

**Insights**  
*Report*

**Achieving Positive  
Resettlement  
from Education to  
Employment**

Between 2018 and 2022,  
we made a difference  
to the lives of  
1,001,147 people

We change lives. One  
individual at a time.  
And in the same way, we're  
going to change society.  
We lead the way in creating  
social value

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**This report has been produced in association with the Social Recruitment Advocacy Group,** a network of national employers, local community organisations and third sector specialists who are all committed to driving greater levels of social value recruitment. The mission of the organisation is to open up as many employment opportunities as possible for people who are furthest from the labour market, helping to break down barriers and change recruitment practices and in-work support to drive greater levels of inclusive recruitment. Support for prison leavers is a particular area of focus and we are grateful to have benefited from the expert knowledge and experience of the employers and organisations in our network.

PeoplePlus has over 30 years' experience of supporting people impacted by disadvantage in society through its employability and prison education services.

As the largest private sector provider of Prison Education services in the UK, with more than 500 people working to support those with convictions in custody and in the community as well as delivering Information, Advice and Guidance in over 22 prisons, they are committed to transforming the lives of people with convictions.

Through Employability programmes such as The Restart Scheme they are able to help people with previous convictions to gather valuable employment skills, such as interview training, job-specific training and support to find sustainable employment.

Furthermore, they support people, who are often furthest away from the job market, to become self-employed through starting their own business.



# FOREWORD.

**In 2022, just over 47,000 people were released from prisons at the end of the custodial term of their sentence (MOJ, 2022) with the expectation of integrating back into their communities as productive members of society.**

**Whilst it is true that many factors play a part in a prisoner's journey to positive resettlement, a pathway to employment, and avoidance of re-offending, there can be no doubt that education in prison plays a vital role.**

This report has been commissioned by PeoplePlus, the largest independent provider of training and education in prisons. It draws on their experience as a provider delivering more than two million hours of face-to-face learning each year. The Social Recruitment Advocacy Group, an umbrella group comprising employers, charities and specialist organisations operating within the prison environment has also provided fresh insights. Most importantly, the report was informed by people with lived experience. The report draws heavily on insights from the focus groups we held with people in custody and those individuals who have left custody, including neurodivergent individuals with a range of different learning requirements. We spoke with individuals close to their release date and those who have been out of the criminal justice system for a short period, as well as those who have been out for a much longer time (e.g. 15 or more years).

It would be true to say that the benefits of creating effective pathways that make prison education work harder to achieve resettlement are huge - the cost of reoffending alone is estimated by the Ministry of Justice at some £18bn<sup>1</sup> each year. This is almost as much as the entire £20bn budget of the Government's New Hospital Programme<sup>2</sup> - every year. The potential to contribute positively to the UK economy through productive employment is clearly even greater. Major employers such as Reed Boardall, Suez, Kier Construction, Greggs, Co-op and Iceland are all focused on supporting prison leavers not just because it is a socially responsible thing to do, but because they recognise there is a diverse and rich talent pipeline that they can tap into to drive productivity in their businesses.

That requires prison education to act as an 'enabler', helping to ensure that prison leavers have the qualifications and mindset shifts needed to support them on their journey into sustained employment when they leave custody. Dame Sally Coates, who led an independent review of prison education for the Government in 2016<sup>3</sup>, has previously said of her recommendations that very few have been carried out in full but some in part<sup>4</sup>. Yet the prize for doing so is substantial in terms of reduced rates of reoffending and the impact on skills shortages that are currently impacting the UK's economic recovery.

Our report considers these issues and the extent to which changes in the prisoner learner journey can improve education to employment outcomes. Importantly, it explores how work-focused skills, training, and employment delivered in prison together with functional skills, are fundamental to a successful transition into the community on release.

As part of this picture, the report also highlights the significant challenges faced by people with additional learning needs such as those with learning disabilities or difficulties, neurodivergent individuals and prisoners who are managing mental health challenges. These learners often struggle to engage in formal classroom settings but can flourish when they have accessible learning which is embedded learning through vocational training courses.

It sounds obvious to say it, but supporting people into work must be accompanied by stability in their lives - somewhere to live, access to financial support or benefits, and on-going support both in the community and workplace. The report also identifies how this phase can unravel good progress achieved in prison, if not properly executed.

The potential to contribute positively to the UK economy through productive employment is clearly even greater. With significant skills shortages across many industries in the UK, the prison population is recognised by an increasing number of employers as a valuable source of talent, with innovative training programmes beginning in prison.

We would like to say a special thank you to Marie Claire O'Brien from New Leaf CIC and Chris Leslie from EOS CIC for running the focus groups with such professionalism and expertise and of course, for their advice and counsel - it has been invaluable.

We would like also to thank those organisations that contributed to our online panel discussion. Special thanks go to employer representatives from Reed Boardall and Suez and to expert organisations including Genius Within, Prison Education Trust, Kinetic Youth, the Prison Advice and Care Trust and BEAM - an organisation which does great work to support those at risk of homelessness.

I do hope you find this report provides useful insights as to how and where all parties can work together to achieve greater results of resettlement and employment.

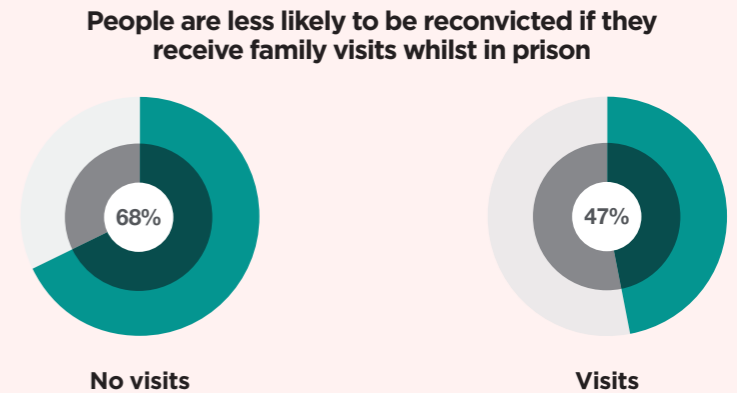


**Rt Hon Anne Milton**  
Former Skills Minister and Chair of Social Recruitment Advocacy Group

## Some factors affecting reconviction

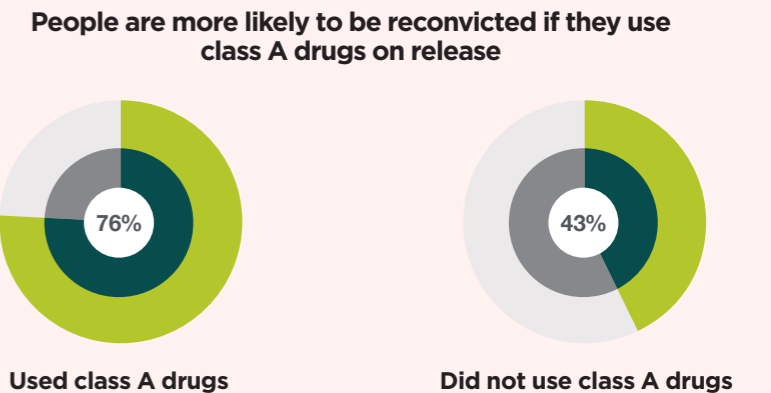
**69%**

of prisoners said they had received visits from family whilst in prison



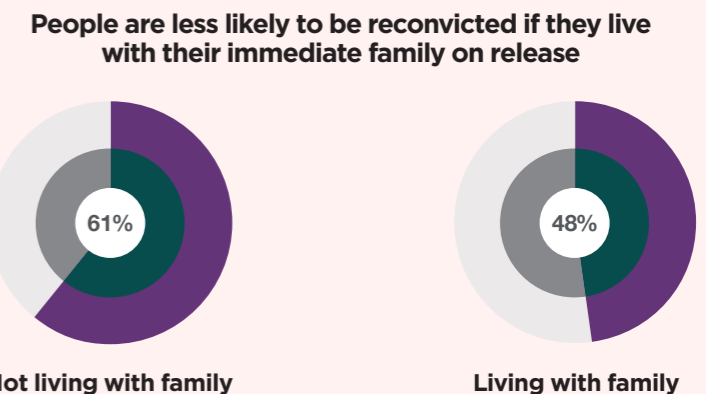
**1 in 3**

said they had used class A drugs since leaving custody



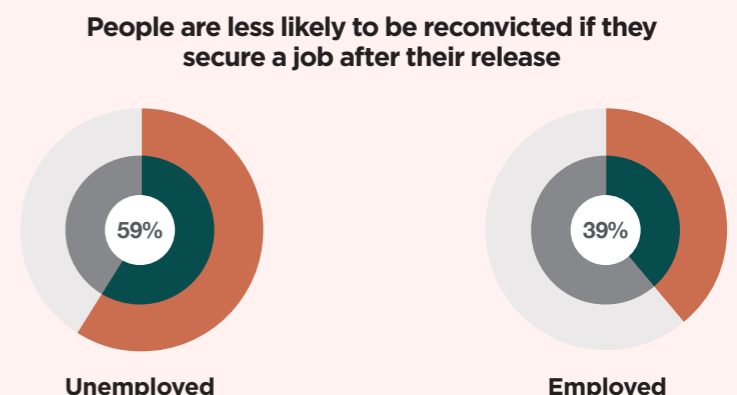
**57%**

said they were living with their immediate family on release



**28%**

of prisoners had been in employment the year after custody



<sup>1</sup> Economic and social costs of reoffending Analytical report, Ministry of Justice Analytical Series 2019  
<sup>2</sup> New Hospital Programme - media fact sheet, Department of Health and Social Care May 2023  
<sup>3</sup> 'Unlocking potential: a review of education in prison', Independent Report, Dame Sally Coates Ministry of Justice 2016  
<sup>4</sup> Education Committee Oral evidence: Prison Education, April 2021

Source: <https://prisonreformtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/January-2023-Bromley-Briefings.pdf>

# CHAPTER 1. ENTERING THE PRISON EDUCATION SYSTEM

“**The aim for every prisoner should be to improve their levels of numeracy, literacy, training and qualifications during the course of their sentence, with a tailored plan developed from entry into prison.**” Prisons Strategy White Paper, December 2021.

**Engagement with education can significantly reduce reoffending<sup>v</sup>. However, the number of people taking part in prison education and the number of people achieving qualifications, while it has made some recovery post COVID, remains lower than it was a decade ago.**

This is despite recent and renewed focus by Government to: increase the use of release on temporary licence (ROTL); give governors powers to commission education, expand vocational training opportunities and improve employment outcomes on release.



The reasons for this are manifold and include significant numbers of prisoners with negative experiences of mainstream education throughout childhood; prisoners who have a limited belief in the potential of learning and the fact that prison education is often paid at a lower rate than unskilled prison work<sup>vi</sup> thus being less attractive to prisoners than education per se.

Successful education to employment is often determined by the very first days the prisoner enters the system. That experience will have lasting impact on their likelihood to engage in education in prison and will impact the likelihood of a successful resettlement.

During our focus group research, we explored the early stage of the learner journey and factors affecting take up and integration into prison education.

**Effective early-stage assessments for prisoners**

On entering prison - or transferring from one prison to another - prisoners are typically assessed and screened within five days of arrival. The results inform the plan throughout the prisoner’s stay.

It is widely recognised by justice experts that an initial assessment to establish basic needs is necessary because it ensures that prisoners have an understanding of what the next steps are. However, our research indicated that early assessments, when carried out too close to arrival, can provide misleading results because the prisoner is undergoing a profound period of adjustment to their new circumstances.

“**I was crying the whole way through my induction just because I was shell-shocked.**”  
Female (left prison 3 years ago)

Whilst it is possible for prisoners to adjust their plans, this is usually the exception rather than the rule.

One of our expert organisations, BEAM (*Homeless Social Enterprise*) suggests that assessments could incorporate discussions with someone who has lived experience to help prisoners open up about their concerns and aspirations.

Our focus groups highlighted how unsettled and traumatised many new prisoners felt during those first few days. Expert organisations from our online panel suggested that those first assessments should be subjective discussions to ask about people’s feelings towards different subjects but followed up with more detailed discussions as part of a phased induction. It was also noted that regular learning assessments through from pre-sentence to licence conditions would help foster a sense of education as part of developing a growth mindset.

Evidence from our prison education delivery, backed up by the testimonies from focus group participants, suggests that successful assessments occur when the circumstances of the individual are fully understood. Taking a ‘360’ view of additional needs, personal circumstances and time spent identifying vocational aspirations through effective Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) to understand their ambitions for the future plays a significant role in improving the individual’s motivation to remain in education.

Transfer and re-assessment were also frequently referred to as factors that needed consideration to ensure coherent education.

These interventions were quoted during our focus groups as factors which can often disrupt a course or qualification, or in some cases, end the aim of achieving a qualification which a prisoner had already begun pursuing.

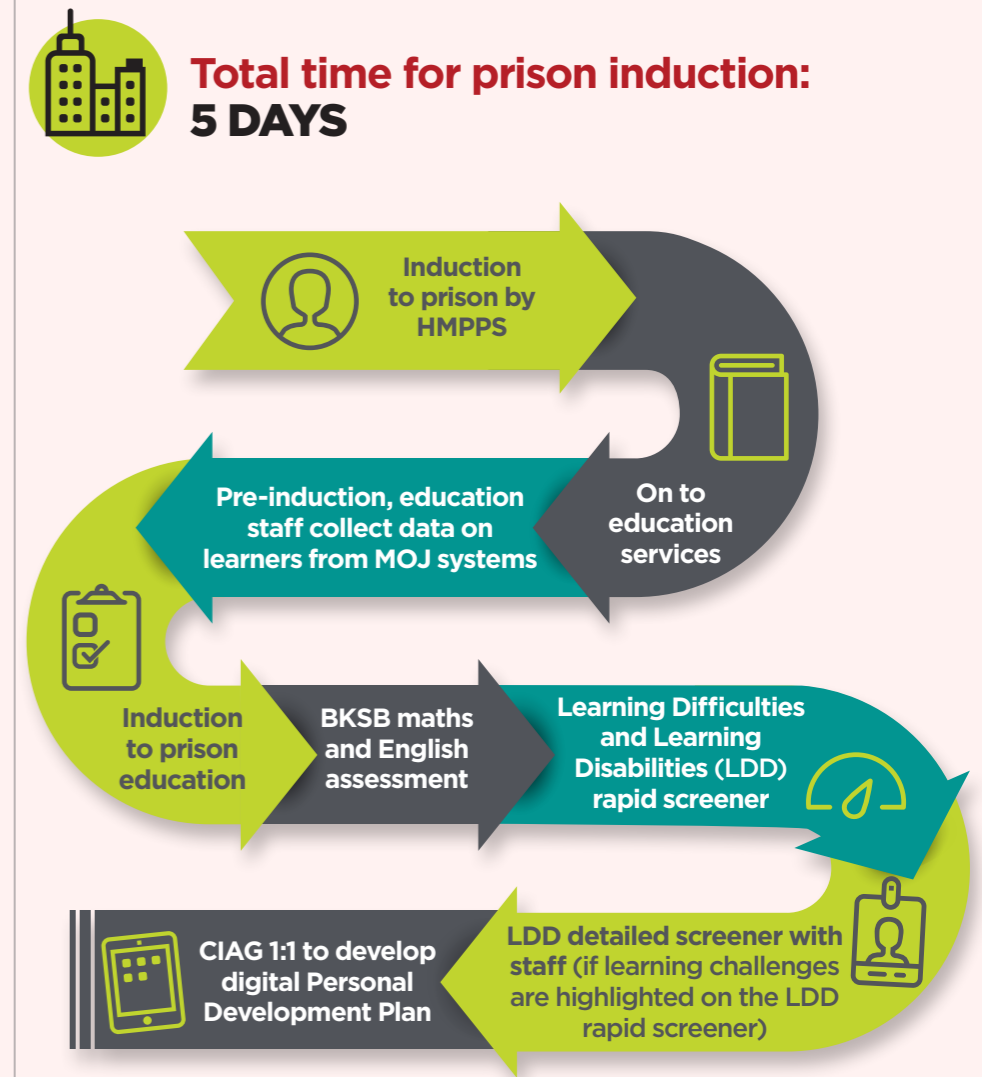
**Addressing low confidence and previous low educational attainment**

Around half of those within the criminal justice system have no qualifications - compared to 15% of working age population. About 42% have been expelled or permanently excluded from school (32% for women, 43% for men) - compared to about 1% in the general population<sup>vii</sup>.

Conventional school systems have historically failed many in the criminal justice system, leading to pathways into crime, substance misuse and mental health issues.

It is estimated that around half of people in prison have either diagnosed or undiagnosed neurodiversity or other learning needs (including learning disabilities and difficulties, acquired brain injuries, ADHD and autism).

Sarah Jones, Head of Neurodiversity and functional skills has noted that “There is a cohort that would never admit they can’t read or write. Guys that in their 50s who learned to read in prison. We’ve made significant changes to enable neurodivergent learners in our prison education teams to realise anything is possible, to instil a sense of belief in themselves”.



<sup>v</sup> Exploring the outcomes of prisoner learners: analysis of linked offender records from the Police National Computer and Individualised Learner Records, Ministry of Justice and Department for Education, July 2017.  
<sup>vi</sup> “Not just another brick in the wall: why prisoners need an education to climb the ladder of opportunity” House of Commons Education Committee, 2022

<sup>vii</sup> Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile, Prison Reform Trust, January 2023



For prisoners with little or no experience of a formal school environment, the very prospect of the “classroom” is enough to repel them from prison education.

**“I’d never been to school. I suffer anxiety and I can’t cope with that many people, the noise. What changed for me in prison was the tutor showed me respect and took the time to work out a way I could learn. That, with support of the prison peer mentors, made all the difference. My main reason for doing this is so I can help my kids with their homework when I get out”**

**Female  
(currently in prison)**

The importance of tutors who put learners at ease and adapting styles of teaching is also a factor that can significantly enhance learner engagement. Many of our focus group participants highlighted kinaesthetic learning as something that was helpful to them – lessons that include an element of physical activity or use of their senses to help them learn. Adapting learning styles has been shown by the Butler Trust to be particularly helpful for prisoners who have additional learning needs such as learning disabilities, brain injuries or additional learning needs such as dyslexia.

A prisoner in his mid-twenties from a male establishment talked about how his tutor had helped him feel ‘human again’ simply by taking the time to help him read and how that tutor felt like the most positive influence he had ever had in his life. A tutor that has versatile skills and can relate and inspire learners with little or no classroom education can be transformational.

Importantly, this learning style is also helpful for developing functional skills, vocational training and work experience that follows chosen career pathways. It can unlock a passion for education that has previously remained dormant by conventional schooling.

The Clink Charity provides a great example of this. Working in partnership with the Prison & Probation Service, it delivers 36 training projects: 3 restaurants, 2 gardens, 1 event catering business, 1 bakery and 29 prison kitchens. All projects use an integrated programme to ensure that students

receive the support they need, not only while they are in prison but also post-release.

“Skills and training – where students feel that they are being practical and doing something – succeed. We teach in three stages: ‘Show’, ‘Do With’, and then the learner ‘Demonstrates’ to the tutor what they have learned. English and maths are coached with recipes or horticulture techniques.” Yvonne Thomas, Chief Executive, The Clink Charity.

This approach can work well for people who are neurodivergent who can access embedded learning through a vocational training course, for example, instead of sitting in a classroom all day, struggling to process information and engage.

**HMP Lincoln Berties Restaurant**  
A new training restaurant has opened as a result of a partnership between PeoplePlus, celebrity chef Fred Sirieix’s charity, The Right Course, and the Ministry of Justice. ‘Berties’ is the first prison restaurant where prisoners will be both staff and customers. The restaurant will also be serving food to prisoners and their families during visiting time – allowing full families to sit down together in a relaxed setting and have a proper meal across the table from one another.

PeoplePlus provides training so that the men receive City & Guilds Level 2 Diploma in catering and hospitality along with front-of-house qualifications including barista training.



HMP Lincoln



Berties Restaurant



Chief Celebrity  
Fred Sirieix

#### Creating a suitable learning environment

The physical classroom itself can be a barrier to education. Prison classrooms have been described by those who faced challenging educational experiences at a younger age as ‘uninspiring and intimidating’.

For a very significant proportion of the prison population, a classroom represents failure and a negative experience. Asking prisoners to willingly return to that experience is often met with a sense of fear, rejection or resentment.

By redesigning educational spaces to replicate a workplace or perhaps by creating skills centres where the focus is purely on developing relevant skills for the workplace, the ‘school’ stigma would be replaced with a more positive association.

Our focus group found that this was particularly true of people with low attainment in conventional schools.

#### Motivations and disincentives

Prisoners are acutely aware that if they pursue education – it could impact the ability to earn through prison industries. Yet, achieving qualifications (for example English, maths and food hygiene) is an essential step for those pursuing the goal of transferring to an open prison. This motivation was cited frequently as the prime rationale for being in class and more could be made of this ambition when prisoners have initial induction conversations about their prison stay and future life.

The availability of work paid at a higher rate than education can be a significant disincentive to advance in education. Lower income prisoners who might benefit the most from prison education are usually those intent on maximising prison-based income because they lack access to resources from outside prison. These factors and others – such as peer pressure to disengage with education – can have a significant influence over how prisoners are going to use their time.

**“I didn’t do well in my assessments, so I must do maths again. I am a grown man and I want to work. I don’t mind doing the maths but I need to work to earn money - why can’t I do it at the same time. You just don’t get to make any choices for yourself.”**  
**Male, currently in prison.**

Another factor which could enhance take up of prison education is to give governors a greater ability to focus on a wider objective of ‘purposeful activity’. Here, it may be helpful to consider whether a broader performance metric that emphasises



“**I don't know how I would have coped without prison education.**”  
(Female prisoner left custody 25 years ago)

‘purposeful activity’ in its entirety (e.g. education and prison industries) might result in an increased focus on education within the prison establishment.

**Education leading to self-actualisation prepares leavers for resettlement.**

Finding a sense of meaning through personal development from education, work and training, is important to prisoners and regarded both as a way of regaining a sense of self-esteem within prison, as well as preparation for a future after release.

The Coates Review of 2016<sup>viii</sup> highlighted the importance of the educational experience leading to greater self-awareness and the ability to cope with life in and out of prison. Together with recognised qualifications Dame Sally Coates notes that it would deliver successful resettlement for the prisoner on release. This theme was picked up in our focus groups in the community where individuals spoke about feeling ‘valued’ and feeling more confident about themselves in general.

**“I was advancing my own education, helping my self-development and creating self-actualisation. That was very important for me, especially because I was on a long sentence as a young black man.”**  
Male (left prison 30 years ago)

As The Coates Review has highlighted, education is often cited by prison leavers as an empowering process that goes far beyond the original intention of rehabilitation. Throughout the focus groups we hosted, prisoners in custody talked of how they often felt ‘dehumanised’ and ‘shamed’ when they enter prison having committed offences. They talked about how the education system was ‘very enabling’ in helping them gain a sense of themselves again. This has also been borne out by the work of Chris Leslie at EOS CIC who holds black history sessions in prisons. Chris highlights the importance of teaching young men about their culture, saying “I think that’s something that could be further enhanced.”

The Prison Advice and Care Trust has also highlighted the fact that older prisoners are important – and that self-learning for personal growth is the most important factor rather than employment options.

Engagement in education, especially among the minority communities which are overrepresented in prison, can provide a critical lens for understanding their situation and increase their chances of successful resettlement on release.



## Conclusions



**It would be difficult to overstate the importance of sustained employment and resettlement as a means of reducing reoffending rates and helping individuals turn their lives around.** Education plays a key role in that, given that many people who end up in custody have low educational attainment levels.

The first few days of entering custody play a critical role in whether prisoners take up educational opportunities or not. Whilst it is important that an initial assessment is conducted early in the process, we do believe that this, followed by a phased induction where staff can get to know the prisoners’ issues and motivations, would help to drive greater levels of engagement with education.

**Education is a powerful tool for prisoners** – not only in terms of building knowledge but it helps them reconnect with their sense of self and gain a purposeful sense of ambition to move forward – whether that is to better their own lives, to make a difference for their families or to work hard to reduce their stay and move towards the goal of open prison. By shifting incentives and encouraging a greater focus on education through performance metrics that measure purposeful activity, we can help to shift the balance of incentives towards greater participation in education.

## CHAPTER 2. ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF GOOD EDUCATION IN PRISON

“**Education to Employment (ETE) opens doors to help [prison leavers] make new choices in the community and it builds hope for the future. It allows the possibility of a new identity as a student, as an employee, as a business owner. Ultimately it provides them with the confidence and tools to make a positive contribution on release from prison.**”

Jane Dominey, University of Cambridge

**Prisons are inspected against the same framework as other education provision. However, delivering education in prison presents unique challenges as the prison population houses some of the most ‘educationally disadvantaged individuals in society’. The Shannon Trust has highlighted that over 50% of individuals in prison are functionally illiterate – that is they have a reading age of 11 or below.**

The experience with illiteracy can affect a span of generations and causes more people in society to become “functionally illiterate” – so the impact of driving greater levels of literacy for those in custody not only supports those currently in custody, but it can also go a long way to support intergenerational equity.

Literacy is well known to be an important factor in social mobility. A study by the World Literacy Foundation focused on the importance of tackling adult illiteracy “Education is one of the linchpins of how literate practices can be passed on. For example, when illiterate adults take the step to improve their own literacy skills, it has a net positive effect on their children. These newly learning adults can help their children with homework, encourage enthusiasm in the learning process, and communicate effectively with teachers.”

Tackling literacy rates through prison education does require work within the procedures and protocols of the estate, governing movement, staffing schedules and the availability of resources, such as access to learning linked technology.

Literacy strategies must also recognise the distinct educational needs of an adult population that typically has a much lower level of experience and attainment than a school or Further Education establishment and one whose members typically have poor learning experiences and will require different approaches to motivate and engage with learning – particularly as many adults are reluctant to admit that they cannot read.

One example of innovation is the Reading for Dads programme run by Storybook Dads which encourages prisoners who are parents to build their reading skills and then record a bedtime story for their children. The project helps 5,000 prisoners every year. Stories are recorded and edited to remove mistakes and background noise, then a DVD or CD is sent to the children.

**“Our daughter was absolutely over the moon. She has just started school and after hearing her Dad she went to school happy, no tears and feeling loved. She even recited his message.”**

Prison education also needs to offer meaningful, coherent learning experiences if prisoners are to consider them relevant – especially if better paid alternatives in prison work are on offer. Peer pressure can also play a factor – particularly but not exclusively among men - where education is viewed with as a sign of weakness or compliance.

Our focus groups highlighted a real chance to make use of different learning opportunities during the evenings and weekends. Prisoners often felt these times were difficult and challenging and they highlighted the importance of library services to help pass the time. In our focus groups, several participants highlighted the importance of services such as in-cell TV to support ‘bitesize’ learning. Ensuring this is consistent across the prison estate is an important factor to consider, particularly when considering the need to maintain education during more challenging periods, such as wing lockdowns, when prisoners are unable to access learning activities.

The Government’s response to the Prisons Strategy White Paper identified that officers should receive additional training to ensure that they understand the importance of education in supporting prisoners to find employment and reducing reoffending, so they develop a positive attitude towards the role that education must play in prisons.

This would be a much needed and positive step to enhance the focus on education as purposeful activity.

<sup>viii</sup> ‘Unlocking potential: a review of education in prison’, Independent Report, Dame Sally Coates Ministry of Justice 2016.



“**Ultimately, the purpose is to get people into careers of their choosing. The practical way to resolve this is working closer with industry, looking ahead for courses that can fill employment gaps.**” Marie-Claire O’Brian, New Leaf CIC

#### Meaningful, coherent learning

There is clear appetite among prisoners for meaningful pathways to employment – starting off with the vision they have for their learning and employment on release with a clear route map to help them get there.

Projects like ‘The Clink Restaurant’ combine education and work and help build that coherent pathway “We interview prisoners for ‘a job with training’, so barriers to entry are lower than the classroom. It is skills with qualifications NVQ1 and 2 in Professional Cookery acquired in prison employment. For example, prisoners progress to work in the kitchens and our event catering business.” Yvonne Thomas, Chief Executive, The Clink Charity.

This is certainly an approach that PeoplePlus has adopted in its own curriculum. Sarah Jones, Head of Neurodiversity and Functional Skills, PeoplePlus highlights the fact that we use a person-centred approach, particularly with our neurodivergent learners who need extra support “some need the practical element - relatable and contextualised to the outside world. So, if you were talking about maths, it’s ratios relatable to a job, for example the construction industry the context could be cement making, so making the functional qualifications relatable to real life situations.”

Creative courses offer another way to boost motivation and stimulate interest in education. They also help learners build transferable skills that can then help them move into courses that are linked to their employment or educational ambitions.

The PeoplePlus partnership with Synergy Theatre Project at HMP The Mount has this ethos at its heart. The project offered play writing courses and acting courses over ten weeks, with the script writing courses culminating in each participant’s work being performed by professional actors at the end of the course. The company then performs the best work at The Royal Court Theatre in London.

Emma Yorke, Director of Justice at PeoplePlus emphasises the impact of this **‘many participants have never written anything like a play and the sense of pride and achievement that they feel at the end is incredibly emotive.’**

A number of female prisoners in our focus groups emphasised a desire to see a greater focus on basic DIY courses and car mechanics as things that would help on release rather than the traditional ‘female’ courses such as hair, beauty and hospitality.

#### Education for the individual

For many prisoners, education succeeds or fails on their relationship with the tutor. Good tutors were described as having strong communication skills, treating people with respect and having good listening skills. They were non-judgemental, effective at differentiating between learners’ abilities, patient and passionate about education.

“**Our tutor is brilliant, He’s the reason I’m doing my maths and**

**English still. He tries different ways to help me learn, and no one ever did that before, ever. He shows us respect and has really built my confidence.”**  
Female, currently in prison.

“**Being treated with respect is important and tutors do that here. At school, I didn’t want to learn and didn’t want to engage. Now, I feel more ready to get my head down and learn. I feel like I’ve got a future.”**  
Male, currently in prison.

Peer prisoner support also plays a vital role and can be transformational. Through our research, we found peer groups comprised of a variety of ages, life skills and backgrounds who were able to provide motivation and practical help to other prisoners. On one occasion, a former teacher worked with another male prisoner, encouraging him to keep up reading activities.



“We keep each other going. When you feel you’re failing, they pick you up and drive you on. We’ve all got different strengths and weaknesses and past experiences that can be passed on – some better at maths, some at English – some with no education. We work together to find way of learning that work for each of us.” **Male prisoner, in custody**

New prison designs mean that vulnerable prisoner wings will be eliminated, with prisoners blended. So, vulnerable prisoners will soon be offered the same education opportunities as mainstream prisoners which has not previously been the case.

#### One recent ex-prisoner said:

“I did every education programme available to me within the twenty months that I was in there. None of them led to a job. Because I was a vulnerable prisoner, we couldn’t do a CSCS card, joinery, bricklaying - anything that would have been useful for getting a job upon release.”

#### Mental health

Unidentified mental health challenges can be a significant barrier to engagement in education. Most prisoners experience more than one mental health vulnerability. Some estimates suggest that 70% of prisoners meet the criteria for two or more diagnoses.

Better mental health can be correlated with completed education: higher levels of education are thought to not only enhance people’s skills but also empower better coping mechanisms, all of which lead to better mental health.

An individual’s chances of employment increase, and it can provide wellbeing benefits, such as a sense of purpose. This was picked up particularly in our community focus groups where participants highlighted how addressing mental health issues and resilience was key to ensuring they could complete education and get a job.

#### Supporting learning disabilities, autism, ADHD, brain injuries

Neurodivergent individuals will face additional challenges in prison. Traditionally this has meant that programmes have struggled to support them in a way that helps them understand and manage their behaviours to reduce the risk of reoffending. Inspectors surveying prison and probation staff found a need for greater awareness, understanding and confidence relating to **neurodiversity**<sup>16</sup>. Neurodiversity specialists Genius Within have suggested that current research indicates around 70% of individuals in custody are likely to be neurodivergent. They highlight the fact some of the learning challenges will be worsened because of the stressful environment in custody so managing their wellbeing is critical. Given the high proportion of neurodivergent prisoners, HMPPS has now recruited neurodiversity support managers for each prison. “That’s a great step in the right direction.” Sarah Jones, Head of Neurodiversity and Functional Skills, PeoplePlus.

“For an individual who’s got a profound sensory need, who has never stepped foot in education, the whole experience is overwhelming.”

In addition to having trained staff who understand neurodiversity, it is important to provide educational support for someone who is neurodivergent and who may be facing sensory overwhelm. Working out how to be flexible for those individuals in the learning environment, for example giving them extra processing time or different ways of learning and processing information, as well as access to assistive technologies and reasonable adjustments (such as learning breaks) will transform the experiences of neurodivergent learners in prison.

#### Conclusions



**Finding new and innovative ways to tackle illiteracy is important.** Often shame and embarrassment can prevent adult learners from taking action to improve their reading. Reading programmes in prison, focus days on dyslexia for example, help create an open attitude to boost literacy levels and address the intergenerational impacts of low literacy rates.

Engagement with education is also boosted when different teaching styles are applied – for example learning with practical activities that help learners focus and engage.

**Finally,** education in prison must cater for diverse circumstances. The dedicated, specialist resource introduced by HMPPS to support neurodivergent learners is a particularly important step forward to achieving this.

<sup>16</sup> Neurodiversity in the criminal justice system, HM Inspectorate of Prisons Criminal Justice Joint Inspection (2021)



## CHAPTER 3.

# HOW THE RIGHT EDUCATION PREPARES A PATHWAY TO WORK

“A third of businesses state that they are unable to address skills gaps in their workforce, according to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). Thinking outside the box about recruitment and exploring new talent pools can help overcome such challenges.” **New Futures Network**

“Getting education right will not, on its own, fix the problem of getting prisoners jobs on release. Prisons will be set up to enable and incentivise good employment outcomes by strengthening the link between local employers and identifying candidates with the right skills in prison.”

‘Not just another brick in the wall: why prisoners need an education to climb the ladder of opportunity’ – **UK Parliament, Education Committee, 2022**

For prisoners: education, work and training opportunities need to co-exist with their journey through the criminal justice system – from entrance, assessment and serving their sentence, through to their transfer(s) within the prison estate during sentence, preparation for resettlement and ultimately their release.

Where prisoners are equipped to enter the workplace, e.g. they have secured accommodation, have a bank account in place and support from friends and family, they stand a far better chance of successful resettlement into the community. This is imperative because many prisoners have limited education and

work experience prior to entering prison, which makes it difficult for them to secure employment after they are released.

For many prison leavers, a criminal conviction is a barrier to leading a law-abiding life on release. However, with skills shortages across many industries in the UK, particularly in, construction, and accommodation and food services, the prison population is recognised by an increasing number of employers as a valuable source of talent. We need to focus our efforts on helping employers recruit from the prison leaver cohort and help them understand how best to support them in the work environment.



“In prison the work, laundry, kitchen work, etcetera, is all done by prisoners – they are already employees in their own right.” **Chris Leslie EOS CIC**

### Employer Partnerships to address skills gaps

Pathways to work and successful resettlement are built on education, work and training delivered in prisons that meet the skills gaps of the local job markets. This works best when businesses work in partnership with prisons to provide work and employment opportunities for prison leavers. Broadening and diversifying the future curriculum offer will enhance this further.

The prisoners we spoke to during our focus groups expressed real desire to pursue vocational and academic development that could lead to new opportunities.

“I wanted to do an Open University degree but was on remand for 18 months so couldn’t start ‘til I was sentenced. I’m now well into it and will continue the studies on release. That’s already led to the offer of a research job in a university department.” **Female, currently in prison.**

“School wasn’t great for me. Teachers just thought I was out to create problems. I know I can do better than this and that’s why practical skills are more important to me. I’m getting paid and learning at the same time.” **Male, currently in prison.**

This extends to partnerships with colleges and universities too. PeoplePlus is currently working on a pilot project with the University of East Anglia. The Crito Project is supporting prisoners to gain higher level qualifications in philosophy and humanities whilst in custody. This is particularly relevant for learners in custody who are ready to move into advanced education or learners serving longer custodial sentences.

### Contextualised learning and relevant skills

Our focus groups highlighted that many prisoners want vocational or practical educational experiences that provide them with a clear pathway. Partnerships with employers are a particularly important aspect of this, particularly given that many businesses are focusing on addressing sector skills shortages.

Construction, accommodation and food services had particularly high levels of worker shortages in March 2023<sup>xxx</sup>. However, we are seeing a rapid emerging demand for skills in “green and clean tech” as the UK invests in climate change mitigation and resilience.

### HMP Ranby Course

Prisoners are benefitting from improved learning facilities and construction training opportunities through a partnership between Kier Construction and PeoplePlus. Kier has resurfaced their 900sq m prison yard and learners undertake a twelve-week construction course covering health and safety, street works, manual handling, working at height and abrasive wheels training. **The training delivered also includes modules to support wellbeing.**

Linking to these future markets provides a further opportunity for prison curriculums to connect directly to emerging market skills needs. For prison education, this will also mean addressing digital inclusion, to give prisoners that same digital literacy as others, so they can better compete for employment.

Apprenticeships, available to prisoners since September 2022, combine work and learning as a key route to employment and rehabilitation and link prison activity to real job opportunities. ROTL is an effective rehabilitation tool and can provide an opportunity for prisoners undertaking apprenticeships to gain experience in the workplace whilst they are serving their sentence.



“**I didn't find the teaching relevant or interesting – more advanced courses provided by the Open University were only done by those on longer sentences. There were not many options for those who already had good qualifications.**”

Female (left prison 6 years ago)

#### Motivating themes - building confidence and self esteem

Combining functional skills into employment training using motivating themes – such as family support or job progression in a chosen employment sector is proving very successful for cohorts of prisoners that are hard to engage. Successful examples include animal welfare and horticulture.

For example, in HMYOI Werrington, PeoplePlus is working with its partner *Restart Dogs*. Within this project, assistance dogs in training go into prison to meet prisoners. The puppies receive the basic obedience training from the young people for 10 months until they are ready to go on to their next phase of their training and assessments with Autism Dogs CIC. The prisoners achieve an industry-standard Canine First Aid qualification, necessary to work with animals in employment. The project is also proven to build their emotional intelligence and empathy skills.



#### Co-existence within the criminal justice system

Being in prison means the prisoners' sentence obligations and their learning plans need to be streamlined. Probation, medical, legal appointments and other sentence obligations can all interrupt the prisoners' learning opportunities with a knock-on effect on their qualifications and attainment. Flexible and portable learning can offer a solution to enable them to continue their qualification(s) where and when they are moved.

#### Progression within the prison education system and through the gate

Some prisoners would benefit from completing a higher education course. Not only is this a productive way to spend time in prison but it can help alleviate boredom and increase employability. But there are barriers to this such as student finance and transfer within the prison estate disrupting learning.

The opportunity to move into education 'through the gate' is also seen as a benefit to prison leavers, taking the education received during the custodial part of their sentence and continuing it under ROTL.

#### Conclusions



**Vocational courses linked to skills gaps in the labour market are a key part of the education offered in prison to prepare people for employment opportunities on release.** Partnerships with employers and specialist organisations which link into the educational provision are providing new ways to engage prisoners and encourage participation in learning.

There are institutional challenges that need to be worked around including the need to minimise, where possible, disruption to education through appointments and sentence obligations. These can have a significant impact on those learners who start but do not finish qualification. Better continuity could be supported through flexible and portable learning solutions – such as in-cell technology.

## Wayout TV

**Wayout TV is our unique prison-only TV channel designed to support rehabilitation by providing prisoners with valuable resources that foster a positive environment for them to grow, learn, and prepare for a better future.**

**“I feel this channel really helps me get through my sentence by keeping me up to date, informed and inspired.”**  
John HMP Stocken



The channel promotes education through bespoke bite-sized learning on topics such as English, Maths, self-employment, hairdressing and DIY. It is particularly accessible for reluctant learners, those lacking the confidence to engage in education and those who prefer to learn at their own pace.

The bitesize learning programmes are complemented by broadcast content which supports wellbeing. This includes exercise and workouts, yoga, mindfulness and faith-based programming all of which helps to encourage prison learners to focus on their overall self-development.

Wayout TV also facilitates direct communication between prison Governors, management teams, and prisoners, enabling instant messaging right in the cells, keeping everyone up to date with important announcements and information.

**“The exercise work outs are really making a huge difference to how I feel and cope with day-to-day life. It helps me feel connected to what's going on keeps me balanced, particularly on those low days.”**  
Alan HMP Wayland





# CHAPTER 4.

## PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL TRANSFER TO RESETTLEMENT

**In 2022, the proportion of prison leavers finding work within six weeks of release was 13%, with 20% in work after six months\*.**

Prison leavers who secure employment are far less likely to reoffend - ex-offenders who get a job after prison are up to nine percentage points less likely to reoffend. This protects victims from the cycle of reoffending and transforms the prospects of prison leavers.

PeoplePlus has been working through its Social Recruitment Framework (SRF) to encourage clear pathways from education to employment. The SRF identifies employer need, undertakes pre-employment training with candidates so they are 'job ready' and importantly, it helps to match up national employer need with candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds right across the UK. For prison leavers undertaking education this is a vital element in the pathway - linking education and pre-employment training to genuine job opportunities right across the UK.

One of the key factors in the success of prisoners taking up job offers is the extent to which it is possible to minimise the length of time from release to job start. The recruitment team at Suez highlights the ability to interview and on-board individuals in custody as a factor that makes a significant difference in terms of setting a prison leaver up for success. They also point to in-work support as being vital, a point echoed by New Futures Network.

**“Having the right in-work support is vital. We’ve been recruiting from prison leavers for a long time and over that time we’ve learnt a lot and adapted. For example, if they are relocating out of their normal area, do they have those personal networks and connections that they can lean into? Often, they also need help with basic life skills, such as time management, how to communicate with colleagues that sort of thing.”**

**Matthew Farrington,  
Suez**

Individual achievements through education and training gained in prison must be matched by a refocus on aligning the core requirements that need to be addressed on release. According to a former probation employee, small but hugely important things get forgotten.

“People will have 48 hours left and their application for housing hasn’t been completed. And then there’s a huge panic and it often ends up being a department within the prison that are not responsible for it which picks it up because they don’t want to see somebody going out without somewhere to sleep the first night.”  
Probation Officer, West Midlands.

Offender Management in Custody Model (OMiC) was implemented in 2018 to coordinate an individual’s journey through custody and into the community. This is a welcome change because when prisoners have the basics they fair better in terms of integration back into the community.

### Through the gate

‘Through the Gate’ services are a complex and intricate patchwork of processes that involve multiple agencies and service providers, and the support of family and friends to aid a prison leaver in the community. If everything works, the prisoner can begin a positive journey to resettlement. But if accommodation, financial support, health or addiction support and employment offers fail to materialise, then the successful resettlement is placed at risk. Some organisations - such as New Leaf CIC and EOS CIC provide mentoring for prisoners on release and these can supplement the support of probation services and increase likelihood of successful resettlement and sustained employment. This is particularly important as these organisations can and do support prison leavers in those early days of a new job.

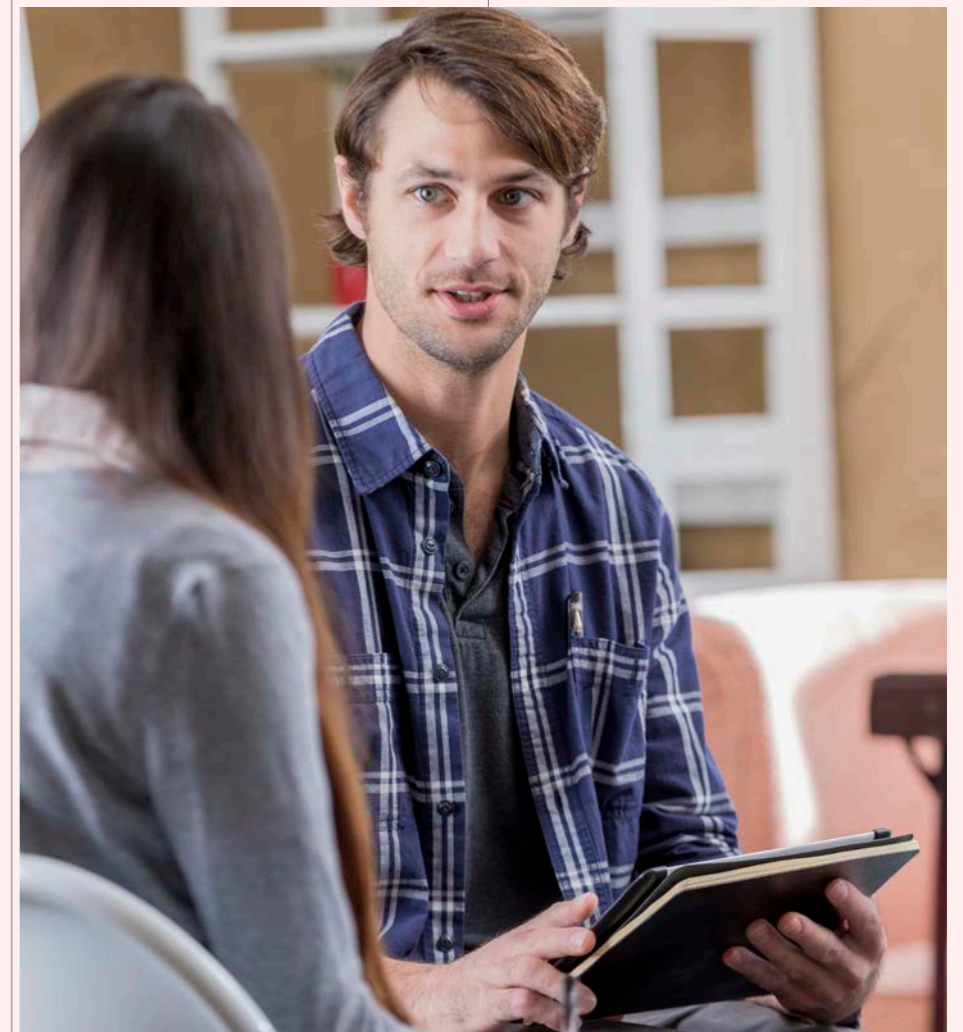
Preparation for resettlement before release needs to address housing, employment and health needs. There are also essential requirements for employment which must be in place for an ex-offender to integrate back into the community. When a job offer materialises, they need a bank account, proof of personal identity and certificates of qualifications.

**“I do think it’s organisations like ours that offer person centered, holistic support that are best placed to help. But there aren’t enough around - supporting prison leavers to be in a place where they are 100% ready to move into employment.”**  
**Marie-Claire O’Brian,  
New Leaf CIC.**

ROTL plays an important part in helping people to prepare for release, particularly those who are serving long sentences. However, this applies to only about five per cent of the prison population - 4,255 people October-December 2022<sup>xii</sup>. ROTL enables prisoners to pursue education, training and work and to spend time with family. The more an individual engages with their community, the less likely they are to (re)offend against it<sup>xiii</sup>.

The Prisoner Reform Trust has identified fear of ‘criticism’ as a particular barrier to the prisons’ use of ROTL but argues that there should be a presumption that prisoners in Resettlement prisons would benefit from ROTL. It also calls for governors to be given a clear and unequivocal message that ROTL should be part of the normal resettlement plan for most prisoners.

Employment boards in prisons are a welcome step. They act as the equivalent of a job centre where prisoners can find out about job opportunities, as well as access support with applications. Education providers and employers sit on these boards to help align skills provision with employer need.



\* Justice in Numbers - Summary Tables, Ministry of Justice May 2023

<sup>xii</sup> Prisons data - Offender management', Ministry of Justice April 2023

<sup>xiii</sup> The impact of policy change on prisoner resettlement and community integration: A case of disproportionate response. Kay, C. (2021)



“**A lot of things have to go right when you out. Housing, money, sticking to the conditions of the release. There was a girl who left here recently, she had a job all set up in hospitality. But the housing fell apart, money problems and before long she was re-offending. I’d rather stay longer and get it all right than go through all that again.”**  
**Female, currently in prison**

### Corporate Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) values support resettlement

Inclusivity and commitments to improving the diversity of the workforce represent an opportunity for businesses to strengthen their corporate responsibility profiles. Just over a year ago, PeoplePlus set up the Social Recruitment Advocacy Group chaired by the former Skills Minister, Rt Hon Anne Milton. The group taps into employers’ ESG commitments and brings together major employers (such as Suez, Kier Group, Openreach and Shell Energy) to equip these organisations with the knowledge and tools to break down labour market barriers for those who are most disadvantaged in the labour market.

Social value recruitment (as part of a company’s commitment to environmental, social and governance, ESG, values) drives active recruitment and job progression for groups facing disadvantage. For example, employers such as Social Recruitment Advocacy Group member, Timpson, have long diversified their workforce and promoted the inclusivity of ex-prisoners, giving them a second chance. Evidence from employers such as Marks & Spencer shows that ex-offenders place a higher value on having a job because of a desire to stay out of prison. This often means ex-offenders have higher levels of loyalty and retention<sup>xiv</sup>.

However, many employers continue to be wary of recruiting people who have been in prison and screen out applicants with criminal records. Given so many sectors face a significant shortfall in workers, the potential of ex-offenders with relevant qualifications offers a real opportunity for businesses to address skills gaps and recruitment challenges.

### Self-employment opportunities

Self employment is a really important option for prison leavers. Social Enterprise RIFT has indicated that over 70% of prison leavers are keen to consider self-employment on their resettlement journey. This chimes with the experience of PeoplePlus which has supported over 100,000 people in to self-employment. Mike Lakinsky at PeoplePlus notes “ self-employment is often a really good option for prison leavers. We often see so many talented people leaving custody who want to set up their own enterprise but don’t have the know-how. It is a critical route into employment for many people.”



“**I did painting and decorating in prison for 18 months – we went into the governor’s office to paint the walls there. A highly trusted position which was beneficial for my job now as a painting/decorating business owner.”**  
**Male (left prison 2 years ago)**

One of the projects that we are running in HMP Wealstun is offering learners three hour group sessions over four days. The course covers business planning, cash flow and finance, marketing, basic bookkeeping and HMRC. The course dovetails with other technical courses (plumbing, hairdressing, graphic design) as part of the ‘pathway to resettlement’ to ensure they have the wider skill set to set up a successful business.

“**The department is still buzzing about this now, we have never had a group of prisoners more committed and engaged with something, and genuinely I believe this is just the start for them. The support that will be on offer to them now they have this base knowledge will be what really makes the difference – not to mention as predicted they all went back to the wings, told their mates how good it was, and now we have several requests in to run it again!”** Jess Tile – Prison Employment Lead HMP Wealstun



### Resettlement passports

The Resettlement Passport, to be introduced in 2024, aims to support prisoners when they are released from prison by gathering the critical information and services needed to successfully reintegrate into society. It also aims to reduce the risk of reoffending by allowing the prison leaver to take ownership of their rehabilitation and reintegration. This is a welcome step forward in helping to ensure the critical services are in place for successful integration which has been implemented by HMPPS and we are looking forward to seeing how this will work in practice and be ‘owned’ by the prisoner.

### Conclusions

**As a society we need to get better at rehabilitating prisoners so that we set them up for positive resettlement.** This will not only allow us to address recidivism today, but to tackle longer term generational patterns that will simply continue without focused attention.

Partnerships between prison education providers and employers are a vital element in this positive resettlement pathway. They strengthen the link between skills development and job outcomes.

A reoccurring theme in our research was the importance of minimising time between release and recruiting a prison leaver. Employers working with PeoplePlus through the Social Recruitment Advocacy Group are actively working to optimise employment outcomes for prison leavers and it is making a real difference. Suez for example, interviews prisoners in custody prior to release and collaborates with key workers supporting the prison leaver to ensure the correct in-work support is in place even before day one in the job.

With labour market shortages encouraging the business community to think differently about the talent pools they recruitment from, this commercial imperative also aligns closely with the expectations of the investor community which is focused on the importance of ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) and being part of a solution that creates stronger communities.

**The time to act and strengthen these collaborations is now.**



<sup>xiv</sup> ‘Employing prisoners and ex-offenders, Ministry of Justice March 2023



# CHAPTER 5.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**While some challenges facing the delivery of education in prison are specific to the characteristics of the prison population - which includes some of the most 'educationally disadvantaged in society' - others are related to how education and the criminal justice system co-exist in a prison and to structural challenges such as overcrowding and prison staff shortages.**

Despite this, based on our conversations with prisoners with vastly different needs and challenges, we saw much ground for optimism. Many prisoners interviewed as part of our focus groups highlighted the fact that with the right tutor and a clear pathway of education which is linked to their 'through the gate' ambition, they started to believe in themselves and redefine their future away from crime.

The Ministry of Justice and HMPPS have also made some important changes to support better educational outcomes for learners, for example the introduction of specialist staff to support neurodivergent learners and the employer boards that have been established in a number of prisons to create a stronger link between the learners' educational ambition and the goals they want to achieve in terms of employment once they leave custody.

One of the key strands coming out of our focus groups was the importance of the process that starts on arrival - that it is seen as the end of one journey where poorer choices were made and the start of another which can be a positive journey but only if all of the elements of a positive resettlement are aligned.

HM Inspectorate of Prisons' expectations for prisons are based on four tests that are set against standards which meet recognised human rights. Whilst safety and respect impact the delivery of education and positive resettlement through their systemic influence, the other two expectations - **purposeful activity, and rehabilitation and release planning**, are intrinsic to successful resettlement and education.

This role that prisons play in (re) educating, as well as rehabilitating, should be properly recognised. Appropriate interventions at the individual level - measurable, achievable, relevant, and linked to length of sentence - could help to correct some of the disadvantages that may have been influential in leading to criminal behaviours. So, every effort is worth making to make prison education effective, relevant and successful.

Additionally, the potential impact and benefits are huge, both from avoidance of reoffending (some £18bn cost to the economy each year) and the contribution to the workforce that 47,000 prison leavers could make to the economy.



There is no one magic 'solution' to positive resettlement - but without a strong focus on improving educational attainment rates and addressing functional skills, the likelihood of reoffending is much higher. Resettlement can become a lottery, given so many variables, and the potential for good work - achieved during education, rehabilitation and release planning - to unravel is huge. But, by making some key changes, we can help smooth the path to positive resettlement.

# OUR RECOMMENDATIONS - EDUCATION TO EMPLOYMENT

- 01** Early assessments play an important role in encouraging the take up of education in prison. Our recommendation is to maintain the early assessment but to ensure a phased induction where prisoners ambitions and future life goals can be considered over a period of time.
- 02** Embedding education into workplaces and vocational training areas should be considered a priority, particularly for learners who find classroom environments challenging.
- 03** We recommend incentivising education through pay so that the reward has parity with prison industry work.
- 04** Support prisoners with additional learning needs by a greater use of assistive technology.
- 05** Consider adopting practical learning styles in lessons. By including an element of physical activity or use of their senses, it can help individuals better engage with learning, particularly for individuals who have struggled with traditional educational approaches.
- 06** Implement reading strategies that do more than address functional literacy. By ensuring a dedicated budget is attached to reading strategies we can focus on ensuring all prisoners can read fluently and confidently.
- 07** Build on the key worker initiative to maximise its impact so that prisoners are fully supported to learn and to engage with education.
- 08** Critical partnerships between prison education providers and employers should focus not only on traditional skills (engineering, construction, beauty) but also reflect future labour market growth areas - such as green tech.
- 09** Ensure learners can build self-employment skills and gain entrepreneurial experiences during their time in custody.
- 10** Create performance metrics for governors that prioritise attendance in education and for providers that encourage learning over qualification achievements.



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