



I learnt to drive a truck in prison

Dee

My journey with education and the gym, for they go hand in hand, started almost immediately after I went to prison. Originally it was an escape from being locked in for hours on end. But then I realised I wanted to be back in learning and get fit for its own sake: for the fun of learning and then for the challenges it brings. I attended day classes, night

classes and every gym session that was provided.

When I started I was IT illiterate, but within three months I could run a mile, bake an edible cake and turn the computers on without crashing the entire system. By the end of my 15-year prison sentence I had trained in horticulture, gained a theology qualification, started a degree in science mathematics, and trained as a lifeguard.

Learning to drive a truck was one of those things on my 'things to do before I'm 50' list. Some people have 'climbing Mount Everest' or 'learning how to scuba dive', but mine was getting an HGV licence. So when I saw a poster on the wall of my final prison, advertising a scheme to attract women into the haulage industry, I put my name down straight away. To help with the cost, I decided to apply to PET for an Allt award,

which funds people to continue their training or education after release. I was awarded £1000 towards the driving lessons and in 2016 was released on temporary licence to take my first lesson in a 16.5 metre-long articulated lorry. One month later I gained by Class C+E HGV licence.

I got my first job, driving lorries for a confectionery company, literally days after being released from prison, and I haven't been out of work since. I really love driving. I love being the biggest vehicle on the road. And that I've got money in the bank. And I love the freedom: that I can listen to books, the radio; go to places I've never been, and I'm responsible for myself. A psychologist would find it easy to work out why I like these elements - I definitely appreciate the freedom and the autonomy of being on the road after spending so long in prison.

I've been lucky - I've watched people struggle to get jobs after prison. I saw radical changes over my sentence - at the beginning there was every encouragement to take on different kinds of education and build different skills, but by the end budget cuts had placed serious limits on what was possible to do. The policy of only funding courses up to Level 2 is short-sighted and limiting. People will face

enough challenges to finding employment while being restrictive in their aspiration and potential as well. The result will be loss of motivation and an increasing need to rely on charities to fund decent education at Level 3 and above. For a core of those who face enough educational challenges, this could result in a lost future, without sustainable and engaging employment.

“ I drive big lorries for great pay in an amazing industry that has embraced me: a brand new driver; a woman; and someone with a past. My future is full. ”

I'm not an office-based person, and I'm not a hairdressers/beautician-type person. These are the sort of skills women are encouraged to build in prison. Lots do enjoy it - and I appreciate being on the receiving end of it - but I'm not that way inclined. Not that the haulage industry would work for everyone - it's very ad hoc; you can't guarantee

or plan anything during the working week. This could make it harder for women with young families, but there aren't any physical reasons women can't do it - the days when trucks were heavy are gone. Now you can turn the wheel with one hand. Unloaded, most will beat cars off the traffic lights.

I've never had any negative reaction to being a woman - quite a few people are surprised - when I turn up in the transport office they think I've just come with a small van. "Is it just a box then?" they ask. People get impatient, but just as much with me as with another lorry driver. And it's an industry that can cope with older women - I'm expected to work until I'm 68 now.

A year after leaving prison, I am proud to say I drive big lorries for great pay in an amazing industry that has embraced me: a brand new driver; a woman; and someone with a past. My future is full. I want to complete my degrees, gain my dumper truck licence, get back to horticulture and clear my name; whilst enjoying life and spending time with family and friends. That's what's important.



Prisoners
Education
Trust



Course Notes

PET provides funding for over 300 types of distance-learning courses. Every month we shine a spotlight on one of them.

Operator CPC

Do you have the drive to join the haulage industry? To become an HGV driver like Dee you'll need a driving licence and a Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC). This is a practical certificate, which needs to be taken outside prison. However, PET offers funding for the Operator CPC, a theory course which is useful for those hoping to become self-employed drivers or transport managers. Transport managers work with operators to make sure goods and passengers reach their destinations safely, on time and in the most cost-effective way. They earn an average of £32,000 a year (compared to £24,000 for a lorry driver), and could be a good option for those who enjoy problem solving and organisation, and may be put off by the demands of driving for a living.

For example, last year we funded Callum at HMP The Mount to complete his Operator CPC. Callum had already been an HGV driver in the construction industry for 16 years before being handed down a seven-year prison sentence. After release he wants to move from driving lorries himself to managing drivers, so the CPC

will be an essential qualification.

The haulage industry is relatively open to hiring people who have served time in prison, as long as their convictions aren't driving or trafficking related. "My record has never caused me any issues," said Dee. "Companies have double checked if I've served time for a relevant offence, but after that they haven't questioned me further - it's my clean licence and my ability to handle a big vehicle that matters."

Like other distance-learning courses, the Operator CPC is studied independently. The exam needs to be taken at a local centre - either during ROTL or after release.

The Operator CPC course is listed in PET's curriculum, which should be available in all prisons' education departments. For more information about distance learning or the Allt awards, which fund people to take up education or training after prison, write to FREEPOST Prisoners Education Trust. You do not need a stamp.

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.



Who would you like to say thanks to?

Nominations are open for the Prisoner Learning Alliance awards, which recognise outstanding educators in the prison system. The awards are unique in the fact that all nominations come from people in prison. So making a suggestion is a chance to have your voice heard and to say thanks to the people who go above and beyond, and who have inspired you to keep learning. Everyone who is put forward will receive a certificate, regardless of whether or not they win.

The awards are in four categories: a) outstanding teacher b) outstanding officer c) outstanding peer mentor d) outstanding 'other' (e.g. librarian, governor, volunteer). You should write your reasons for nominating on no more than one side of A4 and send to: Nina Champion, FREEPOST, Prisoners' Education Trust before 14 July.

The awards will be presented by X-factor winner/ex-prison officer Sam Bailey at the PLA conference in September.