



Prisoners
Education
Trust

Secure Colleges and the Criminal Justice and Courts Bill

(Part 2 and Schedules 3&4)

Prisoners Education Trust Briefing June 2014

Education at the heart of the youth estate

We welcome the focus on putting education at the heart of the youth estate and this should include informal, creative, vocational and academic learning, as well as activities that broaden horizons and promote personal development. For some young people tackling their own personal and psychological issues may simply be a greater priority than an academic qualification and addressing this is an important part of preparing people for learning. We know education works to reduce re-offending, recently affirmed by the Ministry of Justice's Data Lab report proving people funded by Prisoners Education Trust (PET) to study distance learning courses in prison were more than a quarter less likely to reoffend than a matched control groupⁱ. However, for this to work for young people, the Secure College model needs to overcome some key challenges:

Location

Secure Colleges are further away from community support such as YOTs, schools/colleges, families which help young people resettle once they are being released.

- How will the Government manage its partnerships with through-the-gate services for people from many different areas?

The Government has recognised that Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL) could help young people attend college or training close to the area the young person will be released intoⁱⁱ.

- How will Secure Colleges make effective use of ROTL when they are not based near the community the young person is from?

Size

The experience of new, big establishments, like HMP Oakwood, make clear that managing big institutions as a significant challenge. In the youth estate the issue of gang affiliations make it more difficult to maintain a secure and safe environment for both staff and young people. The larger the population, the larger the number of gang affiliations to manage is likely to be.

- Given the size, how will Secure Colleges ensure the regime and learning can proceed in a way to ensure it is a safe environment in which to work, reside and learn?

Range of needs and sentences

Unlike a traditional school or college, in a Secure College young people will be arriving and leaving the establishment at different times depending on their sentence. As the numbers of young people in custody continue to decrease, we need to recognise that the few young people who are in custody will be the most troubled, disturbed and challenging and serving longer sentences.

- How will Secure Colleges manage this change in population and strategies to rehabilitate them?

Young people in youth custody also have a wide variety of previous learning experiences and have a wide range of learning and other needs.

- How will Secure Colleges ensure teaching addresses a variety of individuals' needs, no matter when they arrive or leave an establishment, or what their learning needs are?

Recommendations

We believe that there are many ways to put learning at the heart of the youth estate (see Appendix 1 for PET's model). For example, the most troubled young people will require specific, often one-to-one, support and investment to assist them with their learning journey both in custody and after release. This approach would help stop people from reoffending over their lifetime and enable them to contribute positively to society which will have significant economic benefits, as well as importantly reducing the numbers of victims of crime; resulting in safer communities.

We very much welcome the Government's commitment to improving learning in current establishments, in particular doubling the hours for a broad learning offer and by improving how they join up with the local community the young people are being released to.

Further, we would like to see the Government act now to ensure a successful model is in place, which addresses the challenges set out above, between now and 2017 when building for the proposed Secure Colleges is scheduled for completion. We hope our model will provide a useful resource.

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 assist approximately 2,000 prisoners each year to study distance learning courses in subjects and levels not otherwise available in prison.

APPENDIX 1

The model and culture

Getting the model of delivery and the learning culture right in the current establishments should be the government's focus. The Prisoner Learning Alliance, formed by Prisoners Education Trust in 2012, have set out a blueprint for an outcome-focused, joined - up and value-driven learning model in their 2013 report ['Smart Rehabilitation'](#).ⁱⁱⁱ

It is not clear how these intrinsic difficulties will be resolved by building secure colleges. A broader curriculum can be provided in smaller institutions using some of the solutions discussed below.

Alternative solutions to put learning at the heart of current establishments

We welcome the commitment to improving the existing youth custodial provision and to put education at the heart. We would like to see current establishments improve their learning offer, in particular how they join up with the local communities the young person is being released to. The re-tendering of the education contracts is a prime opportunity to do this.

Some examples of improvements that could be made to the current system, based on the views of young people we spoke to in focus groups conducted by PET and Kinetic Youth, are as follows;

1. A co-ordinated, case management approach

The Government's response to the consultation was clear that 'enhanced education is not simply about increasing the number of hours' and that a 'fully integrated multi-agency approach' is key. We welcome the understanding that 'planning from resettlement from day one' is vital and that a partnership approach between custody and stakeholders in the community is vital to secure positive outcomes. Therefore we believe an improved 'case management' approach, with one person, probably from the YOT, overseeing the young persons learning and sentence plan will result in smoother transitions between custody and the community.

Having small, local provision would facilitate this joined up working, whereas larger establishments further away from the community would have more difficulty in building relationships with key stakeholders to provide an effective 'multiagency' approach.

There should be a statutory duty to ensure that an individual learning plan should be developed in conjunction with other relevant stakeholders which takes account of prior learning of that young person and sets out how learning and development of the young person is to be managed within the establishment and how that learning and development is to be continued and built upon on release.

2. Learning 'through the gate'

Transitions into the community can disrupt a young person's learning journey. Therefore the learning offer in custody, particularly for those on shorter sentences, needs to be transferable to the community where possible. This can be done in a number of ways;

- Use of ROTL to enable young people to attend a local school, college or other learning / personal development provider;
- Partnership working with local providers and charities to provide learning activities in custody to give young people a taster of opportunities available in the community;
- YOIs should be looking to exploit the exploding potential of IT based distance learning / e-learning / virtual academy tools as a blended model of learning. It offers the potential of continuity of learning beyond custody with the same virtual tutor support and can overcome the problem that custody often causes in disrupting enrolment to FE colleges in the community; however access to IT in the community (at school, YOT, library etc) must be supported to enable the young person to continue with e-learning after release. In order to realise this potential, it is essential that the Government take a balanced view of the security risk of use of IT in the youth estate compared to potential it offers to help address the much larger risks of re-offending. IT must however be used as part of a blended learning model where interaction with teachers and peers is encouraged to get additional support, develop social skills and promote emotional well being.

Transitions to the adult estate also need to be managed carefully to ensure their learning journey continues.

3. Personalised and engaging

- The education provided in the youth estate must engage and meet the aspirations of the young people, be relevant to their needs and offer challenge and variety. Learning should not just be in the classroom and therefore the doubling of education ‘hours’ should not lead to whole days in the classroom; where they may have ‘failed’ previously in mainstream education. Embedding learning in arts, sport, informal learning, vocational skills and other activities, as well as opportunities for peer to peer and family learning, is key to engaging young people in learning.
- The time a young person might spend in custody can be short, therefore the main focus should be using that time to engage and interest a young person with the idea of learning and helping them overcome fears about education, develop their self esteem in relation to learning and make plans to continue learning after release.

4. Outcome focus and pastoral support

- Targeting particular educational qualifications, however much they may be of value in themselves, can drive the system to pursue its own numerical targets in ways that fail to meet the real needs of children or to engage them effectively.
- In order to have an effective outcome focus, both the pastoral and educational activity needs to fall under the same local management structure.

5. Learner voice

- Youth establishments must adhere to the principle of listening to the voice of their own students to focus their services and improve quality;

6. A safe environment

- A safe environment; as the youth estate continues to decrease, it is likely to contain the most disturbed and troubled young people from the population; that will mean that there has to be a sufficient investment in security infrastructure to keep them safe. Young people have told us safety could be improved by improving opportunities for therapeutic support, liaising with young people about IEP schemes, staff training and activities to promote improved respect and communication between young people and with staff.

7. Staff development

Staff need to be trained in working with and effectively engaging young people with complex needs. Continuing professional development is necessary to ensure skills are updated and good practice shared. Expertise can be shared through various means including online ‘good practice hubs’ and training, it does not require all staff to be together in one large secure college building.

The focus on education in youth custody needs to extend to support lifelong learning

While we welcome the focus on education and learning for under 18s, this focus should be continued into the adult estate; many of the arguments set out in the Green paper explaining the focus on education for children and young people, can be applied to the adult estate.

ⁱ Ministry of Justice, Justice Data lab report, [Prisoners Education Trust](#)

ⁱⁱ Transforming Youth Custody, Government response to the consultation, page 12.

ⁱⁱⁱ [Smart Rehabilitation](#), Prisoner Learning Alliance.