

A guide for developing the curriculum in prisons



Foreword

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What kinds of education should be offered to those in prison? Who should design the learning, and how should it be delivered? How can we know whether the education works – i.e. does it actually do what it sets out to do?

These are questions which are central to any effective education programme. This guide to developing education in prisons tackles these broad questions; breaks them down into manageable areas; and suggests practical ways forward.

The document represents exactly what the PLA does best: it draws on the diverse expertise of PLA members, including learners themselves, in order to help everyone working in the sector to be aware of good practice, and to bring their own experience to bear on how things might move forward. Curriculum development was identified by PLA members as one of the sector's key priorities for 2020-2022, and a group was formed to take forward work on this priority. The result is the guide you have in front of you.

We want each prison to be proud of and able to articulate what their curriculum is, why it is this curriculum, and how it works and is reviewed and improved on a regular basis.

We hope this guide will build on current curriculum thinking and planning in prisons to develop the curriculum further for breadth, depth, and success.

I want to thank all the PLA members who have contributed in various ways to this guide; to the members of the working group which took the issue forward; to PLA/PET staff who enabled it – Natalia Catechis, Francesca Cooney, Hannah Stevens, Cassie Edmiston and Jon Collins; and above all to Toni Fazaeli who led this work, expertly chaired the working group, and made sure the work reached completion.

Prisoner Learning Alliance Curriculum Working Group.

In autumn 2020 the Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA) consulted our membership to find out what areas of prison education they would like us to work on. Members said that the prison curriculum in England and Wales needed reform and that it should be a PLA priority.

PLA members were clear that the prison curriculum was lacking in creativity and inclusion and offered inadequate opportunities for personal and professional development. Prison teachers wanted more guidance on what they were able to teach and were concerned that prisons had not really developed the ideas set out in 'Unlocking Potential', the 2016 report of Dame Sally Coates' review of education in prison, for a whole prison approach to education.

Early in 2021, the PLA established an expert working group, under the leadership of Toni Fazaeli, to develop and support work on curriculum in prisons. The Curriculum Working Group met regularly to discuss vision, challenges, and ideas for the curriculum with members, and consulted on what a good prison education curriculum should look like.

PLA members generously shared their time and expertise with the Curriculum Working Group in various workshops, events and other communications, including:

- An online roundtable on the in-cell curriculum, which took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, when face-to-face education was on hold, or extremely limited in most prisons.
- A roundtable on real-world training and employability.
- A webinar looking at how educators could engage and re-engage with prison learners as lockdown eased.
- Eight individual interviews with people with lived experience of prison, teachers, and other experts in prison learning.
- Two in-depth consultation workshops on the draft curriculum guide with PLA members at the PLA annual conference in November 2022.
- Views from PLA members via email.

In addition, the Working Group drew on extensive evidence from various reports on prison education, including the report of the Education Select Committee's inquiry into prison education (2021-22), HM Inspectorate of Prisons' findings on prison education, and a University and College Union (UCU) survey of over 400 teachers in prisons (see Annex One for further reading and Annex Two for more information about the UCU survey).

How to use this guide, and its reach.

Throughout its work, the Curriculum Working Group was advised that a practical guide was needed, rather than another policy report. Members felt that a document setting out questions that created a place for reflection and discussion, and focused on developing and delivering a prison curriculum, would be most useful. As a result, we have developed this guide. We hope that it will support those working in prisons to offer a good range of high-quality formal and informal learning.

In this guide, we use the terms ‘people in prison’ and ‘learner’. For people who have been to prison, we use the term ‘prison leaver’.

The PLA believes that terms such as ‘offender’ are stigmatising and do not recognise people’s potential. We support education as part of the pathway to creating a new positive way of life and identity as learners, students, mentors, employees, and citizens – with offending left in the past. We aim to treat people with respect and to describe learners as people, not as someone with a label like ‘prisoner’ that many find hard to see beyond.

This guide focuses on England and Wales but can be used in other countries as the principles and questions to consider go beyond borders. Similarly, this guide is useful for men’s and women’s prisons, young offender institutions, and different categories of prison.

We hope that this guide offers a framework that supports you in your work developing the curriculum. Many readers will already have significant experience of developing a curriculum for their prison, but by choosing to cover the curriculum process from the beginning to end we hope to support all those involved, whatever their experience - from newcomer to seasoned educator. We were advised by PLA members and partner agencies that there is fresh thinking, ideas, and ways of framing curriculum in the guide that should really help all involved in prisons.

The current Ofsted inspection framework has a focus on curriculum, but curriculum always matters. Similarly, Estyn has a focus on breadth, balance and appropriateness of curriculum. We intend for this guide to

last beyond the timespan of the current inspection framework and current government policy priorities, as a practical support informed by the principles of good quality, purposeful curriculum, offering range and depth at different levels for learners in prison.

We recommend each prison draws together key staff and partner organisations to review and develop the curriculum most suited to their learners, the local context, and a good future for life beyond prison.

We are keen to hear how you use this guide. Please email us at: policy@prisonerseducation.org.uk with your comments or suggestions.

Contents

Part 1 – Background and context.	6	A five-stage step-by-step approach to curriculum planning.	26
Part 2 – The Curriculum Guide.	10	Stage 1 – Situation analysis.	27
What is the right curriculum for prisons?	11	Stage 2 – Values, Aims and Primary purpose.	29
Who could help to design and deliver the curriculum?	12	Stage 3 – Curriculum planning.	31
Learner voice and consultation with learners.	13	Stage 4 – Implementing.	32
Is there agreement on what matters in a prison curriculum?	15	Stage 5 – Evaluation.	32
Where and how is the prison curriculum delivered?	17	What is the prison learner journey?	33
What are the challenges in developing and implementing an effective prison education curriculum?	18	Part 3 – Conclusion.	40
Types of curriculum		Annexes	
1. Learner-centred curriculum.	21	Annex One – Signposting and further reading.	41
2. Core or essential curriculum.	21	Annex Two – Prison teachers' views on curriculum.	42
3. Null curriculum.	21	Annex Three – Ofsted inspections from February 2020.	43
4. Relational curriculum.	21	Annex Four – Template Curriculum Statement.	44
5. Subject-centred curriculum.	22	Annex Five – List of contributors.	48
6. Outcome-focused or employment-focused curriculum.	22		
7. Integrated and spiral curriculum.	22		
8. Enrichment or informal curriculum.	23		
9. Life phase and time-based curriculum.	23		
10. Decolonised curriculum.	23		
11. Hidden or covert curriculum.	24		
12. Rights-based or entitlement curriculum.	24		
13. Restorative justice framed curriculum.	24		



Part 1

Background and context.

A curriculum sets out the aims of a programme of education and training. It also:

- Sets out the plans for those aims to be implemented, including the knowledge, skills, and behaviours to be gained at each stage.
- Makes it possible to evaluate learners' knowledge and understanding against those expectations.

Since February 2020, Ofsted's 'Handbook for the inspection of education, skills and work activities in prisons and young offender institutions' has placed curriculum intent, implementation, and impact at the heart of inspection judgments.¹ In Wales, Estyn has a similar focus on curriculum and its importance. It expects the same standard of performance as further education colleges in the community, with a relevant range of learning experiences that equip learners for their release from prison.

Who should set the curriculum?

Education in prisons in England is governed by the 'Prison education and library services for adult prisons in England Policy Framework'.² This details the minimum mandatory requirements that prison governors need to deliver. Governors are expected to set the strategic vision for their establishment's education programme, ensuring this is delivered in the best way for their learners.

Prison governors are vitally important. Governors must ensure that education providers deliver a core common curriculum of English, maths, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The Governor can decide upon the other services that will make up their education offer but must meet the definition (purpose) of education as follows:

"Education in prison should give individuals the skills they need to unlock their potential, gain employment, and become assets to their communities. It is one of the pillars of effective rehabilitation. Education should build social capital and improve the well-being of prisoners during their sentences."³

The PLA's position is that there should be the maximum possible delegation of the responsibility for developing the prison curriculum to individual prisons. Governors, prison staff and teaching staff have the best understanding of the prison context, the nature and diversity of their learners, and the range of employment opportunities on release. They are also in the best position to draw experience, capacity and resources from local partners that will enhance the curriculum.

Inspections recognise the importance of an establishment's autonomy in choosing its own curriculum approaches. The PLA supports prisons developing their own curriculum within a high-level policy framework set nationally.

¹ Ofsted, [Handbook for the inspection of education, skills and work activities in prisons and young offender institutions, 2022](#).

² Ministry of Justice, [Prison Education & Library Services for adult prisons in England Policy Framework, 2019](#).

³ Dame Sally Coates, [Unlocking Potential: A review of education in prison, 2016](#), pp.3.

Modes of delivery.

Even within a prison context, there is a broad range of ways in which education can be delivered. This includes both face-to-face and remote modes of delivery, with the latter including in-cell delivery. Figure one provides some examples of the most common form of delivery.

The PLA believes that the most effective education is relational and develops transferable attitudes and behaviour alongside skills and knowledge. Tutors and instructors fulfil a huge need, providing pastoral support and encouraging engagement and motivation. Maintaining face-to-face delivery of education is therefore essential.

We do not want regimes that keep people in cell for longer. But where that is happening, a full range of in-cell activities and the necessary support, should be offered. This is now a key mode of delivery for prison education and should be embedded in the curriculum. In-cell activity should support all other activities provided in the prison, not just those usually delivered in the classroom. Inspections will expect in-cell delivery to be part of a progressive curriculum, provided systematically in a structured way and assessed as appropriate.

“It’s not just about English and maths but about changing mindsets and opening prisoners’ eyes to what life could be like.”

**Interview with a prison leaver,
1 April 2022**

Figure One

Examples of modes of delivery.





Part 2 **The Curriculum Guide.**

The answer to the question “what is the right curriculum for prisons?” depends on the right questions being asked.

Learner voice and consultation with learners.

Listening to prison learners is vital when designing a curriculum. No one designing any modern service would fail to build feedback from service users into their approach to improving and maintaining the quality of that service. Involving learners will enable removal of barriers to education, improve teaching and learning, and help ensure that prison education can transform people's lives.

Consulting with learners will also benefit those involved. People in prison involved in learner voice activities take on a position of responsibility. This can play a vital part in helping them develop the skills, attitudes, and behaviour to move their own lives onto a more positive and responsible course.

Involving learners at the curriculum development stage is more likely to increase participation and engagement in learning. It is important to consult with people who are not engaged in activities, as well as those who are.

If learners feel they are not being sufficiently challenged by education or feel that it is not relevant to them, they are likely to lose trust in its importance. It is vital to show learners that their input is valued and help them to understand the potential benefits of their participation – for themselves as well as for their peers, and the institution.

It is also important to monitor the impact that learners' participation is having, to assess the benefits and refine practice. It is good practice to provide feedback to learners on how their views have been considered, what has changed as a result of their efforts, and if their suggestions cannot be implemented, to explain why not.

“Nobody’s listening to the prisoner, and we’re missing the trick there.”

Interview with a prison leaver,
1 April 2022

“I would involve people who have lived experience, in any form of curriculum design.”

Interview with a prison leaver,
25 April 2022

Is there agreement on what matters in a prison curriculum?

Figure Three

Purpose of a prison curriculum.

There is wide agreement that education in prisons is very important. The Ministry of Justice identifies that education can:

- Build social capital.
- Improve employability.
- Improve life skills and wellbeing (both in and outside of prison).
- Support a reduction in reoffending.

This is echoed by the PLA's 'What is prison education for? A theory of change exploring the value of learning in prison.'⁴ The theory of change shows that the social capital, human capital, improvements in wellbeing, and skills development made possible through prison education not only contribute to longer term positive outcomes, but also contribute to a prison culture that promotes rehabilitation.



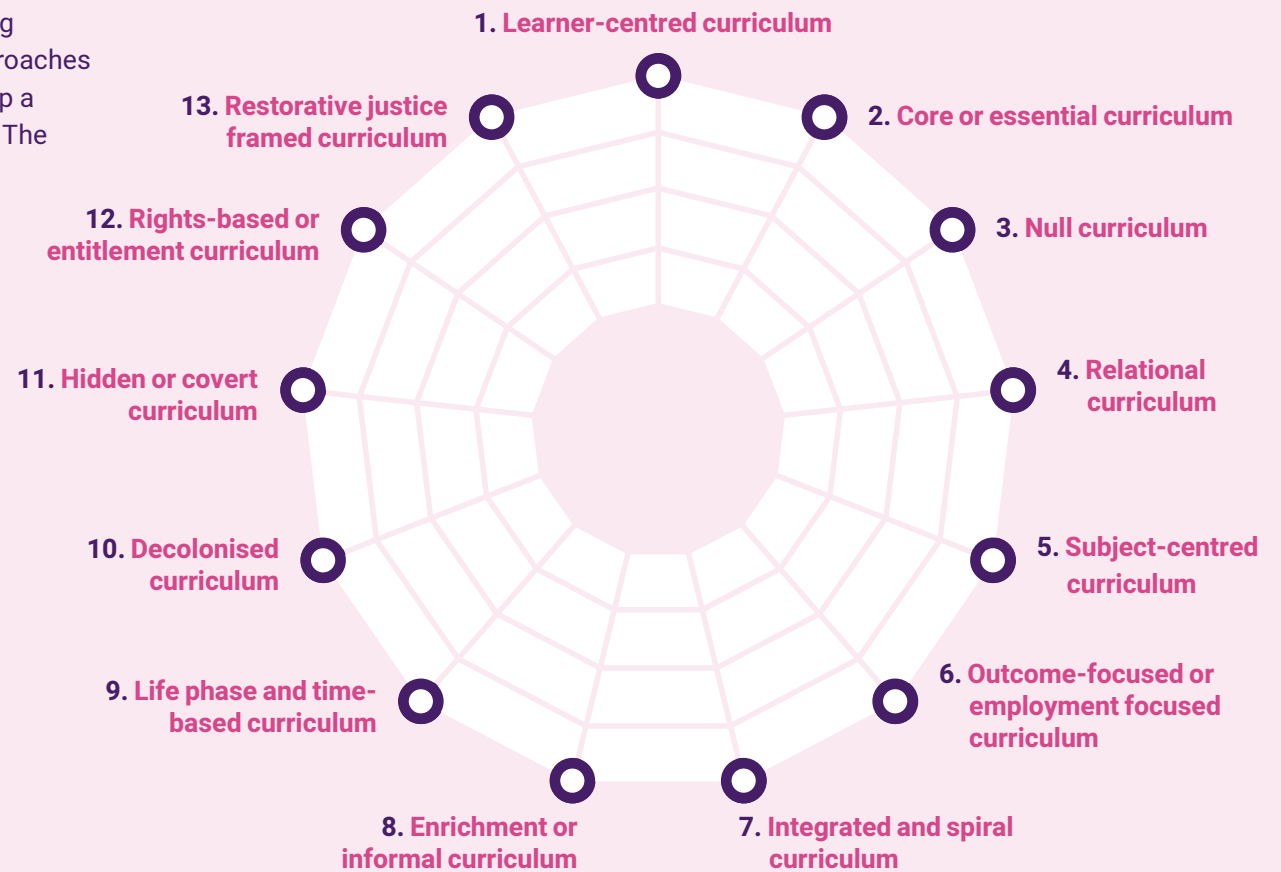
⁴ Prisoner Learning Alliance, [What is prison education for? A theory of change exploring the value of learning in prison](#), 2016.

What kinds of curriculum are there, and how do we think about them when planning a prison curriculum?

There are different ways of thinking about curriculum, and several approaches to explore, interrogate and develop a curriculum that is right for prison. The following frameworks can help:

Figure Five

Types of curriculum.



Most curriculum statements will be informed by a blend of these ways of thinking about curriculum, and some are more self-explanatory than others.

We suggest that as you read about these various approaches to curriculum frameworks that you highlight and mark elements that you consider important for your prison. You can then draw on these as you develop the curriculum framework and statement that are right for your prison.

1. Learner-centred curriculum:

Based on identifying and meeting learners' needs and building on what they already know. It can include personalised learning and sees the learner voice as crucial for shaping the learning experience. Teachers are facilitators and guides. Learners choose what they learn and at what level, when and at what pace, and how learning will be assessed, aided by explicit learning objectives and goals. Emphasis is given to enabling learners to be active, constructing their own meaning from new information and skills, and increasingly becoming independent learners, which prepares learners well for release.

“We recommend a more flexible and person-centred approach to education in prison that provides opportunities tailored to meet the needs and interests of the individual, particularly ensuring that the curriculum

enables the development of positive self-identity amongst black, Asian and minority ethnic and other groups.”⁶

“A fundamental issue is the failure to create a meaningful and relevant education plan for each individual. Effective planning would establish interests and motivations, as well as educational needs. And could help identify educational courses that would benefit and engage each individual.”⁷

2. Core or essential curriculum:

This is at the heart of the curriculum offer and key across every course and how it is taught, as well as in learning support for speakers of English as an additional language, those with additional needs, or those who are neurodivergent. The curriculum usually includes team working; critical thinking; information and digital literacy; creativity and innovation; entrepreneurship; problem solving and reasoning; language and communication skills; numeracy and mathematical thinking; assessing and managing risk; confidence; knowing your rights; relationship building; anger management; self-awareness; and being science minded.

3. Null curriculum:

This involves thinking about what learners will not have the opportunity to learn in the prison, interrogating the reasons for this, and making them explicit and open to challenge. The

principle that people in prison should have the same learning opportunities as those in the community means that a prison might map opportunities within a - for example - 10 mile radius and aim to match this within the prison. To do this, they would make use of education teams, the whole prison's staffing and resources, national and local partner organisations, distance learning, in-cell TV, telephony and technologies, ROTL, and more. Through the process of scrutinising what is not available and why, the actual curriculum offer - including modes of delivery - is likely to improve. Usually, due to null testing, more can be done than previously thought. It is also important to monitor the 'absent curriculum', or what was planned but not delivered, and build this back in.

“For me, it should mirror what provision is outside – a bit like the prison health provision, you should get what's available in the community.”⁸

4. Relational curriculum:

Relationships are at the centre of the curriculum. Firstly, this involves connecting the curriculum to the social context and relational dynamics of the prison, and to the desired contexts of life beyond prison. Secondly, it means the curriculum throughout focuses on building constructive human relationships, the skills of interpersonal communication and engagement, and

⁶ Clinks, [Written evidence to Education Select Committee inquiry on prison education, 2021](#), pp.2.

⁷ StandOut, [Written evidence to Education Select Committee inquiry on prison education, 2021](#), pp.4.

⁸ Interview with individual with lived experience of being in prison, 25 April 2022

teaching and modelling these in educational settings. Many people in prison have experienced difficult and sometimes damaging family and social relationships and so positive ways of connecting and relating with other people need to be learned and developed. This approach is akin to relational approaches for harmony in school cultures, and to relational approaches in care homes that help promote positive relationships, prevent loneliness, boost wellbeing and feelings of belonging, and create an inclusive social community. There can be therapeutic approaches with joint teaching by health professionals and subject teachers and trauma-informed teaching methods.

“I feel there should be more emphasis on educational programmes which focus more on the psychological and social aspects of therapy, treatment and learning to become human again.”⁹

5. Subject-centred curriculum:

The subject-centred curriculum is common. It consists of the planning of the range and levels of subjects offered, the ways they are taught, and the teachers and resources needed. It is important to consider teachers and trainers, and how their subject knowledge, subject-specific pedagogy, and expertise in the prison context is strengthened through Continuing Professional Development (CPD).¹⁰

Consideration is given to offering clear pathways from entry level to higher education, and for academic pathways (including GCSEs and A levels), apprenticeship routes and vocational pathways. For those following apprenticeship or vocational routes, there is a commitment to ensuring current, real-world approaches will be used and ideally people will learn these skills in real life settings with employers.

6. Outcome-focused or employment-focused curriculum:

This means planning the curriculum with an explicit end goal (outcome), and working backwards from it to decide what learning is offered, how, when and, where etc. There is a focus on progression. For example, if the end goal is for all prison leavers to be employed upon release, then there must be a range of pathways linked to attractive and plausible employment options, and opportunities for the development of the essential skills valued by employers e.g., team working, critical thinking, problem solving, good communication skills, self-awareness, and confidence etc.). Key features of an outcome led curriculum include records or portfolios of achievements (including testimonials), CVs for employment, and personal statements for applications to university. Careers guidance is integral.

“If I could change one thing about prison education, it would be actually looking at what employers are specifically looking for, and providing those skills.”¹¹

“Embedding entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial skills should become an essential part of any vocational education or prison workshop. Employers need people that are forward thinking, self-motivated, willing to try new things, determined, business focused and confident. If you have a limited employment record you must be able to showcase these skills and talents. Personal entrepreneurship is a way to do this.”¹²

7. Integrated and spiral curriculum:

This means that the curriculum is designed to be mutually reinforcing across subject areas. For example, maths, English, and construction might be planned so that each subject supports the learners’ development of the other, and provides tailored opportunities to boost progress in all three. Mutual reinforcement might feature in informal learning settings, such as using numbers in gardening or writing letters to family members. A spiral curriculum looks at the learning of subjects so that there is iterative reinforcement. For example, health and safety principles will be revisited across catering courses. As the learner progresses to higher-level provision or to broadened learning such

⁹ StandOut, *Written evidence to Education Select Committee inquiry on prison education*, 2021, pp.1.

¹⁰ Prisoner Learning Alliance, *Professional development for prison educators: How can we train, support, and develop the prison teacher workforce?*, 2022, pp.8-9.

¹¹ StandOut, *Written evidence to Education Select Committee inquiry on prison education*, 2021, pp.2.

¹² Entrepreneurs Unlocked CIC, *Written evidence to Education Select Committee inquiry on prison education*, 2021, pp.2.

as kitchen management, customer service principles will be revisited and looked at in more depth during higher-level courses. It is also important to identify themes that should be visited and revisited so that knowledge can be reinforced and learning advanced, such as relationship skills where we are all ‘work in progress’ and need to continue learning and refining how we relate with others.

8. Enrichment or informal curriculum:

This means ensuring breadth of learning beyond what is taught in formal or informal ways. It can include seeing plays or musical performances by visitors; trying new things, such as making air dry pottery; attending talks from visitors on how schools work today and what the children of parents or carers in prison experience; creating a book group or gardening group; and more. Across the prison community, and across the whole year, enrichment activities can be designed to enhance active listening, discussion, self-esteem and working together, which are likely to be important to the prison’s curriculum policy and plans.

“Pastimes such as self-development, journaling, meditation, self-reflection and practising gratitude are a few of the activities that got me through my sentence.”¹³

“Within the classes at prison X, there were also sessions on philosophy which encouraged discussions around life and emotions. Shakespeare improvisation sessions, Vocalise, in which students from Lincoln’s Inn would come in and train those inside to participate in a formal debate and after a series of classes a team of law students would come in and debate against the prison team in a formal and structured debate on a subject relevant to the legal system or structure, with an audience from the prison watching. Each and every one of these contributed to the individual development of all.”¹⁴

9. Life phase and time-based curriculum:

Time is precious. A curriculum for prisons should meet the needs of those with short and long-term sentences, as well as considering their life stages, such as transition from teenage years to adulthood, retirement, or parenthood, both whilst they are in prison and on release. The curriculum should also be aligned with the stage of the sentence for an individual so that they learn what is most relevant for the start of a prison sentence, the middle years of a long sentence, towards the end of the sentence getting ready for through the gate and release. Consideration should also be given to those on remand, who often have little opportunity to participate in education, skills or work. The curriculum should also be predicated on

learners often spending a lot of time in their cells and should consider how to maximise learning during this time, especially using technologies, learning boxes, and so forth. During the Covid-19 pandemic and extensive lockdowns in prisons, imaginative and safe use was made of new technologies such as tablets to give learning opportunities in cells, as well as a range of self-study boxes and resources. Time also needs to be considered in relation to length of teaching sessions, so that they are broken up into periods matching the concentration spans the group of learners has. A major focus is on equipping individuals to become effective lifelong learners within and outside the prison, with as much ability as possible to actively navigate their own education and to be independent learners.

“Greater flexibility is required of the types of courses offered to prisoners; those serving long sentences must have the opportunity to study at a higher level. This will assist with their rehabilitation, enable them to be productively engaged and will offer improved career choices on release.”¹⁵

10. Decolonised curriculum:

Knowledge and skills, and the methods of teaching them, are not neutral. Certain cultural perspectives may be dominant within subjects. For example, maths may be Eurocentric and not include references to leading mathematicians from India who

¹³ PLA member view submitted via email, 2022

¹⁴ Raymond Smith, *Written evidence to Education Select Committee inquiry on prison education*, 2021, pp. 5.

¹⁵ Tutors at HMP Grendon & HMP Spring Hill, *Written evidence to Education Select Committee inquiry on prison education*, 2021, pp. 7.

informed modern maths and effective mathematical systems across the world. But decolonising is more than internationalising the curriculum.

Decolonising means being aware of imperialism, colonialism and power, and making explicit in the curriculum why histories and knowledge from beyond the West have been marginalised or de-centred. It is also about identifying what can be included to rebalance the curriculum, ensuring a range of voices and perspectives. This is a rights issue; paying attention to the contributions of those made invisible by structural racism, diversifying, and removing discriminatory elements of the curriculum. Widening reading lists, for example, is a small step and exposes readers to a range of writers and perspectives. Learning why writers from some backgrounds have been marginalised, and correcting this, is an important part of improving their learning experience.

11. Hidden or covert curriculum:

This is the unintended way in which values, lessons, and perspectives are conveyed to learners. Learners will absorb how teachers relate with them and their peers. For example, teachers using competitions to aid learning can, if not done carefully, halo the brightest and best and make those who are not ‘the winners’ feel inadequate and demotivated. Gender stereotyped examples can reinforce

learners’ views on what is right and deter them from career options such as engineering or childcare. By thinking about and role modelling the values that the prison wants to promote, a constructive hidden curriculum can be established.

12. Rights-based or entitlement curriculum:

Here education is based on human rights and principles of equality, fairness, empowerment, and non-discrimination. The educators focus on individual learners understanding their rights and claiming them. This usually involves the right to participate in decisions that affect them directly and indirectly. People in prison are better informed and able to articulate and negotiate for fairness, which they can do both within the prison setting and on leaving prison to manage their own history of offending and whether, when and how to declare their criminal record in the outside world. One of the key human rights is to an education, and various United Nations commitments relate this right to lifelong learning.¹⁶ A rights-based curriculum is not adversarial; it is predicated on a culture of mutual respect, harmony and not undermining the rights of others. As with other ways of thinking about curriculum, rights-based education requires a whole prison approach so that the education setting, and the wider prison setting are aligned and not contradictory. Examples of entitlements include “every person in prison is entitled to

be a fluent reader before they leave prison” or “every person in prison must be equipped with the skills necessary for life in contemporary society and employment on release.”

“Emphasis on education as a human right – there should be courses which help people change from prisoner to student and to help them overcome barriers.”¹⁷

13. Restorative justice framed curriculum:

In response to the crime committed, work is done to reduce the individual’s reoffending patterns and behaviours, while also helping victims to recover. The principle is that harming someone creates a personal obligation to make amends. Individuals learn ways to face up to themselves and the crime they have committed and the very real and often life-damaging impact on victims. The curriculum includes ways to understand, resolve and prevent conflict, and develop skills such as mediation. Restorative justice principles can inform the curriculum and help create a culture in which learners understand the impact of their current behaviour on others in the prison and ways to ensure mutual respect. In this framework, prison staff, including education staff, are trained in restorative practices.

¹⁶ For example, [United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4, 2015](#) and [Article 26 of United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948](#).

¹⁷ Interview with individual with lived experience of working in prison, 1 April 2022

Q. Are there other curriculum frameworks that you could draw upon to articulate and plan your own prison curriculum? For example:

- A gender-informed curriculum. What would you include for a female prison and a male prison and/or for all prisons?
- A climate and sustainability curriculum. What would this look like in your prison?

Q. Are there other ways of thinking about curriculum that you think are important to consider for your prison?

Q. Are there points you think are missing in the 13 types of curriculum set out above?

Q. Which elements of the above curriculum approaches will you use?

Figure Six

A five-stage step-by-step approach to curriculum planning.

There are many different ways of thinking about curriculum and the stages of the learner journey. We hope that the above has stimulated ideas for your vision of your prison curriculum.

You may well already be considering:

- What the prison already offers.
- What can be further developed.
- Your prison's priorities.
- Who to involve.

The suggested cycle for a five-stage step-by-step approach to curriculum strategy and planning set out in figure six might be similar to a process you already use, and you can adapt and refine to fit your context.



Stage 1 – Situation analysis.

A useful first step is to assess the current situation in your prison. You may want to consider the range of information available to you as outlined in figure seven.

Figure Seven

Information which may inform your situation analysis.

Learner information	Prison information	External
Learner feedback	Prison strategic priorities	Employment Advisory Board
BKSB scores	Staffing	Colleges and universities
Neurodiversity assessments	Partnerships	Advice and guidance providers
ESOL assessments	Library	DPS providers
IAG assessments	Industries	ROTL providers
OASys assessments	Gyms	ONS and labour data
	IT and in-cell	

Having gathered the information available in your establishment, you may want to use a 'strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats' (SWOT)¹⁸ analysis to help you assess your current curriculum provision.

¹⁸ See [CIPD resource on SWOT analyses](#).

Stage 3 – Curriculum planning.

The curriculum statement describes how the values, aims and primary purposes will be offered and delivered. You should now develop your more detailed curriculum plan.

The list of questions below may give a useful cross checking set of points for you, and you probably will want to regroup them, remove some and add some to make this fit your context.

- **What** are the objectives?
- **What** is the educational offer in terms of both formal and informal learning programmes and enrichment opportunities?
- **What** is not offered, and **why**?
- **Which** learning areas will be offered to ensure breadth? For example, this could include science, creative arts, English, maths, humanities and social sciences, vocational pathways, entrepreneurship, and life skills.
- **Where** will each course or learning opportunity lead and what are the progression pathways?
- **Which** initial assessments will you have in place?
- **How** will programmes be offered? You may want to consider face to face, distance and blended learning, and full or part time options.
- **When** will learning will be offered, including **when** during each learner's sentence?
- **Where** will learning take place (i.e., classrooms or workshops; on the wings or in dedicated drop-in educational spaces; in-cell; online; libraries or association spaces; in college on allowed visits; recreation or garden areas)?
- **Which** teaching and learning methods will be used?
- **How** will the learning culture be fostered?
- **Who** is involved, and what are their roles? This includes teachers, other prison staff, peer mentors, partner organisations' volunteers and staff, and former learners who have used education in prison to create a positive career and life when they left custody.
- **How** will learner voice and the co-creation of education happen?
- **What** learning support will you offer?
- **What** assessment methods and timings will you have?
- **Which** exam boards will you use, and what is your rationale?
- **Which** materials and resources are needed, including books and library facilities?
- **What** development will be given to teachers, trainers, and other staff to support prisoner learning?
- **How** will the curriculum offered be evaluated, refreshed, and developed further?

This phase is likely to take several weeks or several months in your annual or biannual curriculum planning cycle.

Preparing people to leave prison so that towards the end of their sentence there is a strong focus on resettlement. This could include family, social context and employment factors. Especially after a long sentence, it should include contemporary culture, current societal norms and customs, for example single-issue campaigns, political landscapes, developments in understanding and awareness of the needs of different groups of people in society.

Prison leavers will need to be knowledgeable about the labour market or business start-up opportunities, including where appropriate self-employment practices. All prison leavers need to be comfortable using digital technology for work and daily life.

It is vital that people leaving prison know about, and are skilled at using, what are everyday technologies to those in the community. This includes capability on touchscreen mobile phones, text and email, the internet and search engines, social media, online job adverts and applications, online shopping, and online security.

“When I got to the open prison, I got a few guys who were coming to the end of some very long terms in prison. They were saying we could do with something that answers questions such as: What’s the internet? How do we work a mobile phone? What’s YouTube?”

Interview with a prison leaver,
1 April 2022

3

Part 3 Conclusion.

We hope that you have found this guide a useful stimulus for discussions, developing ideas and reviewing and extending the curriculum offered at your prison. We are indebted to the many PLA members who have generously given up their time and informed and shaped this guide, based on their deep knowledge and expertise in prison learning.

We would welcome any feedback.

Please email us at:

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Annex One

– Signposting and further reading.

Signposting:

- [Prisoner Learning Alliance](#)
- [Prisoners' Education Trust](#)
- [The Bell Foundation](#), in particular its [Criminal Justice Programme](#)
- [Education & Training Foundation](#)
- [National Association for Teaching English and Community Languages to Adults \(NATECLA\)](#)
- [Apex Trust](#)
- [Clean Break](#)
- [Fine Cell Work](#)
- [Futures Unlocked](#)
- [Howard League for Penal Reform](#)
- [Koestler Arts](#)
- [Nacro](#)
- [National Extension College](#)
- [Open University](#)
- [Shannon Trust](#)
- [St Giles](#)
- [Storybook Dads \(& Mums\)](#)
- [The Hardman Trust](#)
- [The Longford Trust](#)
- [The Prince's Trust](#)
- [Unlock](#)
- [Women in Prison](#)
- [Working Chance](#)
- [YMCA](#)

Further reading:

Prisoner Learning Alliance:

- [Professional development for prison educators: How can we train, support, and develop the prison teacher workforce?](#) November 2022.
- [PLA materials on cell-based prison education](#) September 2022.
- [Hidden voices: The experience of teachers working in prisons](#) (a report by PLA and UCU), August 2021.
- [The digital divide: Lessons from prisons abroad](#) July 2020.
- [What is prison education for? A theory of change exploring the value of learning in prison](#) June 2016.

Prisoners' Education Trust:

- [Citizens Inside - A guide to creating active participation in prison](#) November 2019.

HMIP thematic reviews:

- [Weekends in prison](#) March 2023.
- [The experiences of adult black male prisoners and black prison staff](#) December 2022.
- [Education recovery in prisons](#) April 2022.
- [Neurodiversity in the criminal justice system](#) July 2021.

Ministry of Justice:

- [Unlocking Potential: A review of education in prison](#) May 2016.

Ofsted:

- [Handbook for the inspection of education, skills and work activities in prisons and young offender institutions](#) October 2022.

HMIP and Ofsted joint thematic review:

- [Prison education: A review of reading education in prisons](#) March 2022.

Education Select Committee:

- [Not just another brick in the wall: why prisoners need an education to climb the ladder of opportunity](#) May 2022.
- [Government response](#) September 2022.

Other countries that have interesting approaches to prison education:

For examples of interesting approaches to prison education from other countries, see [Education in prison: A literature review](#) published by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL).

Annex Two

– Prison teachers' views on curriculum.

In August 2021, the PLA worked with the University and College Union to publish [Hidden Voices: The experience of teachers working in prisons](#), a report detailing the experiences and views of prison educators. They were concerned about 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.'

More than 400 prison educators responded to the survey. Over half (50.4%) of survey respondents felt that prison teachers would be more likely to stay in their roles if they had more autonomy over the prison curriculum. There were clear calls for more independence to develop the prison curriculum, with 52% wanting opportunities to contribute to curriculum delivery alongside teaching.

Annex Three

– Ofsted inspections from February 2020.

Ofsted inspectors look at the quality of the curriculum and its intent, implementation and impact.

Intent.

As part of the inspection, Ofsted speak to education and prison managers to establish the intent of the curriculum. These discussions are the opportunity for managers to explain the rationale behind the curriculum's coverage and structure, and its appropriateness for their learners. Inspectors will ask how prison and education leaders intend people to learn, what end points they want to see, the key concepts learners need to understand and in what order people will learn them.

Implementation.

When inspecting, Ofsted will explore how the prison has implemented the curriculum, including remote activity. The inspection will consider the courses on offer, their subjects and levels, the relative performance on different courses, the geographical spread of any ROTL work or activities outside the prison and the mode of delivery and attendance, including remote learning.

Impact.

Ofsted will focus on what people have learned and the skills they can apply. While exams are an indicator of outcomes, they only represent a sample of what has been learnt. They will look at whether people are becoming more independent, are reading for pleasure and whether they are ready for their next stage of custody or for release.

Annex Four

– Template Curriculum Statement.

For individual prisons to consider when reviewing their current curriculum statement, and/or to add to and adapt this suggested

simple format, changing it to suit their prison, their context and their learners as appropriate.

Curriculum Statement for HMP

	Our commitment and plans	Who is owner and responsible, and key dates	Additional comments
Our values			
Our learning culture, including what we believe about teaching and learning			
The purpose and aims of our curriculum across the whole prison, and why - for our context and the range of learners (e.g. ages, sentence lengths)			

	Our commitment and plans	Who is owner and responsible, and key dates	Additional comments
The kind of curriculum we offer e.g. entitlement and relational (see suggestions pages 20–24)			
What success looks like for learning in our prison			
Summary of the range of our curriculum, across formal and informal learning, and enrichment			
Summary of the levels of learning offered and qualifications			
Summary of lengths and times of learning offered across the year			
Summary of the stages and ways we ensure a positive learner journey, and across different sentence lengths			

	Our commitment and plans	Who is owner and responsible, and key dates	Additional comments
What learning opportunities we offer, across whole prison (formal and informal)			
What progression from learning opportunities we give			
What learning support needs we give, and the ways we identify support needs			
How we offer learning, e.g. face-to-face, in-cell, blended, full and part-time			
Who is involved in the learning offer, including staff across whole prison and from partner organisations			
How we listen to learners and respond to learner voice			

	Our commitment and plans	Who is owner and responsible, and key dates	Additional comments
Where is learning offered, including in-cell, across the prison, and in the community			
When the learning is offered across times of day, week, year			
What resourcing is in place for learning, funds, staffing, peers (including payment system for people in prison engaged in education), volunteers, in-kind			
How we monitor, review and evaluate the learning offer and when			
Other			

Annex Five

– List of contributors.

With thanks to all those who contributed to this guide, including:

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