



Greenhouses not Warehouses:

Commissioning education to plant seeds of hope and opportunity

Summary



Sir Richard Branson:

Do we want warehouses for the incorrigible, or greenhouses for the reformed? At the moment, we are looking at the former. But the latter is possible and within reach.

Helga Swindenbank
(former Director of HMP Bronzefield):

All prison sector leaders need to take advantage of opportunities to plant seeds of hope and opportunity.



The Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA)

The PLA brings together organisations and individuals with expertise in prison education.

Our vision is: That all prisoners can engage in high-quality and diverse learning opportunities to help them transform their lives.

Our mission is: To provide expertise and strategic vision to inform prison education priorities, policies and practices.

'Greenhouses not warehouses' workbook



Strong leadership is essential to any organisation and a powerful force for driving change and improvement [..] Empowered prison governors will have the freedom to set the strategic vision for their establishment's education programme, and ensure this is delivered in the best way for their prisoners.

Ministry of Justice, Kickstarter event, August 2017

Prisons are being given increasing flexibility and control over education budgets and the ability to commission a wide range of provision. Governor-led commissioning is an exciting opportunity to increase engagement of prisoners in education to achieve a whole-prison learning culture. The Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA) has produced a workbook aimed at helping governors and managers plan and commission education. It includes a self-assessment tool and provides advice, case studies and additional resources around ten key aspects of commissioning. This timely resource sets out the crucial questions to be thinking about and suggestions for how to bring together the right people to answer them for your prison and population.

What is prison education?

'Activities that give individuals the skills they need to unlock their potential, gain employment and become assets to their communities. It should also build social capital and improve the well-being of prisoners during their sentences.'

MoJ (2017)

Greenhouses not Warehouses explores this definition to enable governors and managers to be innovative in planning and commissioning education to achieve these outcomes.

Why is education commissioning important?

Getting commissioning 'right'

Prisoners who are purposefully engaged, well supported by staff and peers and hopeful about their futures will be a positive influence on others, the prison culture and themselves. Thoughtful, appropriate education provision is a vital part of the solution. Knowing who and what is best for your particular prison population requires forward planning, good stakeholder involvement and a clear understanding of needs and evidence-base.

Getting prison education commissioning 'wrong'

Getting prison education commissioning 'wrong' could exacerbate current challenges facing your prison, specifically increasing prisoner disengagement and disillusionment.

'I was angry. I was not happy. I had nothing to focus on. When I was a child my teacher would say to me – drummed it into me – you're worthless, useless and not going to do anything. But now with my certificate in my hand I feel complete, my anger has gone.'

'I was almost at the point of despairing of my life and had often contemplated suicide as I was so depressed and have no family. However I now feel optimistic about my future and job prospects and I feel proud of myself and what I've achieved.'

Former prisoner learner quotes, PLA Theory of Change (2016)



Self-assessment tool

How confident are you with ten key aspects of commissioning education?

1. Vision and strategy

You will need to have a clear idea of what you want to achieve with education in your prison. What will your prison look and feel like when it is supporting this vision? **How confident are you in this?**

Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Moderately	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very	<input type="checkbox"/>	Extremely	<input type="checkbox"/>
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2. Identifying needs and priorities

You will need to understand the strengths, needs and interests of your population. What learning opportunities could help meet these needs? What are the priorities for your population? **How confident are you in this?**

Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Moderately	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very	<input type="checkbox"/>	Extremely	<input type="checkbox"/>
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3. Listening to your prisoners

You will need to understand your prisoners. What do your current learners say is working and not working within existing activities? What do prisoners not currently engaged in education feel would help them to engage? What would help current learners to progress? **How confident are you in this?**

Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Moderately	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very	<input type="checkbox"/>	Extremely	<input type="checkbox"/>
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4. Using research and evidence

Evidenced decisions are more successful. How will you use research and evidence to plan and commission your learning offer? How can you measure and increase the impact and quality of learning in your prison? **How confident are you in this?**

Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Moderately	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very	<input type="checkbox"/>	Extremely	<input type="checkbox"/>
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5. Partnering with the right people, the right way

There are many partners who could help you design and deliver education. Which specialists and partners could help you achieve your vision? How can you ensure they work together effectively? **How confident are you in this?**

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6. Ensuring fairness in the commissioning process

It is important to have a fair commissioning process. How will you communicate with potential providers about what you need? How will you ensure that your commissioning process is fair, transparent and open? Do you understand the procurement rules? **How confident are you in this?**

Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Moderately	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very	<input type="checkbox"/>	Extremely	<input type="checkbox"/>
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7. Innovation v. consistency

Don't fix what isn't broken. What is currently working that you could build on? What isn't working and needs a new solution? What innovations are out there? **How confident are you in this?**

Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Moderately	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very	<input type="checkbox"/>	Extremely	<input type="checkbox"/>
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8. Looking beyond the gate

You will need to think about opportunities in the community. How will you build bridges for prisoners into wider society? How will you ensure prisoners are involved in education, training or employment after release? **How confident are you in this?**

Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Moderately	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very	<input type="checkbox"/>	Extremely	<input type="checkbox"/>
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9. Developing a 'Whole-prison' Learning Culture

You will need the 'buy in' of all staff to develop a learning culture. What are the roles for those outside of key education posts to promote learning? How could training and development opportunities help others contribute to making the vision a reality? What value could prisoners add? **How confident are you in this?**

Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Moderately	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very	<input type="checkbox"/>	Extremely	<input type="checkbox"/>
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10. Who else can help make this happen?

There's a lot to consider when taking this new approach to commissioning education including commercial and financial implications. What other specific expertise do you need to help you and how might you get it? **How confident are you in this?**

Not at all	<input type="checkbox"/>	Slightly	<input type="checkbox"/>	Moderately	<input type="checkbox"/>	Very	<input type="checkbox"/>	Extremely	<input type="checkbox"/>
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What next?

For online copies of the full workbook:

<http://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/prisoner-learning-alliance>

For hard copies of the workbook and/or for a PLA member to come to your prison to lead a discussion or a workshop please email: nina@prisonerseducation.org.uk



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