



Prisoners
Education
+ TRUST

‘Never too old to learn’ A response to the Justice Select Committee Inquiry into Older Prisoners

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About Prisoners Education Trust

Since 1989, Prisoners Education Trust has been providing access to broader learning opportunities for prisoners, to enhance their chances of building a better life after release. We do this through an advice service, peer mentor training and a grants programme which assists over 2,000 prisoners each year to study distance learning courses in subjects and levels not available in prison. We are funded by over fifty different trusts and foundations and also receive a government grant from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills.

Through our policy work, PET raises awareness of the importance of education for prisoners in aiding rehabilitation and makes the case for better access to academic, creative, informal and vocational learning in prison. Key to this is incorporating the voices and views of prisoners towards education provision and we use their experiences to influence policy and good practice.

Introduction to our inquiry response

In responding to this inquiry, we draw on our expertise in the field of prison education and prisoner feedback to make comments relating to the learning needs of older prisoners and how they should be met.

People aged 60 and over are now the fastest growing age group in the prison estate. Yet, there is no national strategy for the education provision of older prisoners¹, as a result older prisoners’ experience of prison education policy and provision can vary greatly.

¹ Her Majesty’s Chief Inspectorate of Prisons thematic review of older prisoners in England and Wales calls for a ‘*NOMS national strategy for older prisoners supported by national and local standards.*’ Prisoners Education Trust echoes this call, with the additional requirement that this national strategy includes specific guidance for the provision of education to older prisoners, such as the implementation of older prisoner learner forums across the estate.

This inquiry response is primarily informed by our recent survey of 31 older prisoners² from our learner voice panel. The survey asked these older learners about their experience of learning in prison, how their learning needs might differ from the general population, and whether these needs were being met by the current provision. We received much interest in the surveys, with one prisoner even distributing copies to other older men at his prison, indicating that many have strong opinions on this subject. The quotes that you find throughout our evidence are from older prisoner learners themselves.

Overview: One-size does not fit older prisoners

Older prisoners' voices must be listened to in order to understand what their needs are and allow them an opportunity to shape prison education policy and practice.

As can be seen from our evidence, provision for older prisoners must take full account of their individual learning needs and provide facilities to meet them. Older prisoners have told us that, whilst the current focus and investment in basic numeracy and literacy skills under the current learning and skills contracts (OLASS 4) may be appropriate for some prisoner learners, this provision does not provide for the many amongst this age group that have progressed beyond this level.

We stress the importance of recognising that older prisoners are not a homogenous group. While it is sensible to understand that they may have particular needs as a distinct demographic within the prison, older prisoners should not be dismissed as quiet or incapable. Many are highly skilled and capable of pursuing learning with little assistance.

'All types of learning benefit older prisoners. Older people face a lot of prejudice and discrimination. People say 'let's have a few art classes'- why not mountaineering!! (Age not given)

'This all depends on individual needs and wants, many older prisoners would like to achieve - they don't want to be pushed aside.' (Age 65)

Distance learning, peer mentoring and prisoner carers can play a vital role in meeting the needs of older prisoners, ensuring that they can engage with a wide variety of learning, both formal and informal.

Desistance theory suggests that all forms of learning are key in encouraging older prisoners to desist from offending by offering them a hook to change and allowing them the chance to shape a new identity distinct from their label of 'offender'. Therefore learning must be allowed to play a fundamental part in the desistance of older prisoners.

² While we appreciate that, for the purposes of this inquiry, older prisoners are defined as those over the age of 60, we echo other organisations in suggesting that 50 is a more suitable age by which to define this stratum. Research suggests that older prisoners possess a physiological age of ten years in excess of their chronological age. Therefore many prisoners over the age of 50 may face similar issues as 60 year olds on the outside. For this reason, we include the voices of prisoners over the age of 50 in our response. The unanimity of views expressed between this sub-section (50 - 60) and those properly defined as older prisoners (over 60) further re-enforces the claim that these age brackets should be defined as one group.

Summary of evidence and recommendations

- **Listening to older prisoner learners - Section 1.0**
Older prisoners should be properly consulted as a distinct group within the estate to ensure that their voices are heard and their needs are properly met. We recommend a national implementation of older prisoners' councils, and older prisoner reps.
- **Learning is of real benefit to older prisoners - Section 2.0**
Older prisoners perceive a wide range of benefits including improving mental and physical health, developing family relationships and providing activity that helps them to stay positive through their prison sentence. Despite this, support for distance learning has significantly reduced across the prison estate under recent learning and skills contracts. We recommend that distance learning is supported in prisons.

In their response to our survey, older prisoners highlighted the following issues regarding their learning needs and learning provision across the estate:

- **Access to learning - Section 3.0**
Older prisoners are more likely to struggle to access learning facilities inside prison due to physical barriers, staff perception of their learning needs and emphasis on providing places to younger prisoners, and the focus on learning for employment at a national policy level. We call for all estates to ensure that learning facilities are accessible to older prisoners and that staff are properly trained to support their access.
- **Higher levels of learning - Section 4.0**
Whilst basic literacy and numeracy skills are appropriate for some older prisoners, most are likely to have progressed beyond this level of learning, either during their sentence or before custody. A broader provision of high levels of learning is necessary to allow prisoners from this age group to progress.
- **Peer mentoring - Section 5.0**
Older prisoners are a huge resource of knowledge, experience and skills that should be properly utilised. They often act as mentors or classroom assistants, helping others with learning. We recommend a more formalised process of utilising this resource towards peer mentoring and learning assistance, with proper accredited qualifications and embedded learning and support for mentors.
- **Prisoner carers - Section 6.0**
The increase of older persons in prison requires a greater provision of age-specific care and support. We recommend a formalised system of trained prisoner carers, to support care professionals within the prison and ensure that older prisoners are given the necessary assistance to fully engage in formal and informal learning.

- **Arts-based learning** - Section 7.0
Older prisoners are approaching retirement, with some having retired before release. For this reason, an employment focused approach to learning does not meet their needs, and proper arrangements should be made to ensure they have greater access to informal and arts-based learning.
- **ICT & digital inclusion** - Section 8.0
Many older prisoners told us that they need further IT training. They see learning in this area as essential in giving them the best opportunity to re-integrate into society once released. We recommend that age-specific ICT training is implemented across the estate to ensure that older prisoners can up-skill in an appropriate learning environment. We also believe that mentoring is an effective way for prisoners to support others to develop their ICT skills.

Evidence and recommendations

1.0 Listening to older prisoners

Prisoners Education Trust works to enable prisoner learners' voices to influence prison education policy and practice. Learner voice refers to *'developing a culture and processes whereby learners are consulted and proactively engaged with shaping their own educational experiences.'*³

Our Brain Cells 2 report demonstrates that prisoner learners want the opportunity to engage in a more participatory way in shaping their learning provision.⁴ 28% of those who responded to our survey wanted to take part in a learner forum, 56% wanted the chance to meet with policy makers directly, and 27% wanted to receive training in participation skills to help them to better communicate their views.⁵

Some good practice is already taking place across the estate; more than 30% of prison staff asked in a 2010 survey by Prison Reform Trust indicated that a forum, focus group or consultation for older prisoners was running in their establishment.⁶

'We have an excellent older prisoner forum that gives great benefit.' (Age 63)

However, given the ageing prison population, these pockets of good practice should be replicated across the prison estate, fully engaging older prisoners to ensure their views are heard and they can influence prison policy and practice.

'Older prisoners are quiet and therefore systematically forgotten.' (Age not given)

Recommendations

1. All prisons with older prisoner populations should implement age-specific prisoner councils that give older prisoners an opportunity to voice their needs and influence their learning provision.
2. Older prisoner representatives should be enrolled across the estate and invited on to other forums and consultations in the prison to ensure that they can feed the perspectives of their cohort into broader prison practice.

³ Rudd, Colligan & Nalik, *'Learner Voice: a handbook from Futurelab'*, 2006

⁴ Champion, N. *'Brain Cells Second Edition: Listening to prisoner learners'*, Prisoners Education Trust, November 2012

⁵ Idem

⁶ Cooney, F. & Braggins, J. *'Doing Time: Good practice with older people in prison - the views of prison staff'* Prison Reform Trust, 2010

2.0 Benefits of learning for older prisoners

Through our service provision supporting prisoners into distance learning, and by listening to the voices of learners themselves, we continue to believe in, and gather evidence of, the benefits of learning for older prisoners.

These benefits were also recently recognised by the Minister of State for Universities and Science when, referring to older people and education, he said *'Education is such a good thing - it is not reserved for younger people. There will be people of all ages who will want to study. There is great value in lifelong learning.'*⁷

Research that we undertook in 2011 showed that of a sample of prisoners of all ages who had recently completed distance learning supported by PET;

- 81% were confident that distance learning had a positive impact on them as individuals
- 75% were applying to do further study as a follow up to their learning
- 58% had become involved in volunteering roles in prison as a result of their learning experience
- 33% had applied for prison work as a result of their learning experience

11% of those prisoners we supported last year were over the age of 50, showing a clear will to engage with learning at high levels and in a variety of subjects.

Those older prisoners that have applied to us for distance learning have emphasised that learning in prison can have a wide range of other benefits for older people including improving their mental and physical health, developing family relationships and providing them with an activity that helps them to stay positive through their prison sentence.

'It (education) helps to create a calmer environment. I hope that with time it will enable me to reduce my medication, to the extent that I will be able to cope without it.'
(Applicant for art materials)

'When I leave prison I will be sixty-five years old and will be retired. Continuing with the Open University will give me a positive purpose in life and will occupy me.'
(Applicant for Making Sense of the Arts Open University course)

'I am diabetic and my eye-sight is deteriorating. I am unable to read for more than ten minutes. I enjoy painting, it will keep me from vegetating and I do not need glasses to do it.'
(Applicant for art materials)

Despite this wide range of positive effects, support for distance learning has been significantly reduced across the prison estate under OLASS 4, with many learners who were being supported now no longer able to continue.

Recommendations

3. We recommend that distance learning, as a means to obtaining level three and above qualifications, is supported in prisons.

⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2013/feb/21/david-willetts-old-people-university>

3.0 Access to learning for older prisoners

Older prisoners told us that there are a number of issues relating to their access to learning;

3.1 Physical environment

The National Offender Management Service is subject to the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act. It is required to promote disability, equality and eliminate unlawful discrimination in all the prisons in England and Wales. Disability, as defined in the Act, covers a range of impairments, both physical and mental, including learning disability.⁸

Research indicates that 83% per cent of older prisoners have a serious illness or disability.⁹ As the Chief Inspector of Prisons recognised;

*'Given an ageing prison population, disability is an increasingly important issue for prisons.'*¹⁰

Physical disabilities may prevent older prisoners from attending learning facilities without assistance from staff or other prisoners, respondents told us that this can often act as a barrier to learning.

'Not all needs of the older prisoners are met. This is mainly due to access problems as the older prisoners quite often suffer from mobility problems. With the education department located on two floors with no lift it is not possible for some to take part in some classes.' (Age 67)

'I feel that older prisoners differ in many ways, first I believe that health is an issue, more time if any should be spent in identifying individual needs - hearing, manual dexterity.' (Age 65)

'One barrier at this prison to access learning in the education department is the amount of steep stairs that have to be climbed; for some senior people this is impossible.' (Age 63)

'I only go to the over-50s when I can get there, as I am disabled and on crutches all the time.' (Age 75)

A survey of prison staff by the Prison Reform Trust supported these prisoners' comments, finding that the Education department was the area that was most likely to be inaccessible to prisoners with mobility difficulties.¹¹

These findings were also confirmed in the thematic report on disability by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, which noted that;

⁸ Howse, K (2003) *'Growing Old in Prison: A scoping study on older prisoners,'* Centre for Policy and Ageing & Prison Reform Trust Centre for Policy and Ageing & Prison Reform Trust

⁹ Idem

¹⁰ Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, *'No problems - old and quiet': Older prisoners in England and Wales, a thematic review by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons'* September 2004

¹¹ Cooney, F. & Braggins, J. *'Doing Time: Good practice with older people in prison - the views of prison staff'* Prison Reform Trust, 2010

*'Prisoners who said that they had a disability reported less access to activities and association than those who did not, and were less likely to say that they had been involved in work, education and vocational or skills training.'*¹²

In the research that we undertook for our report Brain Cells 2, 20% of prisoners self-identified as having a learning difficulty or disability. The report questioned whether *'sufficient measures are being taken to enable these prisoners to take part in learning activities. For example, those with back problems may find it uncomfortable to sit for long periods of time and may require equipment such as back rests. Given that people over 60 are the fastest growing age group in the prison estate, this barrier to learning may well be an area that needs some attention.'*¹³

As prisoners with disabilities, including 83% of older prisoners, may be unable to work or may have retired, education offers a vital form of purposeful activity, and acts as an important rehabilitative tool. The physical environment of prisons should allow these prisoners to access a full range of learning facilities.

Recommendations

4. Education facilities should be adapted so as to be accessible to older prisoners with disabilities, both to ensure compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act and equality legislation, and to maximise access to this important pathway of desistance from crime.
5. Staff should be fully trained to ensure that older prisoners with disabilities can access education and learning facilities e.g. libraries
6. A formal system of trained prisoner carers should be implemented nationally to provide support to care professionals working in the prison and ensure that older prisoners have maximum access to learning (see Section 6.0 below).

3.2 Employment-focused learning

Many older prisoners felt that the current focus on employment under OLASS 4 encouraged prisons and learning providers to enrol younger prisoners in to education at their expense. They often felt that they were denied access to learning due to their age.

'Younger prisoners get priority; I was automatically put on the retired list when I entered this prison.' (Age 70)

'There seems to be an ideology in place that says 'push the younger guys into education and training to keep them occupied and out of trouble, the old blokes can play chess, dominoes or do jigsaw and stay out of the way.' (Age 68)

'The new education contract actively works against older prisoners.' (Age not given)

'Older prisoners are often looking for recreational learning to keep their mind

¹² Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, *'Disabled prisoners: A short thematic review on the care and support of prisoners with a disability'* March 2009

¹³ Champion, N. *'Brain Cells Second Edition: Listening to prisoner learners'* Prisoners Education Trust, November 2012

stimulated, not to enhance their chance of employment when released.’ (Age 67)

‘The focus on employability impacts negatively on older prisoners, programmes are ‘lower-skill’ based and nothing is provided for those who already have employment experience and qualifications.’ (Age not given)

Furthermore, many older prisoners told us that they wanted to learn for reasons other than to gain employment, as they were due to retire either before, or shortly after, release.

‘The primary benefit of education is not the awards and skills per se, but more the personal improvements in maturation and psychological self-belief that serve to push offenders away from criminal impulses.’ (Age 58)

‘The needs of older prisoners differ from those of the general prison population in that [prison] education is directed at helping prisoners back into the world of work. Older prisoners require courses or hobbies that keep their faculties stimulated and occupy their time productively, both in prison and on their release.’ (Age 64)

Our experience suggests that learning in itself can be vital in encouraging prisoners to desist from crime, by acting as a hook for change¹⁴ and encouraging learners to form a new ‘pro-social’ identity¹⁵ - a prisoner becomes a student, a plumber, or an artist. Therefore we strongly support those older prisoners who tell us that they want to pursue learning for its own sake, regardless of whether it will strengthen their employment options.

Recommendations

7. We recommend that specific provision is made for older prisoners to engage in the full range of learning provision, regardless of their employment prospects.

¹⁴ Giordano et al ‘*Gender, crime and desistance: Toward a theory of cognitive transformation*’, American Journal of Sociology, 107, 990-1064, (2002)

¹⁵ Maruna, S. ‘*Making good: How ex-convicts reform and rebuild their lives*’, American Psychological Association Books, (2001)

3.3 Age-specific learning environments

Some prisons have provided clubs for older prisoners, where they can engage in activities and arts-based or informal learning. Those prisoners that are in establishments running older prisoners' clubs tend to speak highly of them, valuing a space away from younger prisoners in which they could interact with others their age and learn.

'We have a club for people over 60. We play dominoes, cards, bowling and do light chair exercises.' (Age 70)

'Here the learning needs of older prisoners I feel are not met as everybody is usually put in the same class, where many older prisoners find it difficult to concentrate in what is usually a noisy environment.' (Age 65)

Case Study - The Rubies Project

'The Rubies project for women prisoners who are over 50 has been running in HMP Eastwood Park since the summer of 2010. Run by a Project Worker from Resettlement and Care for Older Ex-Offenders and Prisoners (Recoop), a national project working with older offenders in prison, there are two group meetings every week devoted to an enormous range of discussions and activities.

Topics have included: love, being in prison, being an older woman, overcoming difficulties, food, humour, different cultures, Christmas, Valentines Day and Chinese New Year. They also read poems, short stories, articles and reviews with the support of an additional volunteer from Prison Reading Group (PRG), embedding literacy skills and soft skills such as concentration and communication.

*One prisoner 'L' learnt to knit, crochet and read English with the group.'*¹⁶

Recommendations

8. We recommend an increased provision of age-specific classes, both for formal and informal learning (such as reading groups). However, there should also be opportunities for those wishing to use their knowledge and skills for the benefit of younger prisoners, through mentoring or classroom assisting (see section 5.0 below).

¹⁶ <http://www.recoop.org.uk/pages/home/news.php?story=154>

4.0 Older prisoners need higher levels of learning

The older prisoners that sent us responses to this inquiry expressed frustration at the lack of opportunities for progression on to higher levels of qualifications and learning.

'In my experience the educational needs of older prisoners differ greatly from younger illiterate prisoners. For this reason I have to say learning in prison is far from fulfilling or rewarding.' (Age 61)

'Generally I would expect [older prisoners'] learning requirements to exceed the level taught in prisons.' (Age 61)

'What job awaits an ex-prisoner with Level 2 Maths and English in this present day climate? None.' (Age 65)

The need for higher levels of learning was recognised by the House of Commons Education and Skills Committee in their 2005 report on prison education;

*'An over-emphasis on basic skills driven by key performance targets has narrowed the curriculum too far. Whilst aiming to meet the basic skills needs of prisoners, the government must endeavour to broaden the prison education curriculum and increase flexibility of provision to meet the much wider range of educational needs that exist within the prison system.'*¹⁷

This issue was also confirmed by our report Brain Cells 2, which highlighted both a lack of accurate data regarding prisoners' educational profiles, and the need to include higher level qualifications in the prison learning offer,

*'The government should use OLASS 4 as a timely opportunity to collect, collate and analyse up-to-date data on the educational profile of prisoners, including their qualifications... [this] should then be used to establish the appropriate spectrum of further education qualifications...The use of distance learning, modules and e-learning should be explored to enable prisons to offer wider provision and enable progression.'*¹⁸

Recommendations

9. We repeat our recommendation that more research and data gathering should be done to attain better data on the educational profiles of older prisoners, to ensure their learning needs are being met.
10. Distance learning can meet older prisoners' learning needs once they have progressed beyond the basic literacy and numeracy available in prison. We recommend that all older prisoners that have achieved basic literacy and numeracy be offered and supported to undertake this form of learning.

¹⁷ House of Commons Education and Skills Committee *'Prison education: Seventh Report of Session 2004-05'* March 2005

¹⁸ Champion, N. *'Brain Cells Second Edition: Listening to prisoner learners'*, Prisoners Education Trust, November 2012

5.0 Peer Mentoring

Older prisoners tell us that they have a wealth of experience, knowledge and skills that they are keen to utilise to support younger prisoners to learn, providing both parties with purposeful activity and new skills. A significant minority of those who contributed to this response were already enrolled in peer mentoring learning, or acting as classroom assistants to support younger students, and many more expressed their desire to use their knowledge to support others in learning.

'It always suited me to share my learning, to help and encourage others and to be a good example of what may be achieved in all of us. Older people can be more patient and understanding, and having the 'lived experience' are prime candidates to be the most positive, effective, communicative mentors.' (Age 58)

'Older prisoners have, usually, a wealth of experience, which needs to be first identified then channelled in a positive direction.' (Age 65)

'You are never too old to learn. It has enabled me to be a better mentor and co-ordinator for Diversity & Equality, and given me a lot more confidence. It is good to have the opportunity to interact with people of various ages and learn about their perspective on things. It has enabled me to help other women, especially working with foreign national prisoners - and by this, you learn about their culture.' (Age 63)

'Older prisoners benefit from mental stimulation, keeping the mind active and not going into stagnation. It gives them a purpose in life and a goal to aim for. A classroom environment gives them association with others. I found my course enjoyable. I had to push myself, and I was encouraged through the course. I am now able to pass onto others what I have learnt.' (Age 67)

As well as broadening the training and enrolment of older prisoner peer mentors, prisons should look to identify those that are highly skilled in a specific field, who should then be encouraged to share their expertise with younger prisoners. This would increase the diversity of the prison learning offer and make further use of older prisoners' experience in assisting other inmates.

'Older prisoners could benefit the younger generation in prison as most of us have years of knowledge. For instance, I am a landscape and garden designer with two RHS diplomas and over 35 years of experience in all aspects of gardens, plants and soils. This could help the younger generation to look at another job when released.' (Age 63)

The need to utilise the knowledge, skills and experience of older prisoners and ex-prisoners as mentors was recognised by the Justice Secretary in the debate in the House of Commons on 9th January 2013;

'In my view the former offender turned good - the former gang member gone straight- is the best way of making sure that a young person coming out of jail does not go back to the same ways.'

This is about getting a mix of high qualifications, of the kind we find in our public probation service, in people who have turned away from crime and who are helping others.'

Recommendations

11. We recommend the implementation of a national, formalised system of older prisoner mentor training, with accredited qualifications and embedded learning.

6.0 Prisoner carers

The increase of older persons in prison requires a greater provision of age-specific care and support. In their thematic review of disability in prison, the Chief Inspector of Prisons proposed ‘a formal system of prisoner carers, to risk assess, train, support and formalise peer support’¹⁹ for older prisoners and those with disabilities. As the thematic review of disability also recognises that

‘Over 40% of disability liaison officers said that they did not have the time to discharge their responsibilities, many also reporting a lack of training and support. Crucial social care support was difficult to secure in prisons, and to plan for after release.’²⁰

These carers could provide additional support to professional care staff to ensure that they have the time to properly discharge their duties.

Age UK also supports such a scheme in their report ‘Supporting older people in prison: ideas for practice’ where they state;

‘Buddy schemes recruit, train and monitor selected prisoners to offer one to one help to disabled older people in prison, thus enabling to take on a responsible role under supervised conditions and to enable older disabled prisoners to take a fuller part in the regime.’²¹

A formal system of accredited prisoner carer training could provide a further learning pathway for younger and able-bodied prisoners looking to train as carers, ensuring that additional provision of care is in place to support care professionals while enabling older prisoners with disabilities to access learning facilities. However, it is vital that prisoner carers do not replace professional staff, but act as a support to them in the discharge of their duties.

Recommendations

12. We echo the Chief Inspector of Prisons’ call for a formalised, national system of prisoner carers. While supporting older prisoners to access formal and informal learning, prisoner carers should be able to achieve accredited qualifications in the field of health and social care under the guidance of professional staff.

A system of trained older prisoner mentors (see section 5.0), coupled with a formal system of trained prisoner carers for older and disabled prisoners (see section 6.0) could provide a mutually re-enforcing environment of intergenerational learning. This would increase both groups’ access and engagement with learning and provide vocational opportunities upon release, while also improving the quality of service to older prisoners and ensuring that they have maximum access to activities and learning opportunities. Training programmes could also include embedded literacy and numeracy for those developing their basic skills.

¹⁹ Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons, ‘Disabled prisoners: A short thematic review on the care and support of prisoners with a disability’ March 2009

²⁰ Idem

²¹ Age UK ‘Supporting older people in prison: ideas for practice,’ June 2011

7.0 Importance of arts-based learning

Of the prisoners over the age of 60 that have been supported by Prisoners Education Trust in the last year, 64.5% have been for arts-based courses or materials. This strong interest in art amongst older prisoners across the estate is also reflected in the responses that we have received from them; which highlighted the importance of arts-based learning in meeting their learning needs in prison.

‘Yes, there isn’t enough learning for older prisoners, to keep our mind and brains active, such as art and crafts. Even the gardening is given to the younger prisoners.’ (Age not disclosed)

‘As I was retired due to disability at the time I went into prison, I could see no benefit from doing studies that I would not use or feel comfortable with the level I had. Art based learning was an area I wanted to improve and it was something I could carry on with and progress even on release from prison.’ (Age 67)

Art was considered by these learners to play an important role in keeping their minds active, providing a social space to spend their time, and offering them an opportunity to learn skills that were not primarily employment focused - as many older prisoners do not expect to find outside employment before retirement.

This significance of arts-based learning was also acknowledged in the ‘*Review of Offender Learning*’ by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills;

‘We recognise the important role that the arts can play in the rehabilitation process through encouraging self-esteem and improving communication skills as a means to the end of reducing re-offending.... Engagement in the arts with the possibility of fresh vision, or at least a glimpse of a different life, often provokes, inspires and delights.’²²

Recommendations

13. We recommend that age-specific provision of arts-based learning be made available to older prisoners, particularly those who are unable or unlikely to find employment once released due to their age.
14. We know that distance learning is a valuable medium through which older prisoners can gain access to arts-based learning and strongly recommend that support for distance learning is maintained across the estate, to provide older prisoners with this valuable opportunity.

‘Distance learning, with correct support, is by far the best.’ (Age 63)

²² Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, ‘*Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation - Review of Offender Learning*’ May 2011

8.0 ICT and digital inclusion of older prisoners

Prisoners Education Trust believe that there is a the digital inclusion of prisoners of all ages is an issue that needs to be addressed across the estate. We are working with the Prison Reform Trust to publish a report on the digital inclusion of prisoners later in the year.

There are also issues regarding the digital inclusion of older prisoners which need to be addressed. On a recent prison visit, one prisoner learner told us;

'Here we have an aged population - so they have particular IT needs and skills. For some, IT is a new world and it's very intimidating. People who have spent years inside aren't familiar with computers at all. Some of us have expertise, why can't we share it with others? There's loads of scope for mentoring in PC skills.' (Prisoner learner, HMP Kingston)

In their response to this inquiry, many older prisoners also referred to ICT training as a vital part of their learning that would help them to integrate into society once released.

'One subject older people would benefit from is IT, as everything is going that way. Older people, myself included, are afraid of computers.' (Age 70)

'I have learnt how to use a computer, which will be a great help to me on release.' (Age 66)

'At 81 years of age, I started a Level 1 IT course; I possess neither a computer nor a mobile phone at home, but I wished to bring myself into line with the thinking of younger folk. I am the oldest in the IT class' (Age 81)

Many of the older prisoners that we spoke with had been able to access basic ICT training appropriate to their needs. However, some felt that they needed longer to learn these skills than younger prisoners in their class. For this reason we recommend age-specific ICT learning, and ICT mentoring between prisoners.

Recommendations

15. Age-specific ICT classes should be implemented across the estate, to allow older prisoners to learn these skills, which they see as vital to their progression both inside and out, at an appropriate pace.
16. Prisoner mentors with good IT skills should be trained and enrolled to help older prisoners to develop their skills.