



Being heard

'Learning Together' students set out ideas for reforming prison education



Prisoners
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'It's about social change, about class, about whose voices matter and what that means'.

So said one student at the end-of-course celebration event for the first Learning Together prison-university partnership at HMP/YOI Isis. For ten weeks students from Goldsmiths University studied social research methods alongside

students from HMP/YOI Isis. One admitted he had thought social science was studying pubs and clubs, so was surprised when he received the reading materials. However, he found an extract from the book 'The Sociological Imagination' particularly inspirational and realised that social phenomena could explain some of the reasons people go to prison. 'It has made me understand why people chase the lifestyle portrayed in music [...] things they can't afford, like new phones

out every six months. When I'm out I'm not going to be chasing those things any more' he reflected.

Another event in March celebrated students from HMP Lowdham Grange and Nottingham Trent University, who had completed a nine-week Learning Together course on social justice. 'I'd never read any social science before. It's a big subject. I realised that your identity is partly born and partly made by society, [and] the criminal justice system actually reflects our social justice system' said one student.

The HMP/YOI Isis students had been practicing their new social research skills, speaking to their peers about what the Governor should change

about education provision. Ideas included IEP incentives to increase motivation and more courses including personal training, humanities and languages. They also suggested how to improve the course itself as part of an external evaluation, including more support with critical reading. The Governor agreed to take forward their recommendations and enable the students to carry out more research to help improve the prison: 'We need to be more scientific about changes we make, not just do things because I think they are a good idea'.

Suggestions made by students at HMP Lowdham Grange included vocational training delivered by employers, more academic courses and reductions in sentence time for commitment to education. A student from HMP Lowdham Grange said 'it's not often we get heard in prison. It's good to have a forum to hear our opinion. We have something to offer the prison system.' A Nottingham Trent University student said 'I owe it to the inside students to use the voice I have to help others see beyond the wall and help you be seen and heard'.

They summarised that education should be seen a prism of knowledge, skills, values and beliefs because, as one student reflected, 'if I have multiple problems, then there needs to be multiple solutions'. They would like to see more support and opportunities after release and "to hear what is possible" from those who have been successful. Joe Baden OBE, Director of Goldsmiths' Open Book project and a former prisoner, described the HMP/Isis students as "very brave, going against what you've been told in the past." He reflected: "I love what I do now, my family love me again. This is not living, here in prison. Come and see us after release. This experience could change your life."

The Warden of Goldsmiths congratulated the students on "how able and bright" they had demonstrated themselves to be, and how they can use their experiences to change their lives and society. One student has already applied through UCAS to attend Goldsmiths in September. Another said: 'I thought university students were going to be stuck up, but I now know university has a broad variety of different people. Uni could be a place for me'.



PLA Awards 2017 Nominations now open

"I feel he has really helped build my self-confidence and really lifted my mood as he consistently praises you, always encourages you and believes in you no matter what. Thanks to him I now know I can do things and that I am not worthless.

"I now have plans for the future when I leave prison. I never thought I would look at setting up my own business but I'm really looking forward to it."

These were the words of a prisoner learner last year who nominated her teacher Ian Rampton at HMP Eastwood Park for a Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA) award. The nomination was successful, and Ian was named an "Outstanding Teacher" for how he inspired his students during his lessons, including running a soap-making course.

Other awards recognised outstanding peer supporters, prison officers and individuals in more diverse roles. One such winner was Trevor Latham, Family Interventions Co-ordinator at HMP Parc. The prisoner nominating him had written passionately about how Trevor had "invested so much time and humanity into the course, showing us all by his own example qualities which we all wish to adopt for ourselves."

The PLA is proud to be running the awards scheme again this year. The five categories are:

1. Outstanding teacher or education staff (Adult Estate).
2. Outstanding teacher or education staff (Young People's Estate).
3. Outstanding officer or instructor.
4. Outstanding peer mentor, supporter, learning champion or student council rep.
5. Outstanding individual e.g. Governor, librarian, volunteer, charity worker, careers advisor.

The award winners will be celebrated at the Annual PLA Conference on 14th September at De Montfort University, Leicester. The awards will be presented by X-Factor winner and former prison officer Sam Bailey. Everyone nominated will receive a certificate and winners in the peer mentor category will also receive a book of their choice.

How to nominate: Please write to Nina Champion at FREEPOST: PRISONERS EDUCATION TRUST. In your letter (maximum 1 A4 side per nomination), please give:

- Your name, establishment and prison number.
- The name of the person you are nominating.
- Their job title.
- The category you are nominating them for.
- Why you are nominating them.

You might want to think about specific examples of how they have helped or inspired you, how they have promoted learning in your prison and how they have 'gone the extra mile' to help you and others achieve. These awards are an opportunity to thank those who support and promote learning in your establishment, whatever their role and wherever they are based in the prison. Thank you and we look forward to receiving your nominations.

A full PET prospectus can be found in your prison library. You can also write to FREEPOST Prisoners' Education Trust for tailored advice.

'Course Notes', which shines a spotlight on some of the distance learning courses funded by Prisoners' Education Trust, will return to its regular slot next month.

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Writing Competition

2017

Prizes in each
category of:
• 1st Prize £200
• 2nd Prize £100
• 3rd Prize £75

Special prize:
for people of
21 years or under
£100
*

Comment/Article

Short Story

Lyric/Rap

The closing date for the competition is Monday 7 August 2017

The competition is open to all prisoners, prisoners' families and friends, and to former prisoners.

For information on how to enter please contact your education/learning and skills department, library, or contact:
Michele Byam, Prison Reform Trust, FREEPOST ND6125, London EC1B 1PN.
Email: michele.byam@prisonreformtrust.org.uk