

PLA Conference 2022

Prison education and the potential to support rehabilitation and recidivism of individuals incarcerated for a sexual offence, with Jane Slater

Summary

- Overview of findings from research into how prison education differs for the General Population (GP) and Sex Offenders (SO)
- Research undertaken for PhD study purposes

Research Bases

- Experience of teaching in prison (all groups) in East Midlands
- Increase in SO population triggered separate education provision and facilities
- No structure to account for SO population
- SO Classroom dwindled to 10 learners in combined session covering ESOL to Art to Quantum Mechanics and String Theory

Identified Issues

- SO population is in general better educated than GP
- SO level of education often outstrips the competence of teachers
- SO population has limited opportunity for work in prison due to VP status so more motivated to learn
- There is extremely limited provision of learning at appropriate levels i.e. above Level 2 or broader than Maths and English for GP, and even less so for SO
- Data analysis is difficult to find as HMPPS does not differentiate by offence category – it is in the “too difficult and too costly” pile

Identified Attitudes

- SO who do not engage see education as a waste of time as they consider teaching to be poor, and it could only lead to a job that for reasons of social stigma is unattainable
- SO who do engage, even at the low level on offer, see it as the lesser of two evils i.e. better than the workshop
- Staff attitude reflects social stigma:
 - SO will always re-offend (the reality is that SO recidivism is the lowest of all index offences);
 - better educated SO means more likelihood of reoffending (no data to that effect);
 - SO education is futile.

Conclusion

- Education for SO is needs-oriented and requires a bespoke approach
- Opportunities should extend to Level 3 and Level 4 and above

- Stigma, mis-information and misunderstanding dissolves trust on both sides

Questions and Answers

Q. Do education programmes specifically address sex offences?

A. No. That element is managed by the mental health and psychology and psychiatry teams. There is very limited if any impact from education in targeting the nature of the offence.

Q. If special programmes for SO are developed wouldn't that reinforce the stigma?

A. Need to think beyond the sentence/prison and offer SO pathways to different life-choices through learning.

Q. What data on recidivism of SO vs. GP i.e. other well educated prisoners?

A. Anecdotally, recidivism is lower in better educated prisoners who try to find alternative routes to employment and life.

Q. SOs have higher levels of education but on the whole so do fraudsters – how do they get stimulated?

A. It is difficult across the board for better educated prisoners and I know that lots of people including the PLA are working to find alternative routes for learning. Other support such as the RIFTSE programme, particularly at HMP Stafford is encouraging.

The basic problem is one of stigma and perception. To trigger better education and more effective rehabilitation into jobs, employers need to change their mindset around ex-offenders.