

# Hidden voices

**The experience of teachers working in prisons**

UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE UNION

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*A report by the University and College Union  
and the Prisoner Learning Alliance*



## INTRODUCTION

Prison education is a neglected area, in society generally and within post-secondary education. Yet we have a large – and growing – prison population, whose educational needs are as great as any. For individuals and for wider society education can play a crucial part in enabling their rehabilitation and subsequent reintegration. Teachers in prison have a crucial role in strengthening this, yet their voice is rarely heard in discussions about policy, rehabilitation or prison reform. The current commissioning arrangements for education make it difficult for prison teachers to build links with their peers in the community. In terms of resources, technology and conditions, prison education is the ‘Cinderella service’ of adult education. This report, based on the views of over 400 prison educators, aims to highlight their experiences and advocate for further resources and improved conditions.

*The University and College Union (UCU) is the UK's largest trade union for academic and academic-related staff in higher and further education, representing over 100,000 members working in universities, colleges, training providers, adult education settings and prisons.*

*The Prisoner Learning Alliance is a network of organisations and individuals with expertise, experience and an interest in prison education. We use our collective voice to advocate for improvements and we hold the government to account by monitoring prison education. We have over 200 members across the sector including education providers, professional bodies and voluntary sector organisations. The PLA supports the training and development of prison educators, because developing a professional and expert teaching workforce is fundamental to delivering quality prison education.*

In 2013, UCU published a report *A Punishing Regime*,<sup>1</sup> a survey of occupational stress and well-being among prison education. This found that for five of the seven stressors measured by the HSE questionnaire, those working in prison education had lower well-being than those working in further, higher or adult education.

This was followed up by *Professionalism Against the Odds*<sup>2</sup> in 2014, carried out by UCU in partnership with the Centre for Education in the Criminal Justice System. This explored the impact of the offender learning model on teachers, their professionalism and practice. The research found that prison educators constitute a motivated workforce that had chosen to work in prison education rather than in mainstream further education (FE) or Adult Education.

In 2018, UCU produced the report *The experiences of prison educators in England and Wales*.<sup>3</sup> Respondents reported major issues with the regime and culture of the prisons they operated in, which undermined their safety and security. Teachers were concerned that prisons had little resource to address the impact of substance use and mental health problems amongst their learners which detracted from teachers’ core teaching role and impacted on education opportunities for prison learners.



In 2020, the Prisoner Learning Alliance published *Leadership in prison education: meeting the challenges of the new system*.<sup>4</sup> This research, based on interviews with senior leaders and managers in prisons and prison education concluded there was a willingness for further training and development opportunities. However, there is a need for investment and resources to support effective professional development and to establish the conditions that allow for learning and culture change. The pressure of time spent on management, monitoring and reporting risks, detracts from time and resources that are needed to support a whole-prison education culture.

## METHODOLOGY

UCU and PLA invited their respective mailing lists to complete the survey. Recent figures from the Ministry of Justice<sup>5</sup> show that the four Prison Education Framework (PEF) providers (Milton Keynes College, Novus, People Plus and Weston College) employ approximately 1640 full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers. This figure does not include tutors teaching in Welsh prisons or in some contracted out prisons so published figures for the total number of prison teachers are unavailable. In 2016, the Coates review estimated that there were 'over 4,000 teachers (excluding the circa 1,200 industry instructors) working in prisons (including private prisons)'.<sup>6</sup> The survey produced by UCU, and PLA received 412 responses.

## SELF-SELECTION

The survey was completed on a voluntary basis, and therefore participants self-selected. We do not claim that this data is representative of the entire prison educator population, but we believe that the numbers are sufficient and the findings relevant to provide evidence which highlights the experiences of prison educators and demonstrates the case for change.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

In this section, we compare the data we have about prison educators with what is known about teachers in further education more generally. We also look at the differences between the demographic make-up of prison teachers and that of prison learners.

In our survey, over 80% of respondents identified as white British, and over 89% as white, with a further 1.8% identifying as Indian. People of other ethnicities, including Black, Chinese and those of Mixed backgrounds each make up less than 1% of respondents. In contrast, in further education colleges 16% of staff are from a minority ethnic background.<sup>7</sup>

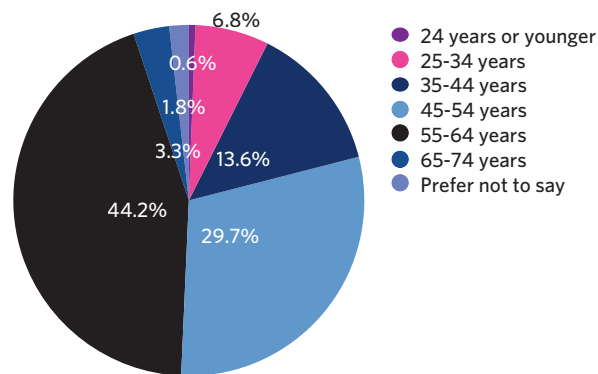
And in an even starker contrast, over a quarter of the prison population (27%) are from a minority ethnic background.<sup>8</sup> The advocacy work and campaigns of unions and community organisations have highlighted the need for educators who reflect the ethnic and cultural make-up of learners in mainstream education and universities. This is also necessary in prisons, because they contain communities that have experienced the accumulated impact of criminalisation, racism and other discrimination. And in particular, research



into prison education for young adults has highlighted that young learners are best engaged when they can identify and relate to their teacher as someone who understands their experiences and culture.<sup>9</sup>

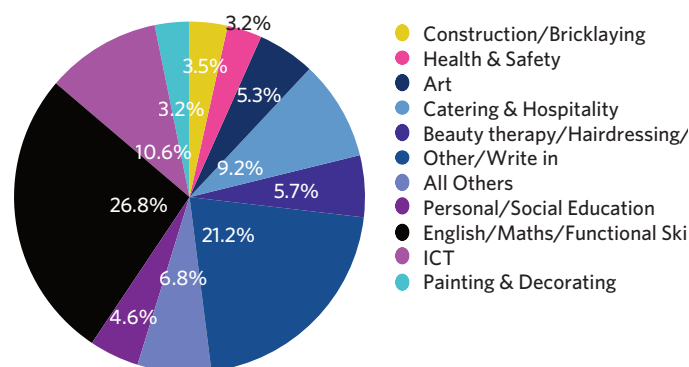
Almost three quarters of the survey respondents were female (73%), which is higher than in mainstream further education, where 64% of staff are female.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, the prison population is 96% male.

The below graph shows that 44.2% of prison educators responding to our survey were between 55-64 years old, which is similar to further education, where 45% of teaching staff in further education are over the age of 50.<sup>11</sup> However, only 6.8% of prison educators responding to the survey were aged between 25-35, whereas 16% of further education teaching staff are 25-35 years old.<sup>12</sup> When we look at prisoner learners, the largest age cohort is those between 30-39, comprising 31% of the prison population.<sup>13</sup>



## TEACHING BACKGROUND

What subject do you teach?



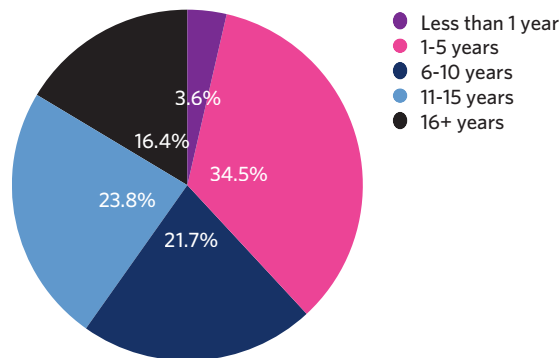
Half of respondents have previously taught in further education colleges, a quarter have taught in secondary schools, and a third have worked for private training providers. Generally, prison educators are experienced teachers - 29.5% of respondents had been



working in education for 11-15 years, and almost a quarter (23.7%) of respondents for 16-20 years. Just over a fifth, 20.9% of respondents have been working in education for over 21 years.

In terms of experience teaching in prisons specifically, almost a quarter (23.8%) of respondents have worked in prison education for 11-15 years, with 16.4% in the sector for over 16 years and more than 21.7% for 6-10 years. Over a third (34.5%) of respondents have been working in prison education for less than 5 years.

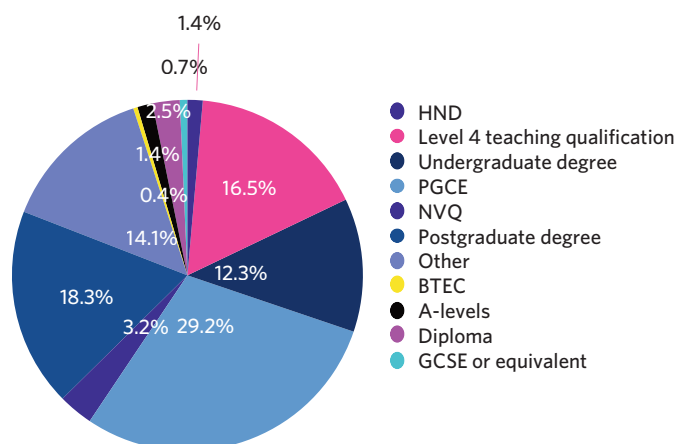
#### How long have you worked in prison education?



## QUALIFICATIONS

The survey asked respondents about their previous educational background and teaching qualifications. Nearly three out of ten respondents (29.2%) held a postgraduate certificate in education, which is similar to further education, where 32% of teachers hold a postgraduate certificate in education. This was the most commonly held qualification. Around three quarters of mainstream further education teaching staff hold a teaching qualification above Level 2.<sup>14</sup>

#### What's your highest qualification?





The standard teaching qualification for the further education sector is a Postgraduate Certificate in Education, or 'Cert Ed'.<sup>15</sup> This Level 5 qualification generally takes place over one year, studied full time. Following certification, individuals are qualified in further education and training, and are able to work in teaching roles employed by education providers. Although two thirds (63.9%) of respondents considered the Certificate in Education ('Cert Ed') adequate to prepare people to teach in prisons, strikingly over two-thirds (68.7%) believed that a specific teacher training certificate in prison education would be useful during qualification.

Some respondents detailed the Cert Ed as having the following benefits:

- studies of behaviour
- understanding recording and monitoring requirements
- lesson plan development
- helping to understand employer expectations
- understanding of teaching students from a diverse range of backgrounds and cultures.

Many respondents explained that the Cert Ed 'enables [educators] to deliver appropriately to adults, [however] not so much specifically to prisoners. This resonates with the experience of a respondent who wrote, 'When I did my training, I was the only prison educator, and I always felt the odd one out - a lot of the suggestions and activities were not doable in prison. However, I would not want to marginalise the prison sector further by people only being qualified to teach in prison'. One educator asserted that 'there should be a unit specific to teaching in the prison environment for those who choose this route'.

Many respondents felt the Cert Ed did not completely prepare them for prison teaching. Most specifically, the need to understand how a prison operates and to be able to respond to learners' mental health needs were two very important areas that the Cert Ed did not cover:

*In prison there is a high percentage of mental, educational, social needs, to name a few. There is also the lack of understanding [of] providing rehabilitation. I strongly believe basic counselling skills are also required therefore a more specialised cert ed needs to be provided.*

Prison educators also highlighted the specialist nature of their role, working with learners with poor prior experiences of education and classes with very diverse needs:

*It is a different environment, not because of the people's crimes but because [of] their situations that have led them to being in prison. This has often skewed their attitude to education and needs more creative handling than 'usual'.*



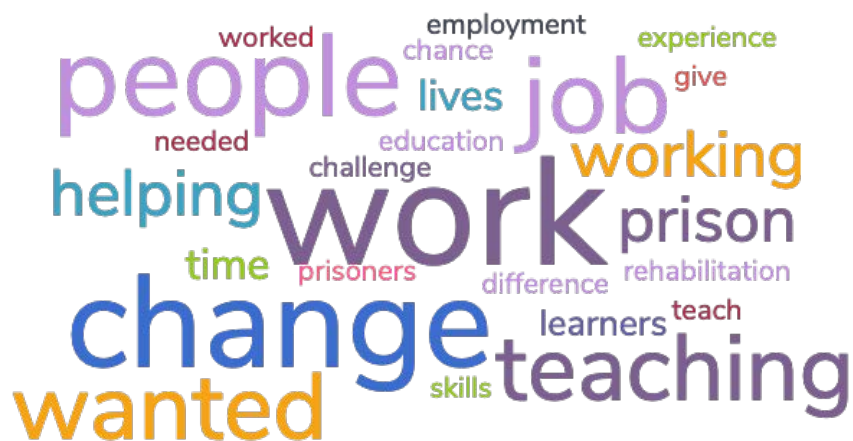
*The clients are obviously different to school pupils - teachers need to understand that some of the learners are functionally illiterate and some are highly intelligent. Also, many have already built a huge resistance to education and their reasons for attendance are often radically different to learners in schools or colleges.*

*The prison population is extremely diverse and I'm not sure how any course could prepare anyone adequately.*

One educator wrote that the Cert Ed 'did not prepare [them] for the additional issues faced by prison education and the prisoners as learners', explaining that '[their] people skills were more beneficial than the Cert Ed'. The practicalities and complexities of teaching in prison, such as 'mental health issues, long lessons, the need to think on your feet and adapt to change', 'complicated learners and stakeholders' and 'behaviour management' are not covered in the qualification.

In addition, some noted that many teaching methods taught in the Cert Ed are dependent on technology that simply is not available in prisons. Some found the Cert Ed to be neither helpful nor unhelpful - simply redundant. One educator asserted that 'no qualification can [prepare educators to work in prisons] - you either like it or not'. The view that 'teaching is teaching' was also frequently cited, such as 'the qualification is adequate [but] only certain types of people can work in a prison'.

#### **What drew you in to working in prison education?**



#### **SUPPORTING NEW PRISON TEACHERS**

The majority of respondents (58.6%) believed that new prison teachers were not adequately supported in their role. Many respondents highlighted a need for providers and prisons to offer more in this area. Just under 10% thought that new teachers were adequately supported, and 31.7% were unsure.

A recommendation for an improved induction programme for newly qualified prison educators featured prominently in many responses:



*There should be compulsory induction and shadowing across all providers for a minimum 2 weeks coupled with a week of jail craft and acclimatisation run by prisons throughout the country. The latter should be repeated if teachers move prison because they are very different in character and geography.*

Interestingly, many respondents felt that prison staff had a large role to play in the induction and support of new teachers. They felt that training in the following areas would be useful.

- National Offender Management Information System (NOMIS)<sup>16</sup>
- Suicide and self-harm prevention / Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork (ACCT) processes
- Safeguarding
- Self-defence, personal safety
- Gang culture, conditioning
- Understanding of MoJ, HMIP and Ofsted requirements
- Equality, diversity and inclusivity training
- Prisoner mental health
- Covid and recovery

Prison teachers also expressed a strong interest in learning 'jail craft' – the operational and cultural knowledge needed to work in a prison effectively and safely. Respondents also suggested that 'jargon busting sessions' and 'weekly catch ups' would help teachers to gain an 'insight into the entire picture of the prison system (not only... teaching in a prison location)'.

### CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Survey respondents were asked which kinds of continuing professional development would be most useful. Interestingly, many of the suggestions related to personal and social development, the building of relationships and networks, and support for their well-being. This highlights the relational and pastoral aspects of teaching, and that communication and connection are fundamentally important for educators.

### NETWORKING AND SHARING GOOD PRACTICE

Prison educators explained that opportunities to meet, collaborate and network with teachers in other prisons and in the wider further educator sector would be beneficial and 'help [educators] to not feel isolated in the subject area'.

*Days away from the prison to address [educators'] own development goals, support with well-being, [and] to meet and work with other prison teachers in other prisons.*





Educators suggested 'meetings where...opportunities are given to allow teachers to share their thoughts and ideas to make improvements and move forward', asking that employers arrange 'job swaps with other prisons' and 'focus groups to access ideas from other prisons'.

### SHADOWING

There was also an appetite for shadowing colleagues, both during teacher training and following qualification as a prison educator.

*A full month shadowing qualified and experienced teaching staff who have a strong track record at dealing with complex and often difficult situations, for example putting a student on a nicking<sup>17</sup> and having to complete all the appropriate paperwork and attend in person the adjudication.*

### MENTORING

There were requests to be mentored by a more experienced colleague, and a sense that teachers would value this opportunity for guidance and support. It was felt this would support teachers to 'alter styles and expectations to accommodate various needs and issues' and to '[adapt] creative teaching in a secure setting'.

*To work with a knowledgeable member of staff for a month. Too many just get thrown in at the deep end and can't cope.*

*The support of an experienced colleague as a 'buddy'.*

### FURTHER STUDY, SPECIALISMS AND QUALIFICATIONS

Respondents were also interested in opportunities for further study and qualifications. Subjects mentioned included psychology, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and PhDs. Many educators had paid for their own qualification of Advanced Teacher Status with the Society of Education and Training.

Other suggestions for continuing professional development included:

*It would be useful to have training to keep up with current methods like schoolteacher training days but specifically aimed at prison educators. I think we did have this prior to lockdown for things like digital skills but might be good to work with educators from other prisons in the same subject.*

*Secondments in non-teaching roles.*

*People awarded outstanding in their job [should] become national leaders in their area.*

*I would like my post as [a Learning Support Practitioner] to be graded and be recognised for the challenge that it is. I would like my qualifications to be recognised within my salary and [for] my salary [to] be on a par with the tutors for doing at least*



*an equivalent role. At the moment I have teaching qualifications, qualifications in specific [Learning Difficulties and Disabilities] but am still paid significantly less than an unqualified newly employed tutor.*

For some, career development and progress were inadequate, or even non-existent: 'I wouldn't know what the opportunities could be. My career development is never discussed.'

### IMPROVING PRISON EDUCATION

Prison educators were clear that access to adequate technology - for teaching, for learners, for recording and monitoring, and for external meetings - would improve prison education significantly:

*Provide upgrades to IT facilities, [don't] come in and give it a downgrade by having less computers in a classroom, no printer, no virtual campus, no Encarta, a projector that keeps breaking down.*

*Take into account our views and provide us with up-to-date IT system instead of letting us struggle. Put your hands in your pockets - a lot is achieved through staff [efforts].*

*Allow more access to online education and meetings which are often inaccessible from prison due to understandable restrictions on Quantum computers.*

Poor facilities, resources and infrastructure also featured in responses.

*The biggest issues are around infrastructure - slow technology and lack of access to technology, classrooms and equipment that is not fit for purpose, lack of resources, the time it takes to do some very simple tasks due to where things are within the prison compared to the classroom, [there should be sufficient] photocopiers, printers, computers etc.*

Respondents asked for: 'access to [their] own PC and [a] static classroom to maximise efficiency', 'a room to work in that has a cupboard', 'heating', 'clean toilets', 'proper office chairs to support back and lower back', and for prisons to 'paint classrooms' and provide educators with 'a place to eat lunch with colleagues instead of at a desk on their own'.

### EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND WELLBEING

Working with people who have experienced high levels of trauma, and who often have many difficult life experiences and complex needs, can be very distressing. Prison educators often take on a role of pastoral support for learners because of the nature of their relationship, and because learners sometimes find it easier to speak to someone who is not in a discipline role. Respondents felt that receiving further emotional support was key, suggesting that prison educators could participate in regular 'support groups with qualified therapists facilitating':



*I recently had to take five weeks off (signed off with stress), in order that I didn't just walk out of my dream job. No one should have to spend all day every workday being treated with such contempt and boiling with rage as a consequence.*

Educators asked for regular opportunities to discuss their well-being with 'someone informal for guidance and support' through 'monthly counselling sessions', explaining that 'much is internalised and [educators] should be able to offload when necessary'. One educator explained that they 'have had to rely on community counselling over the past two years of personal trauma'.

#### What support would help your well-being?



#### SUPPORT FROM OFFICERS AND PRISON MANAGERS

Many respondents explained that it was important to them 'to feel valued [and] appreciated'; there was concern that officers and other prison staff did not always recognise 'the hard work that is delivering a 3-hour lesson and dealing with difficult men'. One respondent expressed frustration at 'being used as a minding service for men that are difficult to manage on the wing'; other educators also explained that they felt professionally undervalued:

*Prison staff and governors [need to understand] just what it is [educators] do and why it is vital to the target of reducing reoffending.*

*An understanding from HMPPS and the providers that sometimes, just getting them through the classroom door regularly is a real success to be celebrated.'*

*For the governor to know who I am and what I do! To have respect and value.*

*Come and meet us in our place of work, talk to us and then show signs of having listened.*

*The prison could have a lot more appreciation for what we do. The two prison staff members (the one in charge of Education and Workshops and the Governor for*



*Reducing Reoffending) responsible for our department are very much on our side and care about what we do and the impact we have, which I'm grateful for. Otherwise, I think we (prison tutors) are regarded as a bunch of weirdos and the fact that we have been the top-performing education department in England and Wales throughout the pandemic, has not been celebrated in our prison.'*

Governors can demonstrate their personal commitment to education in many ways, for instance through supporting effective induction processes that ensure prison officers understand the importance of education and also that teachers' inductions are supported by prison staff.

Education becomes more of a priority in prison when a Governor shows an interest in the way learners access courses and monitors allocations, attendance and engagement. Governors who celebrate attainment, by publishing success stories, hosting awards and presenting certificates demonstrate the value of educational achievement.

When education staff are involved in key decision and information sharing meetings, this helps to ensure that teachers are kept up to date and aware of any changes in the daily running of the prison. There can be better coordination of activities if teaching teams are involved in the core planning of the regime.

### MOTIVATION TO TEACH

Survey respondents demonstrated high levels of motivation about face-to-face teaching and working with prisoner learners. Respondents frequently referred to the opportunity to 'change lives' as the reason they were drawn to work in prison education. They explained their motivation for pursuing the role and the impact that they wanted to have:

*To make a difference in the classroom, to support learners to get an education and qualifications. Build on confidence and self-esteem, show learners there are choices and opportunities in life.*

*Helping to create an environment where the opportunity to learn is celebrated, for learners to discover a skill, experience joy or learn something different about themselves.*

*To be part of the rehabilitation of prisoners, to work within a supportive role and to use my skills to help others.*

*To provide the right intervention at the right time to help prisoners move on with their lives, gain qualifications and employment.*

*A belief that education is a vital part in preventing reoffending.*

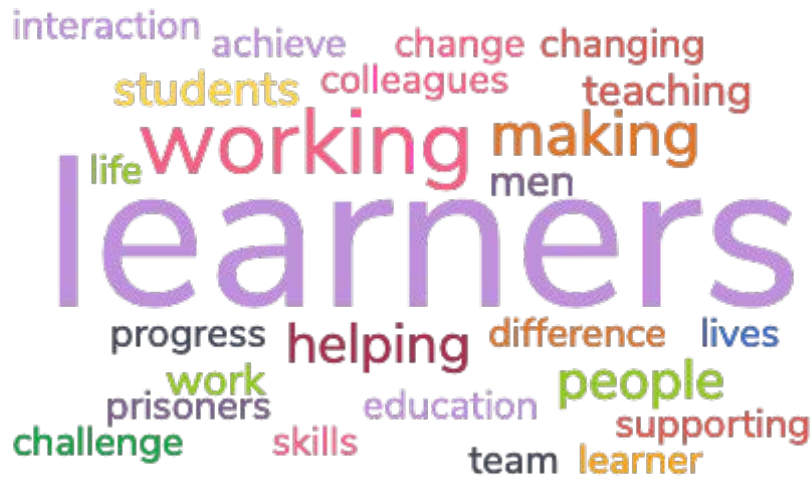
*To help the residents rehabilitate and become valued members of society on their release.*



*To ensure all prisoners develop within prison education to become law abiding citizens who contribute to society in a positive way upon release and achieve economic success.*

*Committed to supporting [those] who did not have a good experience in education the first-time round.*

#### **What do you enjoy most about working in prison education?**



The experience of helping learners to improve their self-confidence was continuously highlighted as the prison educators' favourite aspect of their job:

*Developing and encouraging creative and original ideas to students that for whatever reason thought that they had none of these qualities.*

*Watching my students achieve something academic, often for the first time in their lives. I mainly teach entry level students who have avoided classrooms their whole lives. They don't think they can do it, but they can.*

*Feeling I can enable a means to express oneself without judgement [for] those who are judged by society.*

*Seeing people develop skills they thought were beyond them and changing their attitude to life and what is possible.*

*Satisfaction when a learner gains self-belief that he/she can actually learn.*

*Making a positive contribution to the well-being and employability of the students.*

*Knowing I have made a difference into someone's rehabilitation, not just their education.*



*Seeing someone change their direction and move away from crime.*

*Seeing people achieve when they'd been written off as failures.*

*The challenge, the chance of inspiring someone to change and the team spirit.*

*Sharing what I know to empower others.*

*Providing the men with a qualification and helping them to provide for themselves and family or help to gain employment.*

*Providing education opportunities and supporting learners who have found they can manage their own lives and finances for the first time.*

*Time spent with the learners (face-to-face, classroom teaching), helping them to discover that they are not stupid, can enjoy learning, and can use it to open up more possibilities that don't involve crime.*

## HOW TO RETAIN PRISON TEACHERS

The turnover of prison teachers is too high and is often believed to be as a result of poor pay and working conditions. In our survey we asked teachers how long they expected to work in prison. Over four out of ten said they were intending to still be working in prison education in the next year, over three out of ten in the next two years and just under three out of ten said they expected to be in prison education longer than five years. This is an extremely concerning finding and demonstrates that urgent action is needed to support and develop prison teachers. If this does not happen, there is likely to be a workforce crisis with high numbers of teachers leaving the service and substantial difficulties in recruiting to posts.

For those teachers that wanted to remain in prison education, many reasons for doing so were very positive: 'love [the] job', 'no two days are the same', 'it is interesting'. Educators feel that they 'can make a difference to the way the learners think'. However, some felt that changing to another career would be too difficult: 'I feel deskilled and think it will be difficult to return to mainstream FE'.

For some, there was a concern about job security, or the implications of working for another provider if the contracts or the prison's priorities changed:

*I love what I do but I do worry about the uncertainty around the providers and the security of the contracts and therefore job security.*

*There is no reason not to, unless the contract is lost to a training provider, from experience I would prefer not to work for a privately owned company.*

*Governors can now cancel your course when they like so [there is] no job security.*



For others, the approach of their current employer was making them consider leaving:

*I love my job but [the] constant sniping from management [is] soul destroying.*

*[Employer] is a terrible company. They don't pay fairly. They don't appreciate their quality staff... The only way I'd consider staying is if they go.*

*The chaos of prisons, and specifically the college, have really put me off of wanting to teach.*

Many respondents were unhappy with the current commissioning process for education in prison, believing that it was too focused on funding and that this was detrimental to the education that learners received. Educators wanted:

*To feel that we are not just a 'cash cow' for the rest of the college and to have experienced managers who know how to manage and actually care for their staff!*

*A company who are not so contract driven, [so] that they spend money developing staff [instead].*

*Prison education being taken away from private providers. There's a fundamental conflict of interests between the production line that helps keep the provider in contract, and actually providing the education learners need. An understanding that measures introduced to speed up the production line have a disproportionately detrimental effect on low-level functional skills learners... the stress of trying to meet both aims is intolerable, as evidenced by the number of staff racing to leave [the prison] or who have recently left.*

*The learner is not at the heart of the system, [the focus is only on] contracts and hitting targets regardless of impact on learners.*

*I want to rehabilitate inmates not fulfil a company contract at any cost.*

*I am hoping to get a job elsewhere where I am more appreciated, and the focus is on the learners rather than the business.*

*The system is broken, and the education providers are only interested in money and getting the men through the courses in the Guidance [sic] Learning Hours allocated per course.*

*With [the Prison Education Framework] the prison have increased contact hours and reduced courses delivered. The prison [seems] only interested in ticking boxes, meeting targets, not the education of the women.*



*[There is] too much pressure to make money. I would stay... for the learners if pressure was off.*

*Frustrated by [repetitive] paperwork and delivering a level 2 course to learners who have not [completed] level 1...[simply] because it does not make economic sense to the college to do so.*

*The contract expectations put far too much pressure on teachers and management.*

## MANAGEMENT

Many respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the way they were managed. Possibly the most concerning responses involved allegations of unprofessionalism, discrimination and nepotism from management:

*I'm done with [prison education]. I hate my job and that's mainly due to my manager. I used to love it [but] now I can't wait to finish.*

*One senior manager only comes to [the prison] when his [favourite football] team is playing. Of course, he claims expenses. Travel and a hotel. He boasts about it.*

*Where I was based, there was a terrible bullying issue from the management which is why I left - education contractors and regional management do not seem bothered about this as long as the targets are being met. A huge turnover in staff never seems to be an issue to them, thus affecting the mental health of everyone involved.*

*In my current workplace they need to replace the education manager with someone who can actually do the job.*

*Managers [should come] into class to see how things really are. They would understand what their staff do and realise how difficult it can be. Managers [should be] qualified in their post i.e., are educators or Special Educational Needs Coordinators and have had experience of teaching [especially] with this age group. Managers [should] be visible, not just seen walking along corridors.*

## PROGRESSION AND PAY

The survey asked respondents about the opportunities available to them for career development in prison education. Prison education departments are far smaller than colleges and there are fewer opportunities available. 43% of respondents cited the role of Education Manager, 43% selected Deputy Education Manager, and 30% noted the possibility of promotion to a senior teaching role with reduced teaching delivery. There were clear calls for systems that would promote and develop progression opportunities:

*Create [a] system which would support progression for outstanding employees. Education doesn't support development. Lack of incentives or clear progression paths makes teacher[s] demotivated sometimes.*





*Once [employers] have you in a particular role, they don't encourage you to step up as they have to fill your place, and nobody wants it.*

*There is not a lot of career progression. If there is, you would have to leave the prison and go elsewhere or historically the job was already lined up for a particular person. Many times, staff did not progress even though they were more qualified.*

*If you are a grassroots teacher who loves being in a classroom with learners, there is really no progression.*

Some felt that decisions about promotion and progression were not transparent or fair and did not happen 'unless your face fits' or 'you are in the same clique as [the] regional [senior management team]'. One educator wrote that this is the case 'despite what [employers] tell [employees]'; another emphasises that 'if your face doesn't fit, regardless of your qualifications, you don't get the job'.

Educators wanted a wider variety of roles to be available. Two thirds of respondents, 66% suggested promotion to a senior role with reduced teaching, 53% the option to work as an advanced teaching practitioner, and 52% opportunities to contribute to curriculum delivery alongside teaching. Others suggested 'regional manager' of prison education and 'A Level and GCSE coordinator'.

Educators also expressed frustration that the lack of career progression can also create wage stagnation. Respondents explained that 'if you want to move into management, there is no way unless someone leaves or retires', and that there are 'no prospects of progression'.

The absence of any pay increase was illustrated by one respondent: '[I've] worked for 15 years in prison education and wages have only improved by £2000 in that time'; another explained that they are earning 'less money now [than] in 2015'. One educator highlighted that in addition to 'no pay increase', it is evident that 'newly hired staff get higher salaries than existing [staff]'. For one prison educator, the excessive administrative work makes the 'paperwork to pay ratio' significantly 'disproportionate', writing that they 'have a second [part-time] minimum wage job and earn more per hour worked'.

A substantial majority of respondents (87.9%) believe that 'better pay' would help to keep prison teachers. Respondents noted that, as a largely female workforce, there might not be enough attention to possible gender pay gaps within departments and organisations. Some felt that an equivalent pay scale to college educators would be beneficial. There was concern that different contracts and pay scales between colleagues doing similar jobs led to a lack of transparency.

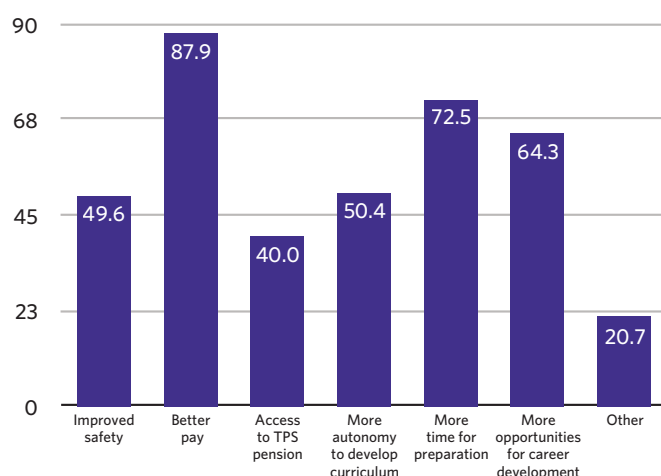
Using FOI data from two of the main PEF providers (Novus and Milton Keynes College), UCU has calculated the average teaching salary for prison educators for those two employers is £31,005<sup>18</sup>. The average (mean) annual wage of full-time teaching staff in further education is £32,000 in colleges and £35,300 in secondary schools<sup>19</sup>.



As highlighted in the Coates Review<sup>20</sup> lower levels of pay in the prison sector than in other FE sectors is a key issue and progression routes into leadership (which would normally see teachers enhance their pay in other sectors) lack clarity and structure.

Another gap was access to a standardised pension scheme. Four out of ten respondents said that access to TPS (Teachers' Pension Scheme) would be an incentive for prison teachers to stay in their roles.

**What key issues would lead to better retention of prison educators (Tick all that apply)**



## WHAT CHANGES WOULD INCENTIVISE PRISON TEACHERS TO STAY IN THEIR ROLES?

### Adequate preparation time

Almost three quarters (72.5%) of respondents believe that more time for preparation prior to classes would improve educator retention. As prison education moves to more in-cell delivery and self-study, it is imperative that adequate preparation time is given to educators for the development of materials, and for time for assessment and delivering effective feedback.

### Opportunities for career development and training

Almost two-thirds (64.3%) said that more opportunities for career development would mean they were more likely to stay in their role. Three quarters (75.3%) of respondents do not believe that time currently spent on prison educator training is sufficient. In addition, there was a call for more face-to-face (rather than online) training. The majority of respondents considered the most important training for prison educators to be in pedagogical updates (67%), technology training (66.5%) and safeguarding (59.2%).

### Input and influence into the curriculum

Over half (50.4%) of respondents believed that having more autonomy to develop the prison education curriculum would be beneficial. They expressed frustration with the



limitations of the curriculum, both in its diversity and the suitability for varying education levels. One educator explained that professionals require 'more say in the provision and courses provided and how they are delivered best for the prisoners', highlighting that the learner must be prioritised 'rather than what is [financially] best'. Educators also requested more say in the construction of the education curriculum, asking that employers 'be more receptive to innovative ideas' to 'change up the curriculum and get up to date'.

### Reducing administrative and monitoring burdens

Respondents talked about feelings of frustration and overwhelm regarding the amount of paperwork and recording required of them. One respondent, echoing the perspectives of many educators, highlighted their frustration with administrative work as a key reason for their intention to leave the profession: 'I am becoming very frustrated with the lack of support, pointless paperwork and senseless barriers preventing me from doing what I am ultimately employed to do: teach!' Multiple educators suggested 'an admin assistant just for [them]. [There is] so much paperwork now, it's overwhelming'.

*Remove paperwork - individualising learners' lesson plans???? Really? Even with just 10 learners, that's 10 lesson plans for 5 hours of teaching. When is there time to do that? And record it? And evaluate it?*

*I don't want any job that has more admin than I have now. I loved teaching. Now [I] feel like I'm working in an office.*

### Setting realistic targets for learners and teachers

Some respondents were concerned that the targets for learners and teachers were too stringent. When asked about support for prison educators, one respondent wrote, 'Not having to deliver three qualifications in one four-week course.'

*[Focus on] quality teaching, not enrolment numbers, and stop giving us impossible targets.*

*Reduce the pressure from above to achieve the almost impossible; give some MOTIVATION, rather than constant criticism.*

These targets were experienced as a pressure and a disincentive for teachers, and as negative for learners:

*Being threatened with being penalised for lack of completions, when that lack was directly due to the mandate on how and how much in-cell work to deliver and in conflict with the advice from myself and other [functional skills] teachers that our learners would not be able to do the work.*

*Stop trying to force men to gain qualifications beyond their current capacity. Stop trying to force round pegs into square holes.*



### Changes to the regime

There was support amongst respondents for changing class lengths:

*Shorter session times for maths and English classes. 3.5 hours is FAR TOO LONG.*

*For the sake of the students I think 3.5 hours as a session [is] far too long for anyone.*

*Look at the delivery of education. Especially with how we have been running it during the pandemic. There are so many ways we can continue this type of delivery and it is far less stressful than the old-fashioned classroom-based education where the learners are expected to stay in class for almost 4 hours.*

*Change the regime hours for education from 8.45AM to 11.45AM and 1.45PM to 4.45PM, to 8.30AM to 11.30AM and 1.30PM to 4.30PM, to allow learners to get to the wing to eat and shower/[make] phone calls before lock up.*

### Improved safety

Almost half (49.6%) of respondents believed that feeling safer in the prison would make them more likely to stay in their role. There was also a strong sense that teachers did not always believe their concerns were taken seriously or acted on. They asked that providers and prisons 'pay attention to how a teacher feels about a learner especially when we feel unsafe'.

*Being a health and safety [representative], it would be helpful to be listened to and not feel I am being a nuisance because I have raised near-miss concerns.*

*Listen to staff and trust their judgement regarding challenging learners and safety concerns.*

### Feeling listened to and being consulted with

Lastly, and very significantly, there was a sense of being 'unheard' in many responses, with educators feeling they had no voice with either prison management or prison education providers:

*Let those with education backgrounds or knowledge lead. For those employed on the prison side to be the 'link', they need to have an education background or at least have knowledge and experience of the labour market and what is needed to support learners to progress.*

*Recognise that 12 years of experience of working in prison might mean that I have something to offer.*

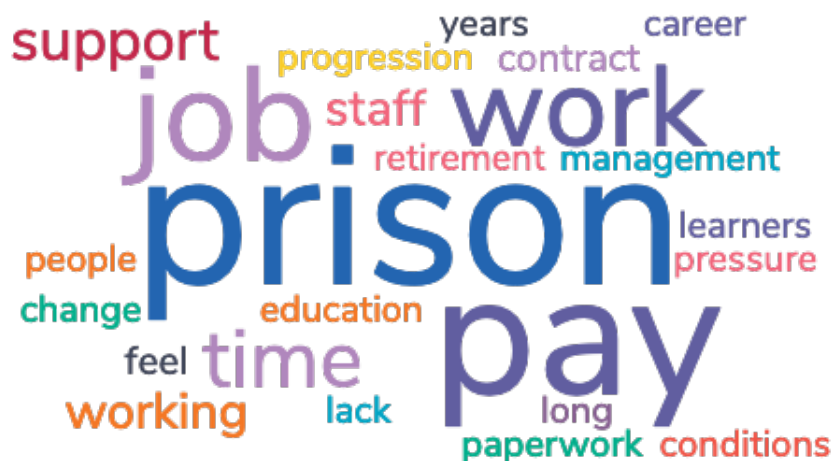
*Listen to us as most of their expectations show a lack of understanding of our day-to-day challenges. When we say something won't work, we are not being negative or awkward, we are speaking from experience.*



### *Incentives for working in prison education*



### *Disincentives for working in prison education*



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In many prisons, the regime does not prioritise, or even facilitate education. Many prison teachers feel a lack of support from the prison staff they work with and in some places, morale is low, which, in turn impacts on learners' experience of education and their outcomes.

Generally, prison educators are experienced teachers, with most having substantial teaching experience both inside and outside prison. Almost half of the survey respondents have worked in prison education for over a decade. Many are unhappy with the current commissioning arrangements for prison education and would like this to be reviewed.

Teaching in prison is a highly specialised role. Despite this, support for prison teachers is generally inadequate, and just under one in ten (9.7%) of our survey respondents believed that support for new teachers was good enough. Some teachers have paid for their own professional development because they were unable to secure opportunities through their employer.



Prison educators are motivated by spending time with learners, and the transformational impact that education can have on people's lives. Teachers understand the rehabilitative impact of education, and they value the process of supporting people in prison to make changes that will lead to better outcomes on release.

Education staff would welcome more input from prison management and officers. There is an appetite for additional training on the operational and cultural aspects of prison life. Prison teachers would welcome regular communication and updates from the prisons they work in, and to feel more integrated into the prison.

Teachers responding to the survey expressed a need for further professional development, opportunities for mentoring, shadowing, networking, sharing good practice and developing specialisms. There is also a need to support teachers' well-being much more effectively, including providing therapeutic support.

Pay and conditions, and the lack of progression are significant issues for prison teachers. Lack of digital technology prevents teachers from supporting learners with essential skills and knowledge. Infrastructure, lack of resources and poor facilities also disincentivise teachers and learners.

The turnover of prison teachers is too high, and 70% expressed an intention to leave prison work in the next five years. This is extremely concerning, and action needs to be taken swiftly to prevent this. The Ministry of Justice and HMPPS are responsible for this, working alongside education providers.

The findings of this current report echoes previous research findings carried out over a number of years <sup>1,2,3,4</sup>. Once again, findings highlight that prison educators' experience and professionalism are rarely acknowledged or valued, the consequence of which is a workforce in crisis.

Many prison teachers feel doubly disadvantaged through not feeling part of the further education sector or part of the prison sector. There is a belief that their concerns are hidden, that their views are not sought and that their voices are not heard.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### For the Ministry of Justice

1. Commissioning processes for education should ensure that conditions, salaries (including clear and transparent incremental progression for service) and pension entitlements for prison educators are at the very minimum equivalent to further education in the community.
2. Contracts should include adequate time for administration work, class preparation, training and development of prison teachers.
3. The Ministry of Justice should work with PGCE providers to develop a specific unit on teaching in prisons.



4. The Ministry of Justice needs to develop a coherent, sustainable strategy to recruit and retain prison educators, working with education providers but ensuring that there is also ownership and input from senior prison teams.
5. Resources for prison education need to be sufficient to ensure that appropriate technology and facilities are provided.

## For HMPPS

6. The prison service should develop a formal induction process for prison teachers, to be carried out by the host prison and that enable them to develop a good understanding and knowledge of prison operations.
7. The regime should be changed to facilitate better engagement with education and class lengths should be equivalent to those in the community.

## For education providers

8. Teachers need sufficient time for class preparation and administration tasks and more input into the curriculum.
9. More support and/or oversight is needed for some managers, and concerns from teachers should be given full consideration and fully investigated.
10. Providers should develop incentives for teachers, including progression routes, training, mentoring and shadowing schemes.
11. Consideration should be given to employing more admin staff in education departments to support monitoring and recording functions and free up teaching time.
12. Prison teachers should be offered opportunities for clinical supervision and therapeutic support.
13. Opportunities to network and share good practice between prisons and with the wider further education community should be increased.

## For Governors

14. Governors should include prison teachers in induction processes and develop regular training opportunities involving both prison officers and teachers.
15. Governors should implement processes that consult and involve education staff more in regime delivery and planning.
16. Governors should promote opportunities for officers and teachers to work together on projects and for teachers to communicate with keyworkers about learners' needs and progress.



## NOTES

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- <sup>2</sup> [https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/6179/Prison-education-professionalism-against-the-odds-Feb-14/pdf/prisoneducators-fullreport\\_feb14.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/6179/Prison-education-professionalism-against-the-odds-Feb-14/pdf/prisoneducators-fullreport_feb14.pdf)
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- <sup>4</sup> <https://prisonerlearningalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/PLA-FETL-Leadership-in-Prison-Education-report.pdf>
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- <sup>8</sup> UK Prison Population Statistics, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper 4334, 2020, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN04334/SN04334.pdf>
- <sup>9</sup> Rogers, L. et al. 2014. The aspirations and realities of prison education for under-25s in the London area. London Review of Education, 12(2), pp. 184-96 (p. 193).
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- <sup>11</sup> Education and Training Foundation, Further Education Workforce Data for England: Analysis of the 2018-2019 Staff Individualised Record (SIR) data, 2020, <https://www.et-foundation.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/SIR27-REPORT-FOR-PUBLICATION.pdf>
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- <sup>15</sup> Education and Training Foundation, Teaching qualifications for the FE & Skills sector, <https://www.feadvice.org.uk/i-want-work-fe-skills-sector/i-want-be-teacher-fe-skills/teaching-qualifications-fe-skills-sector>





<sup>16</sup> NOMIS is an operational database utilised in prisons to store 'personal details, age group, type of offence(s), type of custody (including those remanded on bail and sentenced), sentence length, prisoner movement data (internal and external), case note information

<sup>17</sup> If a prisoner is alleged to have broken a prison rule, they can go through a disciplinary process, also called a 'nicking'. This includes a hearing, or adjudication with a prison governor.

<sup>18</sup> UCU workforce FOI 2019-20 (no available data for People Plus or Weston College).

<sup>19</sup> Association of Colleges, AoC College Key Facts 2021-2022, 2021, <https://www.aoc.co.uk/sites/default/files/AoC%20College%20Key%20Facts%202021-22.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Dame Sally Coates, Unlocking Potential: A review of education in prison, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/524013/education-review-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/524013/education-review-report.pdf)

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