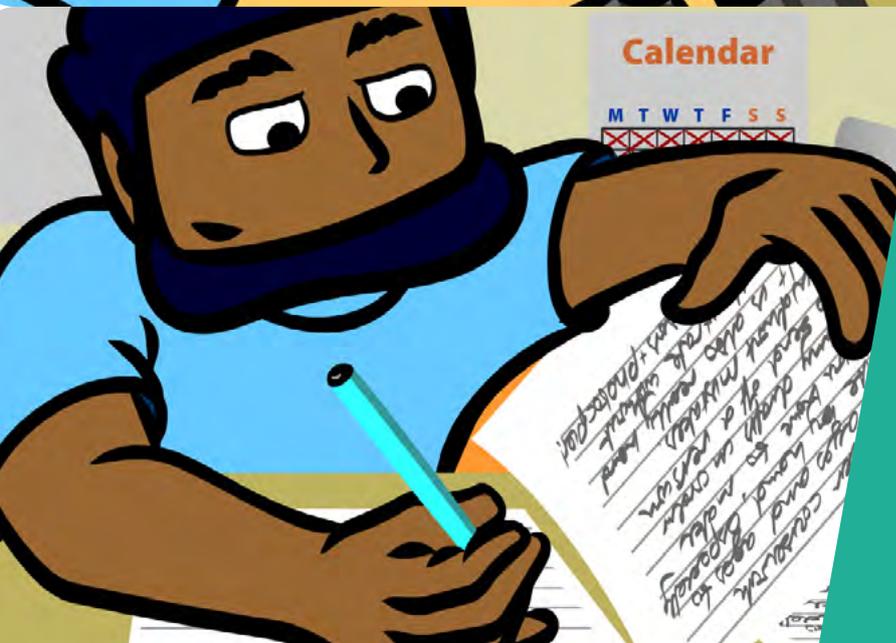
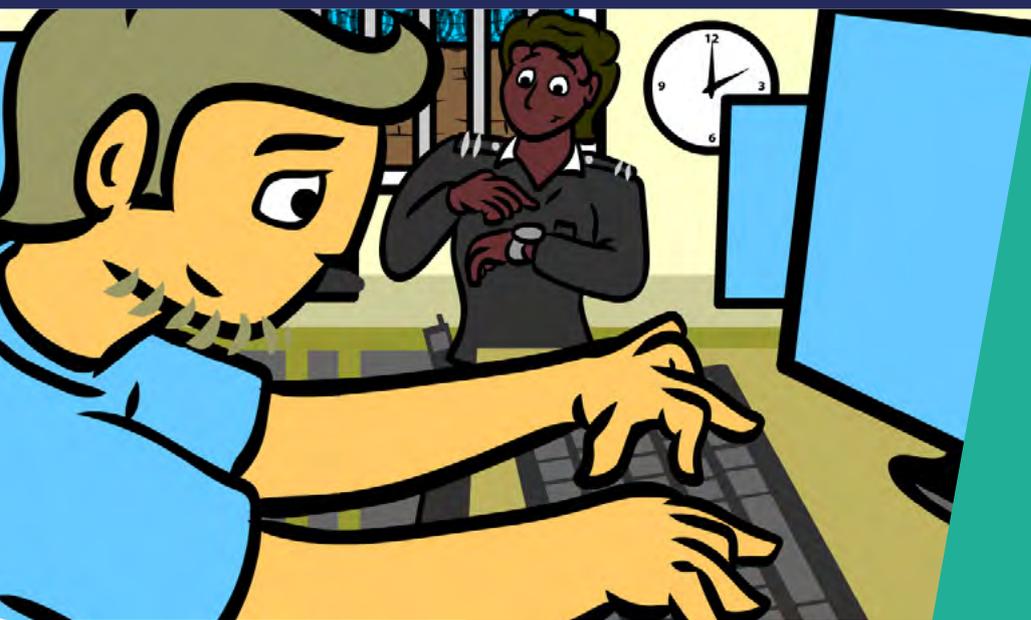


Welsh Prisons Project

2017–2020



Prisoners' Education Trust (PET) established the Welsh Prisons Project in December 2015, funded through a large grant from a major donor.

Initially an 18 month pilot, the project was conceived of as an opportunity to develop a suite of support materials and activities which would enhance PET's core distance learning offer. The project team – Clare Lloyd, Head of Service Delivery, Pwyll ap Stifin, Project Management Officer, and Iva Gray, Advice and Support Officer – trialled a number of different means of supporting and enhancing the experience of PET's learners. After the success of the pilot phase, funding was successfully sought for a second phase for the project, from the same funder, to further develop the project team's work. While the pilot phase was understood as an opportunity to pilot work that would enhance, but not necessarily change, PET's core offer, phase 2 of the project – which ran from September 2017 to December 2020 – was understood as an opportunity to develop initiatives that would directly influence the charity's core offer.

Main achievements of Phase 2 of the Welsh Prisons Project (2017–2020)

Some of the key areas of work delivered during phase 2 of the project were:

- ✓ Expanding the project cohort to include women at HMP Eastwood Park and the new titan prison at HMP Berwyn in Wrexham.
- ✓ Trialling a number of digital projects, looking at innovative new ways of delivering education in prisons.
- ✓ Embedding the individual support for learners trialled during the pilot phase as part of the core offer for prisoners in Wales.
- ✓ Using the lessons learnt in Wales to inform changes to PET's central processes, and acting as a trial ground for developing new processes.
- ✓ Taking a leading role in revising PET's distance learning offer, ensuring that our courses are fit for purpose and fulfil our learners' needs.
- ✓ Developing new courses: an accredited peer mentoring course co-produced with prison peer mentors and a suite of study skills courses designed to prepare learners for distance learning.

Numbers of Learners

The pilot phase significantly increased numbers of prisoners in Wales applying for distance learning courses. The challenge during phase 2 of the project was to find a sustainable way to maintain the momentum behind this rise. Altogether during phase 2, 567 grants were made for distance learners in Wales, from 856 total applications (66%). For context, there are fewer than 5000 prisoners housed in the Welsh cohort of prisons at any one time; demonstrating the extent of the project's engagement, despite its modest size. This has far exceeded our expectations at the end of the pilot project, particularly when considering some of the challenges that arose during that period, not least the fact that distance learning applications ceased entirely during the early part of the coronavirus crisis.

 **567** Distance learning grants awarded

Tailored Advice and Support for Learners

The development of a one-to-one advice service was one of the main successes of the pilot project, being extremely popular with our learners. This became embedded as part of PET's core offer in Wales during phase 2, with Iva Gray becoming a key holder at a number of prisons, allowing her to run monthly advice clinics for learners with minimal disruption for staff. Between September 2017 and the onset of the coronavirus-related restrictions introduced in March 2020, Iva delivered 733 individual advice sessions to learners in prisons. When these sessions could no longer be delivered, Iva, using experience gained through offering remote support for learners earlier in the project, delivered the same valuable advice using the Email a Prisoner (EMAP) scheme, communicating directly with prisoners when unable to access the prisons. By the end of November 2020, she had 253 advice-related interactions using EMAP with prisoners in Wales. Iva also supported prison education staff throughout the lifetime of the project – holding individual meetings with staff from each prison monthly; switching to virtual meetings at the end of the project in response to the coronavirus restrictions.

 **733** One-to-one advice sessions delivered

Peer Mentoring

Having worked extensively with prison peer mentors during the pilot phase, the team recognised that a major problem was the lack of accredited training available that focussed specifically on the skills needed to mentor in a prison setting. After initial discussions with Hafren Training, a Welsh course provider, we decided to develop and trial a course written specifically for prisoners, initially at HMP Prescoed. While the initial version of the course was written by Hafren Training to conform to accreditation requirements, the first 10 prisoners – many of whom had extensive experience of mentoring in a prison setting – rewrote aspects of the course as they studied it; changing some of the language, illustrative examples used as well as the course structure. The course was then trialled, and underwent the same process of co-production at HMP Parc, with a further 10 prisoners, studying and making revisions to the course. This has been the project team’s approach throughout – bringing together stakeholders to find solutions to problems; acting as facilitators rather than dictating the direction of our projects.

The course was launched in May 2020 and has been applied for on a number of occasions, with the first prisoner to complete the course being awarded their qualification in November 2020.



Digital Learning 1

The development of digital learning materials has been a major focus during phase 2, not least at the point when learners were unable to access other forms of education due to coronavirus restrictions. Early in the lockdown period, the team met with education staff from HMP Berwyn to discuss how their learners could be supported using the prison’s in-cell digital technology. We agreed to work together to make the PET Short Courses (described below) available to learners across the prison digitally. The courses were successfully rolled out across the prison, with 210 learners completing the course during a 2-week period in July 2020. Feedback on the courses was very positive, and the team was very happy to be trialling new ways of delivering courses while also responding to an immediate need to make resources available to learners.

During the final months of 2020, the team have been working with education staff at Berwyn to trial a digital application form, allowing prospective learners from Berwyn to apply for distance learning courses directly from their cells.



Connections with FE and HE Institutions

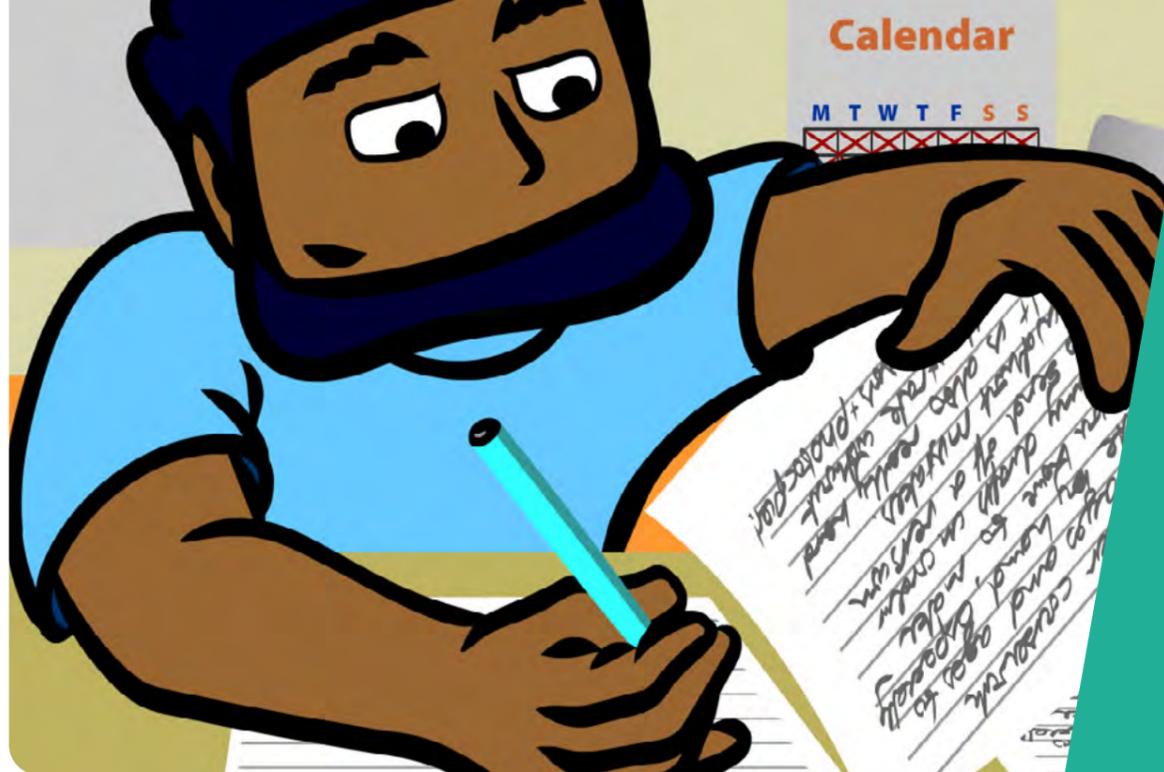
Since the beginning of the project, the team have run annual events at Higher Education Institutions, inviting prison staff and other stakeholders to share best practice and discuss current issues in prison education. PET Alumni, including serving prisoners released on temporary license, have attended each event. While the event initially planned with local FE Institution Bridgend College for 2020 had to be cancelled due to the coronavirus crisis; Iva Gray instead arranged monthly virtual meetings for staff from all Welsh prisons to come together to discuss issues and hear presentations from guest speakers.

Clare Lloyd, the team’s Head of Service Delivery, has been an active member of the Swansea Pathway group; a collaborative project drawing together Swansea University, HMPPS, Gower College and a number of other local providers, to develop pathways for learners from HMP Swansea to access educational institutions after release. This project encapsulates the team’s approach to collaborative working, emphasising the importance of locally-grounded partnerships; an approach again evident in our support for the ‘Learn Together’ project run by Cardiff University at HMP Cardiff.

Digital Learning 2

The project trialled another digital course in HMP Parc during the 2nd year of phase 2. We received funding to trial prisoner access to the National Extension College’s (NEC) ‘Business Start up’ course remotely from inside the prison. The course was hosted on the NEC’s secure website, and accessed from inside the prison using a secure whitelisting system – whereby a web browser would only allow access to a small number of highly secure websites.

The trial ran from August to September 2019, with 10 learners enrolling on the course. The team learned a number of lessons from the trial; not least due to encountering a number of technical difficulties related to the prison’s internet connectivity. Allowing prisoners to access educational courses via a secure whitelisting process dramatically widens the range and quality of education available to prisoners. While the trial was small in scale, it provided a proof of concept that could be truly transformative to prison education.



Study Skills Development

Having recognised the need to strengthen the support that prison learners needed with academic study skills during earlier phases of the project, an opportunity arose during the project's final year to work with Xander Ryan, a PhD student at Reading University, on a new iteration of the project's study skills work. After meeting learners in HMP Cardiff and HMP Prescoed, Xander set about designing a suite of study skills courses, to be delivered as stand-alone distance learning units, freely available to learners in prison. The courses were due to be trialled at a number of prisons during March 2020, but due to the lockdown instigated in prisons in response to the coronavirus crisis, the courses were immediately made available to all learners in prisons across England and Wales, including in digital format to prisoners at HMP Berwyn. Feedback from learners has been overwhelmingly positive. Staff can download the course directly from the PET website.

Work with families

At the beginning of phase 2, the project team worked with a group of prisoners from HMP Parc and their families to produce an animation that showed the positive impact that prison education can have, not just on the lives of individual prisoners, but on their families too. While not an issue commonly considered in relation to prison education, 200,000 children in England and Wales are affected by parental imprisonment at any one time. The men who took part in the film all lived in Parc's Families Wing, where they developed parenting skills, and learnt about the impact of their crime on their families.

Influencing change within PET

Application process

In November 2019, PET started to accept applications for courses on a new application form, using a new process to sort, score and decide on which applications to fund. This was the culmination of a long process of development, which included a trial for learners applying from Welsh prisons during September 2019, and a period of consultation on the criteria used for deciding which applications to fund, with input from staff and learners in Welsh prisons. The team have since moved on to develop ways that this application form can be completed and sent to PET via digital means.

Development of new database and new data processes

One of the chief barriers to monitoring the progression of learners recognised during the pilot phase of the project was PET's internal data processes. From September 2018 the project team started working with an external consultant on developing a new organisational database, which would underpin new processes for tracking learners and processing applications. PET's new Salesforce database started coming online in March 2019 and by December 2019, all applications, advice service delivery and reporting across the organisation were being done via Salesforce.

Advice line and direct support for learners

One of the chief innovations of the Welsh project has been the introduction of one-to-one Information, Advice and Guidance for learners, chiefly through Iva Gray's advice sessions delivered during prison visits. When prisons across the estate introduced severely restricted regimes in March 2020, Clare Lloyd, building upon lessons learnt in Wales, looked for options that would allow PET to support learners directly while unable to access prisons. This led to the establishment of a free telephone line, that learners could use to access Information, Advice and Guidance. The Adviceline was launched in April 2020 and by the end of November had received over 1000 calls from prisoners across the estate.

Welsh Government Stakeholder meetings

Having led the team in developing a number of innovative projects in Wales, in September 2018 Clare was invited to present evidence to David Hanson MP while he was preparing his report for Welsh Government: 'Reforming Outcomes: A Review of Offender Education in Wales. Since then she has been involved in regular 'Offender Learning and Employability Stakeholder' meetings convened by Welsh Government to discuss issues and shape policy. She has also met with representatives from Welsh Government on other occasions to feed into specific policy areas. The opportunity to use lessons learnt from the project's work to inform policy around prison education in Wales will hopefully ensure that our work continues to have an impact after the project has come to an end.



This report outlines the work of the Prisoners' Education Trust (PET) Welsh Prisons Project 2017-2020.

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