



PLA Conference 2022

Welcome and Introduction

Tom Schuller, Chair of the PLA, welcomed everyone to the conference, the PLA's first face-to-face conference since the coronavirus pandemic.

He urged anyone who was not a member of the PLA to consider [joining](#), highlighting the important work that the PLA does to improve prison education and bring people working on prison education together to network and learn from each other.

Tom also encouraged attendees to think about what they thought the PLA's priorities should be over the next couple of years. He said that his own priorities were encouraging stronger relationships with the further education sector and finding ways to better capture the impact of prison education courses (and particularly their benefits to learners).

Three speakers then gave brief summaries of areas of the PLA's work.

Toni Fazaeli discussed the work of the PLA's prison curriculum working group. She said that the working group had concluded that what was needed was not another report but instead a practical guide for people working in prison education, which is useful beyond the current curriculum framework and is interactive. So that is what the working group is working towards. They have had some interesting and useful input from PLA members, learners, teachers and stakeholders and there was a broad consensus that the current curriculum is too narrow, too low level, not well enough linked to employment, and not sufficiently well resourced. They had looked to go back to basics, exploring what the curriculum should cover and why, and how it should be decided and by who. The working group's work was not yet complete, so Toni was keen to have further input.

Maria McNicholl discussed the work of the PLA's teacher development working group. This work had been needed because the findings of the Coates Review had not been implemented and [Hidden Voices](#), the PLA's report with UCU, had shown that prison teachers did not feel supported or invested in. The working group had concluded that there is insufficient professional development for prison teachers, little or no specialist training and no promotion of prison teaching as a potential career. It is difficult to recruit prison teachers. There is a need for a flexible framework that works for new

teachers but also enables experienced teachers, especially with further education backgrounds, to move into the prison system. There is also a need for training on jailcraft and how the prison system works, and the need to bring prison education staff and other prison staff together more so they feel like they are working together, as part of the same team. Prison teachers also need opportunities to come together to learn from each other and to better understand what happens elsewhere. But Maria stressed that it had not all been negative – there are many prison teachers who are passionate about what they do and recognise that they are making a real difference. More information can be found in the working group's report: [Professional development for prison educators: How can we train, support, and develop the prison teacher workforce?](#)

Hannah Stevens then discussed the recent work of the PLA. This included highlighting the PLA's ongoing [webinar series](#), the materials that the PLA has recently published to support [cell-based prison education](#) and the work of the [Essential Skills and Inclusion Network](#), a new PLA innovation co-run with Rachel Öner to provide a networking opportunity for practitioners in the sector. Hannah also mentioned the PLA's work to support people with lived experience to give evidence to the Education Select Committee, the PLA's consultation with members on the Prisons Strategy White Paper and on the next iteration of the prison education contracts, and that Francesca had spoken at the launch of the HMIP/Ofsted report on reading in prisons.

The next speaker was **Theresa Moore**, from Weston College, who discussed a new induction process for prison teachers that they have developed to support teachers into the role. They have developed this recognising that public perception of prison education is not positive, prison teachers are often very critical of their role, and there is actually very little evidence about what is effective in prison teaching (other than work by the Education and Training Foundation).

To respond to this, Weston have developed an induction programme. It is a nine-month programme with five modules, which have been developed by teachers themselves. It also involves two weeks shadowing initially, without teaching responsibilities, and protecting one day per month for CPD. They also get a mentor visit within the first three months. The modules cover security, partnerships, teaching and learning, neurodiversity, and trauma-informed practice. The first two groups to do it had a mixed experience, but the process has subsequently been adjusted and feedback from the third and fourth groups was very positive. They were particularly valuing the networking opportunities and mixing with teachers from other sites who were in a similar stage of their prison teaching career. Weston is now considering whether further adjustments are needed – e.g., Should it lead to a qualification? Could it be shorter? How can prisons be involved more?

In the Q&A, Theresa was asked whether the modules were all the same length and level. She said that they vary in length and are a mixture of Level 2 and Level 3. She was also asked about the pedagogy of care and how teachers can show that they care in their teaching. Theresa said that they have looked at a 'relational curriculum' overlay. She was asked where this fits into teacher training and said that this had to work for both experienced and less experienced teachers and a core challenge has been ensuring that it works for new teachers but that more experienced teachers, who have not taught in a prison before, can see its value. Finally, she was asked whether this was being adopted more widely. Theresa said that she would be keen to work with HMPPS on this, to work towards a consistent approach being taken across the prison system.