



Prisoners Education Trust

Distance Learning inside Prisons

Information for Prison Education and CIAS Staff

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Why distance learning?

Distance learning is an essential part of the provision that should be available to any prisoner who wants to use a sentence constructively. It is recognised within the OLASS Offender's Learning Journey (Section 10)¹ and in PSI 2010/33. It is particularly suitable for some groups of prisoners:

- Prisoners who have already achieved reasonable educational levels before coming to prison or inside prison, and want to progress. Since prison based provision mainly covers up to level two, distance learning may be the only way for these prisoners to progress.
- Prisoners serving longer sentences who have completed all the available and relevant prison based provision (see the OFSTED report on the needs of this group²).
- Prisoners who want to study subjects or areas of knowledge related to particular vocational or employment pathways, which prison provision cannot cover.
- Prisoners who cannot access prison based provision for other reasons; for example, if they are in a VPU or have a mental health condition or if they do not feel able to cope with classroom based learning.

Distance learning courses have some particular advantages for prisoners:

- Learners study at their own pace and take charge of their own learning. Some courses, including OU courses, have fixed timetables for assignments but still allow flexibility about when and where prisoners choose to learn. Other courses progress at the prisoner's pace.
- Distance learning enables progression which would not otherwise be available.
- Distance learning offers access to a much wider range of subjects and levels than can ever be available in a classroom based curriculum. Last year, Prisoners Education Trust funded over 400 different subjects, mainly at level two and covering other levels up to postgraduate study.
- Distance learning courses are portable. Prisoners can continue the courses after being moved to other prisons (provided that course providers are informed and the new prison enables materials and tutor feedback to be received etc). They can also continue after release.

Distance learning and prison provision

Distance learning should normally complement prison based provision or meet the needs of prisoner learners who are low priority in terms of OLASS policy. Distance learning should not be used to cover subjects or levels or courses which are normally available in prison other than in exceptional circumstances.

Selecting suitable applicants for distance learning

For prisoners to benefit from distance learning, they normally need to have a commitment to learning and a strong desire to progress. Distance learning does require perseverance and motivation. Funds for distance learning courses are limited, and it makes sense to direct them to learners who will make the best use of the courses available.

¹ The Offender's Learning Journey: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/further-education-skills/engaging-learners/offender-learning>

² OFSTED <http://ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Post-16-learning-and-skills/Read-about-this-new-section/Judicial-services/Learning-and-skills-for-the-longer-serving-offender>

The impact of distance learning

Distance learning can be a powerful catalyst to further learning and personal development. It can equip prisoners with fresh confidence, stronger aspirations, greater self-esteem if they succeed, and with knowledge and skills that will assist their employment chances and resettlement potential. Even where the course subjects seem unrelated to employment, the soft skills that distance learning develops, such as planning an essay, setting and meeting study targets and keeping to course timetables, are highly relevant to employability.

Distance learning: what prisoners say

I have found my course to be very good and worthwhile. Sometimes it would have been nice to have a tutor there to help but once I cracked it, it was okay. Just waiting for results now.

I have currently paused doing this course because I have no access to books, or www. The prison was not able to lend any recommended books. I have completed three modules, but the questions are getting more technical and the answers require specific info like dates, facts, statistics etc. As you can appreciate being in prison limits my access to the internet, books, libraries, and other sources of info. I would really like to finish this course as it would greatly enhance my chances of employment upon release. I am also due to be released in three and half months.

Studying with the Open University has enabled me improve and develop my study skills. I am enjoying my course and with your help I am spending my time constructively, wisely and hope to pursue a degree qualification if a future grant is approved.

Distance learning has helped me in many ways. You have given me the chance to progress in life and hope I have inspired many more inmates in establishment to study as well.

I have been wanting to do this for a long time. Now I am. If all goes well and I get good marks, I would like to go to college when I am released. And maybe do a degree with the open university.

I have gained a great deal of knowledge and confidence from the course in relation to implementing marketing into my planned self-employment business working from home as a sole trader in woodcrafts.



Prisoners Education Trust and distance learning

Prisoners Education Trust was founded in 1989 in Wandsworth Prison to enable prisoners to have access to a wider range of education opportunities than was available in the prison. Since then, the Trust has made over 20,000 grants to enable prisoners to take courses or to engage in creative or craft activities.

The Trust works closely with prison education staff, with government agencies, with the OU and with distance learning course providers, to enable and support distance learning for prisoners throughout England and Wales.

The Trust raises voluntary funds from other charitable trusts and foundations willing to support our work, as well as from individual donors. In addition, we administer access to funding for initial Open University courses on behalf of the government Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). BIS also provide some funding for level 3 and vocational courses not available in prison, of which the majority must be accredited. This enables access to courses such as GCSEs, A levels, distance learning based BTECs and other courses.

The Trust also supports prisoner learning in other ways:

- We have developed a peer mentor training course, accredited at level 2, and have delivered and promoted this course across several regions. We encourage the use of prisoners as peer learning mentors, providing support for other prisoner learners. This is especially useful and relevant for distance learners, but also useful in other learning settings inside prison.
- We are developing information and advice briefings linking distance learning courses to employment pathways. This booklet contains extracts from these briefings.
- We make the case for offender learning with policy makers and in wider debate, using our own research and experience. We are the only national charity with a specific and exclusive focus on prisoners education and providing grants, services and advocacy.

Accessing information about the Trust's activities and grants

This booklet contains the most important documents you need to work with us by supporting prisoners to apply for grants and to complete their courses. It also contains information which may be useful in helping prisoners decide on suitable courses.

The Trust's website, www.prisonerseducation.org.uk gives more information about our work, including downloadable copies of our publications and access to a knowledge base of project profiles, practitioner profiles and prisoners' voices. The website also has a password protected area for prison education staff and prison CIAS staff. The password and username will be issued on request to members of these staff groups.

Publications available from the Trust

The Insiders' Guide to Distance Learning

A 12 page booklet based on research and prisoner participation providing advice and suggestions for prisoner learners.

Brain Cells: listening to prisoner learners

A summary of prisoners' experiences and views in relation to all aspects of learning inside. Based on 470 responses to an Inside Time survey.

Funding Application Guidelines November 2009

We have tried to make these guidelines as comprehensive as possible. Around one third of the applications we receive require further information. This is time consuming both for our staff and for you, so do please check that each application is complete before sending it off. Thank you.

Prisoners Education Trust makes grants to sentenced prisoners for:

- Distance learning courses.
- Beginning study with the Open University up to completing a first 30 point Level 1 course (funded by the Government Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, BIS).
- Art/creative hobby materials.

As our funds are limited, we give priority to meeting needs for progression or for particular subjects and levels that cannot usually be found in prison education provision. From October 2009, we no longer fund short external courses or driving lessons.

1. Eligibility Criteria

1. Courses selected should be suitable in relation to the applicant's ability level and previous educational achievements.
2. Courses selected should be suitable with regard to the applicant's offence.
3. The prison must be willing to contribute a minimum of 10% of the course fees (**except for OU Openings and level 1 courses as these are fully funded by BIS**).
4. Applicants are not permitted to fund the prison contribution themselves. They may make a personal contribution, but this CANNOT be in lieu of the prison's minimum 10% contribution.
5. Applicants must have sufficient time to complete the course, and any examination, before release. Applicants for arts materials should usually have at least six months to serve.
6. There is no restriction on the number of times that a prisoner can apply to the Trust. It is expected, however, that one course will be completed before another application is made. Only in exceptional circumstances will the Trust make two grants at the same time. It is very unlikely that Trustees will make an additional grant to OU continuing students who are financed by an OU fee waiver. Applicants for art materials can in general make up to two applications a year.
7. The Trust does not accept applications for retrospective funding.

Trustees try to be as flexible as possible, so if you have an applicant who falls outside these criteria, you are welcome to discuss whether or not an exception might be made. Fulfilling the criteria does not guarantee a grant, as there are usually insufficient funds to meet all the applications received.

2. Filling in the application form for OU and other distance learning courses

There are two separate application forms: **Form A** is for courses and **Form B** is for arts materials grants. Please make sure the correct form is used.

For ease of reference, the numbers here follow those on the application form. **It is essential that all sections are completed fully.** As there is no interview, trustees rely on the information given to make their decision. Incomplete applications will be returned and no further action taken.

1. Full name and address of prison.
2. Applicant's given name & family name.
3. Prison registration number.
4. Please indicate gender and give date of birth. *These are essential both for our records and may enable us to use particular restricted funds for an applicant.*
5. Earliest release date: *This should be the earliest date a prisoner is likely to be released/paroled, and where appropriate, take into account HDC. We cannot process applications which do not give an expected release date.*
6. Home Address: *this is important for allocating restricted funds with a geographical restriction.*
7. Have you ever served in the British armed forces? *It is a condition of funds we receive from the Royal British Legion that we have this information. Please ensure that a separate form is attached for any ex-service personnel. Some ex-service personnel will not wish to give these details - please just indicate this - it will not affect their application.*
8. Have you ever applied to the Trust before? *This helps us check our records.*
9. Course details: *These should be completed as fully as possible, giving essential details such as course name, any reference number or code.*
10. Suppliers' details and contact address: *these are especially important if the course supplier is new or not often used. Please include any additional costs, e.g. registration or membership of a professional organisation. NB: where the course is split into modules, the Trust will only pay for one module at a time.*
11. Cost: *The Trust rarely funds fees in excess of £500 for a single course or module (except for OU applications eligible for Government funds). Please ring and discuss if an applicant's course is more than £500.*
12. Amount to be provided by Prison: *10% contribution is required for all courses other than OU undergraduate courses: this must be completed to show consent. Personal and charitable contributions must also be clearly marked.*
13. Details of educational qualifications: *examples include NVQs, GCSEs and degree awards. This helps Trustees to consider if the course applied for is at the right level. Trustees want to ensure that prisoners succeed rather than take a course that is too difficult or indeed too easy. This information also helps us to build a profile of the applicants and it is important that we have full details of subjects, levels and grades.*

Please also ensure that applicants complete the Equal Opportunities monitoring form and return this with their application.

For OU applicants, the staff member recommending the application should ensure that the IT related requirements of the proposed course can be supported in the prison.

3 Applications for Arts Materials

- Grants are rarely for more than £60 including postage costs. If there are exceptional circumstances, tell us in your recommendation.
- For sections 1- 10 of the application form, follow the guidance above.
- Details of materials required: give an itemised list and any other relevant detail about the materials required, continuing on a separate sheet if necessary. For materials for distance learning courses, please also give the name of the course being studied.

4 Applicant's Declaration,

The applicant is asked to declare

- That s/he does not have the necessary funds to pay for the course/art materials.
- That s/he will keep the Trust informed of their progress and transfers.
- That he agrees to allow the Trust to obtain information about whether the course was completed and the grade achieved as a result from the course provider, in order that the Trust can report to funders. *No personal data will be disclosed to any third party without individual permission.*

Please ensure that this is signed and dated.

5 Recommendation

This must be filled in by an authorised member of the Education Department or other relevant staff member authorised by the Head of Learning and Skills or equivalent. This is a vital part of the application assessment and should be as full as possible. Trustees want to know why you think that the applicant will benefit and to know about previous achievements, not necessarily just academic ones. The recommendation should be specific to the applicant. Trustees place great reliance on your recommendation.

6 Prison Declaration

This indicates that you have undertaken some enquiries and that the application has been handled in conformity with the PSI covering OU and distance learning, which sets out how prisoners should deal with applications for OU, higher education and other distance learning study. Trustees rely on your judgment that the course is suitable given the applicant's offence. They do not wish to know the offence but in some cases require written confirmation that a prisoner has not committed a particular offence. For the following courses written confirmation is always required:

- Bookkeeping or finance related courses- the applicant's conviction should not be for fraud, deception etc.
- Navigation - the applicant's conviction should not be connected with drugs.

- Childcare or other courses focused on children or adolescents- the applicant's conviction should not be for child abuse, violence etc.
- Airline ticketing, travel & tourism - the applicant's conviction should not be for money laundering.

See also the **Approved Courses Guidance** appended to the PSI on OU, Distance Learning and Higher Education.

7 Signature

All applications must be signed or countersigned by someone whose name we recognise. If there is a change in authorisation, please let us know and either email, fax or send a copy of the new signature. Sometimes it will be more appropriate for someone who knows the prisoner to write the reference. This is fine but should be countersigned by the signatory known to the Trust.

8 Applicant's letter

The letter should preferably be handwritten and should be about 200-300 words long. It should give reasonable detail about why s/he wants do this course rather than anything else and how it fits in with their future plans. The letter should be countersigned by whoever signs the recommendation. This is to try to ensure that the letter is written by the applicant - friends can sometimes be too helpful!

We do of course recognise that a letter of this length would not be appropriate for those applying for art materials. For these applications, either use the space provided on the application form or send a separate shorter letter. We are happy to consider exceptions (eg if the applicant is dyslexic) but you do need to tell us the reasons.

9 Attachments

The application form and applicant's letter should be accompanied by

- Equal opportunities form - for all applicants
- Ex-Service personnel form where appropriate
- Registration Agreement form (signed) and Individual Sponsorship form (unsigned) for all OU students

Please ensure that OU applicants for full modules and short courses have considered Section 5 'Data Protection' on the OU Registration Agreement Form and ticked the box giving permission for the OU to disclose information about course completion and results to sponsors. This enables the Trust to obtain summary results from the OU and make essential reports to our Government funders. No personal data will be disclosed to any third party.

10 The process at the Trust

Trustees meet monthly. The dates of grants meetings can be found on the Trust's websites and will be sent to each prison.

The closing date for applications is the 1st of each month. Two Trustees and the director meet to discuss the applications in the second or third week of each month and agree the grants to be made.

We send written notification to each prison of the outcome of applications, usually within two weeks of the Trustees' meeting. The letter will also contain letters for the applicants.

11 Follow-up

1. If a grant is made:

- Distance learning courses: The Trust will order the course which should arrive direct to the prison education department within 4-6 weeks. The prison will be invoiced for its 10% contribution later.
- Art materials: A cheque for 90% of the award will be sent direct to the prison so that the materials can be bought locally.
- OU Courses: The Trust will send the registration form to the OU and pay for the course. There will be no 10% invoice unless the funds come from the Trust's own voluntary resources, e.g. for postgraduate courses.

2. If the application is refused.

The majority of refusals are for lack of funds. When other factors have resulted in a refusal, we usually try to explain why. We are always happy to discuss the reason if it is unclear from the notification letter.

3. If the application is deferred.

Sometimes more information is needed. This information will normally be requested in the notification letter. It is vital that this information is provided quickly. Lack of response is likely to mean that the application will not be reconsidered. Occasionally, an application will be deferred to a future date, when we hope to have more funds or to allow one course to be completed before consideration is given to the next.

4. Monitoring

Monitoring forms are sent out 2-3 times a year. Your help in completing them promptly is much appreciated. The information needed is used to secure continuing funding both from charitable and government sources.

All the information and forms needed, and the Trust's monthly scrutiny dates, are on the password protected area of our website. Access will be given to any prison education staff who request it - please email or ring.

27th November 2009

Courses, Providers and Employment Pathways

Distance learning courses cover a broad variety of subjects and levels.

- Some courses, from a range of providers, include assessment and/or exams leading to accredited qualifications found in the National Qualifications Database. These include GCSEs and A Levels as well as a range of vocational qualifications.
- Higher education courses are mainly provided by the Open University, the largest provider of distance learning for people in custody.
- Other courses (e.g. Stonebridge Associated Colleges courses) are independently accredited at equivalent levels to those in the National Qualifications Framework although they are not found in the Framework.
- Other courses enable learners to study particular subjects in courses which are recognised in particular employment sectors, or to cover content that is part of a recognised qualification that they may then be able to complete either in open conditions or after release. For example, the Royal Horticultural Society courses, provided by the Horticultural Correspondence College, are well recognised.
- Even courses with no recognised accreditation can add to knowledge, confidence and employment plans for particular individuals.

At present, most prison based distance learning is still restricted to paper based courses, which means that the wide range of e-learning courses available cannot be accessed. As the Virtual Campus project spreads across the prison estate, we hope this will change, enabling both e-learning and blended learning (in which access to online technologies and content is combined with paper based learning).

Below are some examples of the range of courses, providers and employment pathways which are most frequently of interest to prisoners.

Fuller details of the courses and related employment pathways and contact information are available in the **Career Briefings** on the Trust's website, www.prisonerseducation.org.uk or can be requested in hard copy. Available from August 2010.

Fuller details of the Open University courses available to prisoners are given in the OU Prospectus for Prisoners and in their online courses database.



Sport, health and fitness	
Courses	Employment pathways
<p>OU Exploring Sport and Fitness (Openings Y164): <i>online course; requires internet access.</i> Introduction to sport, fitness and management (E112)</p> <p>Stonebridge Associated Colleges Personal Fitness Trainer Level 3 Sports Injuries Level 3 Sports Massage Level 3 Sports Nutrition Level 3 Sports Physiology Level 3</p> <p>Premier Global Certificate in Sports Nutrition Certificate in Theory of Sports Injuries Certificate in Nutritional Advice Diploma in Anatomy and Physiology Certificate in Exercise for Special Populations</p>	<p>Work in gyms or sports centres Work as a personal trainer Voluntary work related to increasing participation in sport, especially around the Olympic Games Community sports leadership Work in healthy living schemes</p>

Counselling and health and social care	
Courses	Employment pathways
<p>NEC A Taste of Counselling Introducing Counselling Skills Developing Counselling Skills Understanding Loss and Grief</p> <p>Stonebridge Associated Colleges Counselling Skills Level 2 or 3 Drug, Solvent and Alcohol Abuse Counselling Level 4 Grief and Bereavement Counselling Level 3 Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Level 5</p> <p>OU Starting with Psychology Y163 Understanding Health Y178 Introduction to Counselling D171</p>	<p>Drugs helplines Drug treatment centre Work with homeless people Work with ex-offenders Work in crime diversion Voluntary sector projects working with socially excluded groups</p>

Management, business and accounting	
Courses	Employment pathways
<p>NEC Business Basics: Book-Keeping GCSE and A Level in Business Studies Advanced Book-keeping Computerised Book-keeping</p> <p>OU Understanding Management Y159 Introduction to Business Studies B120</p> <p>Stonebridge Associated Colleges Business Law Level 4 Food and Beverages Management Level 3 Marketing Strategy</p>	<p>Starting your own business Work in the catering industry Work in the retail sector</p>

Beauty therapy and complementary therapies	
Courses	Employment Pathways
UK Open Learning Beauty Therapist Level 2 Nail Technician Level 3 NCFE Stonebridge Associated Colleges Beauty Therapist Level 3 Holistic Beauty Therapist Level 4 Nail Technician Level 3 Beauty Make-Up Professional Level 3 Beauty Salon Management Level 3 Aromatherapy Level 4 Holistic Back Practitioner Level 3	Work in the beauty industry Setting up a home based or mobile business Work in the sport and leisure industry Work in the field of occupational health



Other vocational/employment areas

There are also a range of specialised areas in which relevant and accessible distance learning courses are available. Some examples are given below.

Event management, including wedding planning.

See Stonebridge Colleges courses and International Correspondence Schools (ICS) courses.

Horticulture, landscape and garden design

See courses provided by the RHS Horticultural Correspondence College (HCC).

Journalism and creative writing

See courses provided by the London School of Journalism, the National Extension College (NEC), the Writers' Bureau and the Open College of the Arts.

Plumbing and related areas of building trades

See courses covering NVQ related plumbing theory provided by Learn Plumbing. ICS also offer a BTEC in Electrical Installation and an Advanced Diploma in Construction. OLCI also offer a more expensive range of courses.

Property Management

See courses provided by Manchester Open Learning (MOL) and recognised by National Federation of Property Professionals (NFOPP).

Theology and Religious Studies

See courses provided by St John's College, Nottingham, London Bible College, Maryvale Institute.

Working with animals, pet care

See courses provided by Animal Care College, Stonebridge Colleges and UK Open Learning.



Distance Learning Providers

Animal Care College

www.animalcarecollege.co.uk

Horticultural Correspondence College

www.hccollege.co.uk

01225 816700 Email: info@hccollege.co.uk

Institute of Counselling

Web: www.instituteofcounselling.org.uk

0141 204 2230 Email: admin@instituteofcounselling.org.uk

International Correspondence College

www.icslearn.co.uk

0500 888 003

Learn Plumbing

www.learnplumbing.co.uk

0161 330 1309

Manchester Open Learning

www.mol-openlearning.co.uk

0161 203 2103

National Extension College (NEC)

www.nec.ac.uk

01223 400 200 Email: info@nec.ac.uk

OLCI: courses in construction and building trades

www.olci.info

0800 058 2848

Open College of the Arts

www.oca-uk.com

0800 731 2116

Open University

www.open.ac.uk

Student Registration and Enquiry Service: Offender Learning Team: 0845 366 6059

Premier School of Building

www.premierschoolofbuilding.com

01244 311609

St John's College, Nottingham

www.stjohns-nottm.ac.uk

0115 925 1117

Stonebridge Associated Colleges

www.stonebridge.uk.com

Tel: 0845 230 6880

Email: info@stonebridge.uk.com

Good practice in supporting distance learning inside prison

Distance learning works best for prisoners when there is some support at different stages of the process. The key stages are:

- Choosing a suitable course: is the level right? Is the subject appropriate in terms of the prisoner's offence and in terms of his or her previous experience and future plans?
- Ensuring that the course requirements can be met in the prison; does it require use of DVDs or CD ROMS? Does it involve any specific materials, such as graphite for art courses? Will these be allowed?
- Making applications for both the course and the funding; see other sections of this booklet.
- Ensuring the course materials reach the prisoner and support is given to help the learner begin.
- Ensuring that learners have access to computers for writing assignments and assisting them if necessary to print and send off assignments.
- Making any arrangements needed for tutor contact or exams.
- Encouraging mutual support or peer mentoring, and generally helping learners if they run into difficulties.
- Recognising success; ensuring prisoners' achievements when they complete a course or get good results are acknowledged and celebrated.

Making the systems work

There are some lessons from experience about how to make distance learning work:

- Expect applicants for distance learning to demonstrate their commitment to learning by completing available prison courses if relevant.
- Ensure that a range of prospectuses are kept in the library.
- Make sure that copies are kept of assignments sent off to tutors, with despatch dates, in case they are lost.
- Open sessions for distance learners are immensely valuable and provide opportunities both for learners to raise difficulties and for peer support. Distance learners can often be invisible and isolated, and support through open learning sessions can make a significant difference and capitalise on their experience.
- Encourage other prison staff to know about and support distance learners; this can include wing officers, personal officers, education staff, library staff and others.
- Explore whether distance learners can be drawn into assisting other learners in a volunteer role as a mentor or classroom assistant or orderly.
- Gather feedback on the courses prisoners do, and encourage them to spread the word about distance learning to others.
- Make sure that distance learning courses are recorded on the prisoner's learning plan; and that information is sent to the course provider when prisoners are moved.

Funding

There are a range of charities that provide grants for courses for prisoners.

The Prisoner Funder Directory is an excellent guide to the funding available. Copies are sent every year to each prison and should be found in the prison library. The Directory can also be accessed online at www.hardmantrust.org.uk