



Prisoners
Education
Trust

**Prisoner Learning Alliance
Summary of Second Meeting
25th January 2013, Linklaters, London**

The meeting was chaired by Alexandra Marks, Chair of Prisoners Education Trust (PET).

Welcome to new member BTEG

- Mark Blake from Black Training and Enterprise Group (BTEG) was welcomed as a new member of the PLA, as agreed at the inaugural meeting in November

PLA Work Plan Themes

- After the inaugural meeting a one off Task and Finish Group (TFG) met to discuss a work plan for the PLA. To avoid replication, key areas that government departments were working on were identified as areas of work to avoid at this stage (Virtual Campus, learning difficulties and disabilities, distance learning, arts in prison and self-employment support). However it was agreed that in future meetings a section of the agenda will be allocated for feedback and discussion on these areas.
- As such, the TFG recommended three broad areas of work based on what had been discussed in the inaugural meeting, which would constitute three separate Task and Finish Groups. These groups would focus on;
 1. Planning the learning journey effectively through custody and beyond
 2. Developing a learning culture: 'the learning prison'
 3. Why learn in prison? An exploration of the wider benefits of learning for prisoners beyond 'employability'
- It was agreed that Members of the PLA will be allocated to one of the groups (they will fill out a form to state their preference to be returned by 31st January) and meet as a group before the next PLA meeting in April. In April the TFGs will report back on their progress with an outline of their ideas of practical action and possible outcomes.

PLA Work planning

PLA members were divided into three groups and asked to brain storm one work theme each.

1) Planning the learning journey effectively through custody and beyond

- Discussion about what would make a good ‘learner journey’
- Discussion about barriers to a good learner journey.
- Group would like to collect examples of good practice.
- Consultation of all involved, including prisoner learners, prison staff, commercial services and employers, probation - looking for good practice examples in different types of establishments with different populations.
- Following consultation, publish and disseminate guidance on best practice in ILPs and planning the learning journey in custody and beyond, including progression routes.
- Possible pilot project.

2) Developing a learning culture: ‘the learning prison’

- Discussion about what a ‘culture’ of learning in a prison would look like.
- Various reports give suggestions (literature review required).
- Final outcome could be a database of good practice examples across the prison estate, covering all types of prisons and YOIs.
- Formulate standard measures, practices and mechanisms and identifiable outcomes and criteria.
- Drawing up criteria will take place alongside identifying examples of good practice, by working out why examples were suggested.
- Building up the database can go through a three-stage process, first the TFG identifying examples, then the wider PLA doing the same and finally asking contacts taken from others and from examples already identified.

3) Why learn in prison? An exploration of the wider benefits of learning for prisoners beyond ‘employability’

- Describe mechanism. Why broader education has a positive impact on reducing reoffending (RR pathways) and desistance (desistance principles)
- Gather qualitative evidence - case studies from PLA members and others
- Gather quantitative - e.g. Justice Data Lab, evaluations
- Best practice under current structures
- Look at who is missing out when employability is the only focus and why learning is important for these groups too e.g. older prisoners, BME, women with young children, LDLD prisoners, high risk prisoners etc.
- Explore alternative models.

Learner Voice

To ensure that Learner Voice is at the heart of the PLA, a Q&A session was held with a prisoner learner who has been funded by Prisoners Education Trust and Women in Prison to do distance learning, including Open University. She was attending the meeting on ROTL to share her experience of prison education, as well as suggesting improvements and highlighting examples of good practice.

The learner explained before coming to prison she had GCSE's and A-levels and had worked in administration.

A section from one distance learning application she wrote to PET read: *'I have nearly three years to get as many qualifications as I possibly can. I know that having a criminal record will hinder me slightly when I am trying to get employment, but I want to give myself the best chance possible.'*

Some of her comments to the PLA included:

Access to and support for distance learning:

"It was there [her third prison] that I was encouraged to study with the Open University. I applied to Prisoners Education Trust and started an OU Degree in Business and Accounting".

"There are physical barriers to distance learning- I was lucky as I was working in the library, but it was often difficult to travel between work areas in the prison, even just to do word processing".

"There is one person organising distance learning for too many people and she is very overworked. I started to informally help people too, supporting people with their CVs and interview techniques - some of them got jobs as a result. I also encourage them to apply for distance learning as they don't know about it".

"Lots of women have potential to study by distance learning - lack of support means it can take months to get on a distance learning course".

Virtual Campus

"The Virtual Campus is not working at my prison for Open University. The computers are still used for other things and are on one wing that is difficult to access. You literally have to shout through a gate and across a yard to get the attention of an officer who can then let you in to that part of the prison. I had to change one of my OU modules I wanted to do as I couldn't access the virtual campus. I also can't access my OU learning page on the computer even when I'm on ROTL".

Work experience on ROTL

"Women in Prison came to see me and they helped me find a job - so thank you!"

"ROTL is a good scheme but there are only 40 places available for 400 prisoners, so some people are waiting a very long to get a place. We need more resettlement wings so more can go out on ROTL and study and get work experience like I am".

Progression routes

“I have seen some girls who have come from terrible backgrounds, living on the street and have been shocked by how well they got on, doing their literacy and numeracy courses. Often they have wanted to do more but have been pushed back by HMPS, told there is nothing other than basic skills”.

Good practice

“In terms of good practice, there is generally one good person in every prison”.

AOB

A request was made for any information about prisons running graphic design courses so we can ask a prisoner to design a PLA logo.