



PET / PLA written evidence to the Education Select Committee Inquiry: Ofsted Further education and skills report 2012-2013

Introduction

1. The Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA) welcomes this opportunity to submit evidence on the recent Ofsted Further Education and Skills report 2012-2013.
2. In November 2012 Prisoners Education Trust (PET) established the PLA, which has a membership of 17 organisations involved in prisoner learning. Details can be found [here](#)
3. The PLA recently launched its [first report](#)ⁱ in the Houses of Parliament, setting out key principles and recommendations for the future of prisoner learning; many of which echo the report of the Education and Skills Select Committee into Prison Education in 2005 (Seventh Report of Session 2004-05) and Ofsted's 2012 - 2013 Further Education and Skills report.

Ofsted's findings relating to prisons

4. Ofsted's main findings relating to prisons are;
 - Training and education is not enough of a priority for prison governors and other senior staff. Accountability for the quality of provision is weak and must be addressed urgently(p.6).
 - The quality of learning and skills work in prisons was poor. It had the largest proportion of inadequate provision across the whole of the FE and skills sector. In prisons, 'leadership and management of learning and skills and work' was judged to be inadequate or as requires improvement in 22 (58%) of the 38 prison reports published by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (p.10).
 - Prison regimes often disrupted learning and work related activities, resulting in poor attendance and punctuality. Furthermore, take-up of provision in English and maths was often very low compared with the level of need assessed at induction. Overall, far too few prisons were preparing prisoners adequately for resettlement and employment with good quality education and training. (p.11).
 - Despite Ofsted's negative findings, they also saw pockets of excellent practice in prisons (p.11). The most effective provision was vocational training where the prison worked in close partnership with employers.

PLA evidence in response to Ofsted's findings

5. The PLA agrees with Ofsted that accountability for the quality of education provision is weak and needs to be addressed urgently. In our [Smart Rehabilitation](#) reportⁱⁱ we recommend this can be achieved by greater leadership from prison governors and senior staff to prioritise a wide range of learning. Ofsted should continue to have a role in inspecting learning arrangements and where they are failing, should be able to follow up with prisons to guide them to improvements. However, Ofsted only inspect on an infrequent basis and therefore other mechanisms for accountability need to be considered. The IMB could play this role to a certain extent, however there is not a national approach to their inspections to enable comparisons to be drawn; other mechanisms need to be devised.

6. Ofsted is concerned that ‘leadership and management of learning and skills and work’ was judged to be inadequate or as requires improvement in 22 (58%) of the 38 prison reports published by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Prisons. In our [Smart Rehabilitation report](#)ⁱⁱⁱ we provide recommendations for developing an engaging ‘learning culture’ within prisons, involving officers and staff where learning is prioritised and found in every corner of the prison, not just within the education department. Lead Governors and Heads of Learning and Skills, along with other key leadership roles such as CRC’s, Education Managers and Heads of Reducing Reoffending, must receive training and support to develop such a culture of engagement in learning throughout the prison estate. This needs to come from the top.
7. Ofsted is concerned about the low take up of courses and again is something the PLA raised in our [Smart Rehabilitation](#) report. A personalised approach is needed with individual learning plans designed to ensure that prisoners reach their learning goals and potential. Prisoners told PET in a [survey](#)^{iv} to ‘listen to what prisoners want to learn rather than force them into subjects which they have no interest’. We advocate for a broad range of learning, including; distance learning courses and the arts. A creative approach to engaging with and teaching prisoners is also needed. Our [Fit for Release](#)^v report provides examples of prison projects successfully using sports to embed English and maths within sports activities. Much more of this kind of learning is needed; opportunities to embed vocational qualifications into prison workshops and industries are all too often missed. We also advocate for better use of IT in learning and for adequately preparing prisoners for resettlement and employment as evidenced in our recent report, [Through the Gateway](#)^{vi}
8. Good practice. We agree with Ofsted’s finding that there are pockets of excellent practice in prisons and that the most effective training is vocational linked to employers. We provide examples in our [Smart Rehabilitation](#) report and make recommendations about learning being joined up and improving coordination between prisons and the community. However, although there are examples of good practice there needs to be better mechanisms for sharing these as well as offering ongoing CPD to prison teachers as set out in our Smart Rehabilitation Report (p.43).
9. **Policy Context**
Ofsted’s findings must be seen within the context of unprecedented change and reforms within the Criminal Justice System. These include;
 - Significant cost savings as part of the ‘Fair and Sustainable’ agenda, making it harder to achieve rehabilitation outcomes
 - Changes to education contracts under OLASS 4 restricting the learning hours available and range of courses on offer
 - Plans for secure colleges under Transforming Youth Custody (click [here](#) for our consultation response)
 - Transforming Rehabilitation (click [here](#) for our consultation response)
 - Plans to transform the management of young adults in custody (click [here](#) for our consultation response).

Given the above context it is crucial that government departments (BIS, MoJ and DWP) whose policies all have an impact on prisoner learning, undertake a joined up approach; co-ordinating policies, aligning outcome targets and working together to achieve overall rehabilitation outcomes.

The PLA would be happy to provide further input. Please contact Nina Champion:
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ⁱ Champion, N (2013) Smart Rehabilitation: Learning how to get better outcomes. London: Prisoner Learning Alliance.

Source: http://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/fileadmin/user_upload/PLA_Smart_Rehabilitation_Report_PROOF3.pdf

ⁱⁱ ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ ibid

^{iv} Champion, N (2012) Brain Cells: Listening to Prison Learners. London: Prisoners Education Trust. Source: http://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/fileadmin/user_upload/doc/Learning_Matters/PET_Brain_Cells_Report_2nd_edition.pdf

^v Meek, R., Champion, N. & Klier, S. (2012) Fit for Release. London: Prisoners Education Trust. Source: http://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/fileadmin/user_upload/doc/Learning_Matters/PET_Fit_for_Release_Report_WebVersion.pdf

^{vi} Champion, N & Edgar, K (2013) Through the Gateway: How Computers Can Transform Rehabilitation. London: Prisoners Education Trust and Prison Reform Trust. Source: http://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/fileadmin/user_upload/CQ_through_the_gateway_WEB1.pdf