

# Our Strategy

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**2022–2026**





Photos by Ian Cuthbert, Ben Langdon  
and Mile 91, and Rebecca Radmore.

# Foreword

## That first letter home was the worst. That moment writing to my mum made my eyes burn.

“I just wanted you to be proud of me and now look at where I am.”

Those words sat behind my rib cage and felt like they were smashing their way through me. The first few weeks of prison were some of the hardest of my life. I witnessed assaults, suicide attempts and brutality. The world I thought I knew had gone and what replaced it was a place that had its own rules, regulations and codes. I felt like I was sinking. I sat in a cell and tried to look up from my bed, so I could see the sky without the bars getting in the way. I had nothing. I felt nothing. I was nothing.

The first time I heard about Prisoners’ Education Trust from another prisoner, I actually smiled.

“You mean there are charities that want to help prisoners?” I felt my body loosen.

“They can’t help everyone. But yeah, they give you funding so you can do courses.”

I got a form. Poured my heart out and hoped beyond hope I would get supported.

I received a letter. They would fund my application for the arts and languages Access course I had applied for with the Open University. This letter felt like the golden ticket. It felt like I had been trusted. That someone believed in me. I rang my mother and told her all about it. By then she was so ill and I didn’t realise how far her cancer had spread. She said she had studied that in Holland and

I said I could tell her all about it and we could have debates.

The day the books arrived the officer said, “Has Christmas come early?”

I said I was born on Christmas Day and this definitely felt like all my Christmases and birthdays had come at once.

I opened up the books and the learning CDs in my friend’s room. She had a DVD player and she was as excited as me as we watched together. It took us into the Tate Britain in London and I saw Tracey Emin’s piece ‘The Perfect Place to Grow’. I promised myself at that moment I would go to the Tate Britain when I got out.

I learnt about graffiti, poetry and activism. I started to dream of a life where I could be free to do all those things. My life had been small and the prison was smaller but in the folds of the textbooks I was reading, I saw the world.

When I left prison I contacted Prisoners’ Education Trust and joined their Alumni Network. I felt a part of a bigger community. I was a student. I went to the Tate Britain, I went to poetry events, the theatre and to Leake Street tunnel in London. This year I will be starting a Criminal Justice and Criminology BA.

Every person in prison should have these opportunities to learn and to grow. This strategy describes how Prisoners’ Education Trust wants to make this happen.

**Dalton Harrison**

Prisoners’ Education Trust alumnus

# Introduction

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## Welcome to Prisoners' Education Trust's new five-year strategy for 2022-2026.

Since we published our last strategy in 2017 much has changed. Prisoners' Education Trust (PET) has continued to develop and grow. We have modernised the way that we work, taken our first steps into the digital delivery of courses, and recruited a new Chief Executive.

We have also launched a new Advice Line, which has received more than 2,000 calls from people in prison and their families just over a year after its launch. And we have informed and influenced the development of policy on prison education.

All the while we have continued to adhere to our values as an organisation and to deliver on our core mission: to enable people in prison to access education that would not otherwise have been available to them. Overall, PET is an organisation in robust health.

### The impact of coronavirus

This is despite the very challenging circumstances that we have all found ourselves in over the last 18 months, with the coronavirus pandemic affecting every area of our work.

Prisons have been in lockdown, confining people to their cells 23 hours per day and closing education departments, while PET's offices in London and Cardiff have had to temporarily close, with staff adapting seamlessly to the challenges of home working.

That PET has continued to offer an outstanding service in these circumstances – supporting people in prison to participate in distance learning – is a testament to the professionalism and resilience of the entire staff team.

### Looking to the future

While we all hope that the worst of the coronavirus pandemic is now behind us, the implementation of this new strategy will inevitably be affected by its aftermath.

Prisons have taken tentative steps towards recovery, but it will be some time before participation in education returns to pre-pandemic levels. Meanwhile, steps are being taken to improve access to digital technology within the prison estate but progress is slow.

Furthermore, the number of people in prison is expected to grow significantly in the coming years, putting further pressure on the prison estate's limited resources. Maybe most importantly, the coronavirus pandemic and its aftermath will inevitably lead to an extended period of uncertainty, meaning that retaining flexibility will be key to our future success.

### Our new strategy

Despite this challenging context, this new strategy is an ambitious one – setting out a future for PET that builds on our strengths and continues to move the organisation forward.

We will, of course, continue to support people in prison to access distance learning – that is what we were founded to do more than 30 years ago and it remains at the heart of our work.

But to do that in a way that is compatible with our values and our mission and vision we are looking to expand our reach and to ensure that our services are as widely available as possible.

Everyone in prison, wherever they are in the country and whatever their background, should have access to education. PET must do everything we can, including making use of our standing and expertise to influence policy development, to make that happen.

A great deal of work has gone into the development of this strategy and we would like to thank colleagues on the Board of Trustees and in the staff team, our stakeholders, and our learners and alumni for their contributions.

Our learners are at the heart of everything that we do as an organisation, and we look forward to continuing to work with them and on their behalf for the next five years and beyond.



**Elisabeth Davies**  
Chair



**Jon Collins**  
Chief Executive

# About PET

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At PET, we believe that education has the power to change the lives of people in prison, and that everyone should have the chance to study while there.

Working with prisons across England, Wales, the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, we fund courses in levels and subjects that are otherwise unavailable; support people to choose courses and progress with their learning; and champion the life-changing power of education to prisons, policymakers and the public.

We offer over 120 different distance learning courses, from business start-up to creative writing, GCSEs and A-levels, Open University Access modules, and everything in between. We help around 1,500 people each year to start their studies, equipping them with the skills and qualifications to build brighter futures.

## Our vision

Prisoners' lives transformed through learning

## Our mission

Every prisoner a learner, every prison a place to learn

## Our values

All of PET's work is informed by our values:

- We **inspire** hope and aspiration through learning
- We **care** passionately about empowering learners and staff
- We are **tenacious** in making change happen
- We are **inclusive** and promote equality and diversity
- We are **expert** and listen to learners and other experts
- We **collaborate** to achieve more together
- We **celebrate** everyone's successes

For more on our values, please visit:

[www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/about-us/mission-vision-values](http://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/about-us/mission-vision-values)

# PET's aims for 2022-2026

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**PET was founded to provide people in prison with opportunities to access a broader range of educational opportunities than would otherwise be available to them.**

Raising funding and using those funds to support people in prison to access distance learning courses remains at the heart of what we do and we will continue at all times to carry out this important work.

We want to build on this, ensuring that access to PET is inclusive and that as many people in prison as possible have the opportunity to access PET's services. We want to work towards making the learning experiences of people in prison as good as those of learners in the community.

## **To achieve this, over the next five years:**

- 1.** We will extend our reach by seeking out and engaging people in prison who have not yet considered or participated in distance learning.
- 2.** We will extend the support that we provide, to enable learners to access courses that meet their goals and to increase the proportion who complete their courses.
- 3.** We will make use of digital technology to enhance the learning experience for people in prison.
- 4.** We will use PET's standing to influence policy in order to achieve change and realise our vision.

## **To enable us to carry out this work effectively and in line with our values:**

- 5.** We will engage with and involve people with lived experience of prison education, so that PET continues to put the learner at the centre of all that we do.
- 6.** We will put equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of our work, to ensure that fairness is central to everything that we do.
- 7.** We will ensure that PET is a well-run, effective and financially sustainable organisation, built on firm foundations and fit for the future.

These aims will determine our work programme over the next five years and we will judge our success against them.

Over the following pages, we will set out what we will do under each aim to support their achievement.



# 1. We will extend our reach by seeking out and engaging people in prison who have not yet considered or participated in distance learning

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At present, only a small minority of people in prison apply to PET for support in accessing distance learning opportunities.

Meanwhile the number of applications that we receive varies significantly between prisons and our data suggests that some communities and groups may be underrepresented in the applications that we receive and the awards that we give.

## To address this, our priorities will be:

- To develop a robust and comprehensive picture of the people who are applying to PET and those who are successful in their applications, in order to identify groups, communities and prisons who are currently underrepresented.
- To carry out work to better understand why these groups are not currently accessing distance learning and what could be done to address this, including by engaging directly with people who are or have been in prison to understand their experiences and views.
- To develop specific initiatives and activities to increase engagement with those who are not currently accessing distance learning.
- To address structural barriers to engagement with distance learning through our policy and advocacy work.
- To collaborate with HM Prison and Probation Service, prison governors and staff, and other partner organisations to maximise the reach and impact of our work.
- To assess the impact of these initiatives and activities to ensure that they are effective in introducing new learners to distance learning.

## Through this work, by 2026 we will have ensured that:

- We have increased the number of people applying for a distance learning course from groups or communities that are currently underrepresented.
- We have robust data available that allows us to target engagement activities where they are most needed.
- We better understand the diverse needs of people who have not accessed PET support and how to meet those needs.
- PET and our services are more visible in prison and connect with more potential learners.
- We have developed effective partnerships that help us to extend our reach.

## 2. We will extend the support that we provide, to enable learners to access courses that meet their goals and to increase the proportion who complete their courses

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At present, people in prison have limited access to advice on distance learning, while not all learners go on to complete their courses. Those who do complete often lack guidance on what they can do next to continue with their education in prison or after release.

We have recently launched a telephone advice line for people in prison and their families, and continue to offer advice by post and email. We want to develop this area of our work further, supporting more people in prison on their learning journey.

### To address this, our priorities will be:

- ④ To broaden the support that we offer to current and potential learners and promote its availability within prisons and to organisations working with people in prison and their families.
- ④ To develop ways to encourage and support learners who disengage with their course to return to and complete it.
- ④ To carry out work to better understand which learners are not completing courses and why, and take steps to address any identified issues or barriers.
- ④ To develop partnerships to refer learners who complete our courses to organisations that can support them in taking the next steps on their learning journey.

### Through this work, by 2026 we will have ensured that:

- ④ More people in prison have a positive experience of distance learning, making it more likely they will continue to participate in education in the future.
- ④ More learners are able to complete the courses that PET supports them to access.
- ④ We are able to demonstrate the impact that extra support can have on distance learners' outcomes.



### 3. We will make use of digital technology to enhance the learning experience for people in prison

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Face-to-face teaching should always be a key part of the delivery of education in prison. Digital technology and secure access to the internet has the potential to complement this in a range of ways – transforming the provision of education in prison, broadening access, and enabling learners to participate in a wider range of courses.

But access to digital technology and digital educational materials is limited and prison staff do not have the capacity to support people in prison to develop digital skills. People in prison need opportunities now to 'level up' and be better prepared for digital life on release.

#### To address this, our priorities will be:

- ④ To make PET support services available through digital channels alongside our existing channels.
- ④ To enable people in prison to apply to PET digitally for distance learning courses.
- ④ To develop resources and courses that can be delivered through digital channels.
- ④ To work with partners to support the development of a strong digital offering to people in prison.
- ④ To provide a strong voice advocating for the potential of digital technology to support and transform prison education.

#### Through this work, by 2026 we will have ensured that:

- ④ More people in prison are able to access PET services online, creating a quicker and more efficient process for them and for PET.
- ④ PET has provided access to a range of courses for people in prison that can be delivered through digital channels.
- ④ PET has acted as an effective advocate for greater access to digital educational content, digital devices and the internet within the prison system.

## 4. We will use PET's standing to influence policy in order to achieve change and realise our vision

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PET's own experiences as a provider of education to people in prison, and the insight that we gain from our alumni and from our role at the heart of the Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA), means that we are well-placed to inform and influence policy and practice relating to prison education.

This work remains essential. Despite the attention given to prison education in recent years, following Dame Sally Coates' 2016 review, there is still a great deal to do to improve and expand the available provision. While a significant focus on level 2 and below in the provision offered in most establishments reflects the needs of a significant proportion of learners, the curriculum is too narrow. This is very limiting for those who are looking to take further steps on their educational journey.

### To address this, our priorities will be:

- To identify and advocate for clear policy priorities, with the aim of securing changes in legislation, policy and practice that support the delivery of this strategy and our broader mission.
- To use our policy reach and networks to influence the development of the planned Prison Education Service.
- To develop relationships with prison governors and regional or contract managers to ensure our policy recommendations are operationally sound and deliver real change.
- To carry out research in support of our policy priorities to strengthen the case for change.
- To use the media, including social media, to inform and influence key stakeholders.
- To support the development of the Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA) as the leading network of organisations and individuals engaged with prison education, helping to ensure that it is influential in the development of prison education policy and practice.

### Through this work, by 2026 we will have ensured that:

- We are able to identify positive changes in policy and practice that have been influenced by our work.
- The development of the Prison Education Service is in line with our vision for it.
- PET's policy work continues to be supported by robust evidence.
- PET has supported the PLA to achieve its goals in informing prison education priorities, policies and practice.

## About the Prisoner Learning Alliance

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The secretariat to the Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA) is provided by PET. The PLA is a network of organisations and individuals with expertise, experience and an interest in prison education. The network has over 200 members and aims to use its knowledge and expertise to inform prison education priorities, policies and practices. Its work is directed and governed by an independent, elected Steering Committee. To find out more about the PLA, visit:

[www.prisonerlearningalliance.org.uk](http://www.prisonerlearningalliance.org.uk)



## 5. We will engage with and involve people with lived experience of prison education, so that PET continues to put the learner at the centre of all that we do

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The expertise and experience of our alumni have helped us to develop our work and have informed improvements to our ways of working and our policy priorities.

We want to go further by supporting people with lived experience to take a greater role in PET's work, moving from consultation to co-production and ensuring that all opportunities at PET are genuinely open to people with lived experience.

### To address this, our priorities will be:

- To increase the opportunities for people with lived experience to be involved with PET's Alumni Network and alumni Advisory Group.
- To work co-productively to develop our services and our practice.
- To empower alumni to act as advocates for PET within the prison system, supporting our work to extend PET's reach.
- To listen to the experiences and recommendations of people with lived experiences to inform our policy work.
- To support people with lived experience to participate in public and policy debates around prison education, including in the media.
- To provide people with lived experience with opportunities to develop their experience of organisational governance.
- To create specific employment and volunteering opportunities within PET for people with lived experience.
- To continue to develop existing recruitment procedures that have enabled PET to recruit colleagues with lived experience.

### Through this work, by 2026 we will have ensured that:

- The experiences and knowledge of people with lived experience are included in all areas of our work.
- Changes to our service delivery and our policy work have been developed co-productively.
- Opportunities have been created for people with lived experience to work or volunteer for PET.
- We are able to say with confidence that all roles within PET – paid and unpaid – are open and accessible to people with lived experience.
- We are able to develop and share best practice on involving people with lived experience in our work, acting as a positive example to others.

## 6. We will put equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of our work, to ensure that fairness is central to everything that we do

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PET values and celebrates everyone's contributions and sees diversity as a strength, and we have made progress in recent years in making our work inclusive.

We want to go further, doing everything possible to involve and include disadvantaged and marginalised groups in all our work. We want to ensure that everyone – our learners, our partners and our team – can recognise the centrality of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) to PET and our work.

### To address this, our priorities will be:

- To establish which groups or communities are less likely to access our services and address this through our 'extending reach' programme of work (see Aim 1).
- To establish new recruitment policies and procedures that promote a fairer and more inclusive approach.
- To review our communications channels and products from an EDI perspective and make any necessary changes.
- To review PET's internal policies and procedures from an EDI perspective and make any necessary changes.
- To ensure that we are transparent with staff and stakeholders on EDI issues.
- To maintain a culture across PET's Board of Trustees and staff team that recognises the importance of EDI and considers it in all that we do.

### Through this work, by 2026 we will have ensured that:

- We have improved the reach of our services, and in particular ensured that they are accessible to all communities.
- We run recruitment processes that recruit the best people based solely on their aptitude for the role, increasing the diversity of the staff team.
- All members of the staff team are treated fairly, enhancing staff wellbeing, and feel that PET is a fair and inclusive employer.





## 7. We will ensure that PET is a well-run, effective and financially sustainable organisation, built on firm foundations and fit for the future

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PET has developed and grown significantly in recent years and, despite the challenges caused by the coronavirus pandemic, is in robust health.

As we look to build from this position of strength, we need to consider how we can best capitalise on the opportunities available to us and meet current and future challenges – including securing funding for our future plans, recruiting and retaining staff and volunteers, and ensuring that our work is effective and based on a comprehensive understanding of our learners and their needs.

In line with PET's values and the priorities set out elsewhere in this strategy, we will need to ensure that lived experience and EDI are at the heart of this work.

### To address this, our priorities will be:

- To establish clear measures of success for our work.
- To develop our use of data to ensure that we are measuring our outcomes and driving improvements in our service delivery, creating a culture of continuous improvement.
- To refine and embed our new processes for managing applications for distance learning courses.
- To grow and diversify our income base, including increasing income from individual donors.
- To establish a new model of working for staff and volunteers that combines efficiency and flexibility, learning from our experiences of remote working during the pandemic.
- To continue to invest in staff development and wellbeing in order to ensure that the staff team feels valued, supported and able to contribute fully to PET's work.
- To work with volunteers to enable them to make a contribution to PET's work, while also benefitting from the volunteering experience.
- To ensure that the Board of Trustees continues to provide effective governance for the organisation.
- To ensure that PET operates in line with our values in all that we do.

### Through this work, by 2026 we will have ensured that:

- We are able to rely on robust and effective processes that ensure we operate efficiently.
- We base decisions about new or revised services on data derived from our work.
- We can fund PET's programme of work while retaining a prudent level of reserves.
- We work in ways that are efficient and effective while also prioritising staff wellbeing.
- We can be confident that PET's governance is robust and effective.
- We can demonstrate the steps we have taken to ensure that PET operates in line with our values.



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