



## PLA Conference 2022

### We need to talk about blended learning with HMP Liverpool

This excellent workshop took the format of an interview between Emma Ireland, Quality Manager and Esther Kelly, Hub Manager, both from Novus.

Participants were asked for their definition of 'blended learning'. In the community, this combines traditional classroom practice and virtual learning. In prisons, as access to tech is limited, education staff have to be more creative. There is no standard definition of blended learning provided by the Ministry of Justice.

As HMP Liverpool came out of the pandemic, they were keen to look at what works and what doesn't.

Initially, when staff asked learners what they wanted to work on next, they got few responses. Of the 22 that replied, the answers were 'nothing,' 'don't know, and 'plastering'.

There were a huge range of challenges reinstating education. Staff wanted to improve the experience for learners, and many of the learners were disengaged. In addition, although some learners had been studying during the pandemic, they hadn't all been assessed, or needed new assessments to see what levels they had reached.

Esther realised that learners did not always know what was on offer and needed more support and guidance to make informed choices. She and her colleagues carried out surveys across the whole prison to find out what people wanted.

They found out that some people felt safer behind their doors and wanted to study in-cell. However, people's experiences were mixed. Some people wanted to work full time in cell, some people wanted classes, and some people wanted a combination.

The team had to manage a huge range of needs and work out how to deliver education to people who wanted to engage in different ways.

The education team realised that, particularly with some of the functional skills courses, learning was 'done to' learners and there was a lot of passivity. The team wanted to change the way that learners engaged. With the support of the governor and the senior team, who were open to doing things differently, they developed a new delivery model.

Some people learn full time in vocational training, some have a blended learning model - with three classroom sessions and additional support - and some received education through an outreach model. This involved independent work, one-to-one sessions with tutors, work packs, and DVD content in cell.

HMP Liverpool use the outreach model as a way of engaging people in education. While people start of studying full time from their cell, they will get support with their learning and will be encouraged to get more involved in face-to-face activity and classes.

Traditionally, the entry level learners had poor rates of attendance in education, but this has improved under the new model. HMP Liverpool's clear engagement plan supports people, has improved attendance, and learners are developing a wider skill set and resilience.

The core of the process is to be flexible and to give learners as much autonomy and individual support as they need.