselves against the seven resettlement pathways developed by NOMS [see Table 4, Chapter 3]. The course offers support to male prisoners by helping them prepare and write individual action plans based on the seven pathways, in particular No. 2: skills and employment. In addition to this, careers fairs are held within the prisons, along with specific workshops delivered by external employers who provide particular components. The main outcome of the programme is the production and development of a more concise action plan.

Source: www.safeground.org.uk/courses_familyman.php

In-cell TV for learning

HMP Littlehey used in-cell television to allow learners to take part in accredited learning. It took a blended approach combining television programmes, specially designed learning materials and face-to-face sessions. Programmes were broadcast and repeated at set times for learners to watch in-cell. The areas of learning selected were parenting, preparation for employment, healthy living and financial literacy, all chosen because of their impact on resettlement. The ability to learn through television allows for flexibility of access.

Source: e-learning in the Secure Estate:

http://shop.niace.org.uk/media/catalog/product/f/i/file_1_47.pdf

Virtual Campus

The Virtual Campus provides prisoners with secure access to a range of content that supplements other teaching. It offers the opportunity for offenders and staff to undertake qualifications that have been made available through a national online learning platform. This includes basic ICT qualifications and support with literacy and numeracy. Using intuitive software it can be used to develop prisoners' CVs prior to release. Each student is risk assessed and then given a unique login that is specific to the content that they are allowed to use and view. There are a restricted number of websites that offenders and staff can access and all activity is heavily monitored. The system is connected to a broadband connection that acts as a virtual private network. Additional websites requested are risk assessed and where possible content providers work to ensure sites are suitable. Prisoners can contact their tutor or submit work online, search and apply for jobs and access information and advice on resettlement services including mentoring in the community.

Source: www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/index.php?id=190

The Prisoners Education Trust based in London is currently undertaking interesting work on Learner Voice and has published a review of prisoners' views of education called:

Brain Cells: Listening to Prisoner Learners

http://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/fileadmin/user_upload/doc/Learning_Matters/RAIN_CELLS_THE_REPORT.pdf

The role of cultural activities in engaging prisoners in learning should also not be overlooked. The Inspiring Change project funded by Creative Scotland demonstrated the effectiveness of music, drama and creative writing projects in engaging prisoners in learning and helping them to envisage a different future for themselves. Creative Scotland has also supported the prison arts magazine *STIR* which as well as establishing a regular, reliable and high quality locus for creative writing and visual art provides a clear focus for learning; developing graphic design, marketing, editing skills but also crucially, team working, working to deadlines, critical thinking, presentation and negotiation skills, all of which will stand prisoners in good stead on release. The magazine is tangible evidence of the prisoners' learning, which they can share with family and friends but also with potential employers as evidence of their achievements. (Issues 1-3 of *STIR* are available from the clerks on request.)

In England the Arts Alliance has pulled together information and evaluations of arts projects in prisons on one website called the Evidence Library which is intended to build on a previous literature review, commissioned by Arts Council England, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Offenders' Learning and Skills Unit at the Department for Education and Skills.

<http://www.artsevidence.org.uk/about-evidence-library/>

What barriers may exist to prevent prisoners being engaging in such activities

Meeting the education and training needs of prisoners is a difficult and challenging task. Prisoners are not a homogeneous group. They come from many different backgrounds and range in age from 16 to over 70. They may have drug or alcohol problems and/or mental health conditions. Many will have problems with literacy and

numeracy but others will be capable of working at a higher level. Some will be in prison for very short periods of time and only have the briefest of encounters with education. Others will be in prison for many years and the learning centres need to find ways of engaging those individuals over long periods of time in activities that are meaningful and help maintain the skills and qualities they will need on eventual release.

There are severe problems in making prison education work. Some are the inevitable results of prison regimes which must give priority to security. Others arise from the problems such as overcrowding and high turnover. Some of the main barriers are listed below:

- The large number of remand and short term prisoners. The short term nature of sentences combined with high rates of recidivism mean that offenders are often only engaged in learning in custody for short periods of time. This has significant implications for both the curriculum and the mode of delivery.
- Learning can often be disrupted by transfer or release of prisoners – unfortunately the learning needs of the prisoner are not always taken into consideration before such moves are made.
- There are particular challenges posed by the nature of the client group who are in many cases very disadvantaged (learning difficulties, drug and alcohol addictions, homeless etc.).
- Attendance at learning and skills programmes is voluntary but often attendance at education can conflict with other activities such as PE and learning centre staff have to work closely with SPS colleagues to ensure that the impact of such timetabling clashes are minimized.
- There are frequently financial penalties for prisoners who chose to attend education – they will earn more for attending work parties.
- No internet access for students and limited access for staff causes problems in accessing up to date support materials for teaching and makes it more difficult for learners to continue their studies if they are transferred.

In discussing the barriers to prisoners engaging with learning it is important not to forget the needs of the teaching staff. Due to the restrictions of the current contract, prison based teaching staff have limited access to CPD and their relative isolation from the rest of the teaching community is exacerbated by limited or no access to internet and email from their work place. There needs to be greater recognition of the 'profession' of prison teacher/lecturer. The London Institute of Education has recently established a Centre for Education in Criminal Justice to address this gap in an English context. See: <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/research/60128.html>

Motherwell College is in contact with the centre and believes that it would be helpful for Scotland to look at the training and continuous professional development of prison teachers/lecturers.

Whether access to purposeful activities is consistent across the prison estate

In general terms, access to a core learning and skills programme is fairly consistent across the prison estate.

Whether access to such activity can be improved

We believe many of the recommendations made by the Options for Improvement (2009) report will help address issues of access to learning and skills. Some of the key recommendations relating to improving access are summarized below.

- Need for better research evidence on outcomes
- Establish coordinating panel for learning activity in each prison, including learning centre manager and other core partners
- Reduce disincentives to learn (i.e. enhanced bonus structure for progression and achievement)
- Take learning on outreach to residential areas of the prison
- Increase level of peer tutoring
- Benchmark against Nordic countries on secure use of internet
- Improve consistency of provision between prisons (and barriers to progression on transfer between establishments)
- Link progress in learning to parole decisions
- Review wages policy
- Develop better indicators of progress
- Promote a culture of learning in SPS starting with VT Officers.

Motherwell College
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