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**PRisoN: Unlocking prison
research**

Prisoner education in the UK:

A review of the evidence by Prisoners' Education Trust

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'He who opens a school door, closes a prison'. Victor Hugo.

This article will provide an introduction to a selection of research looking at prison education in recent years, including research conducted by Prisoners' Education Trust (PET). It will first set the context in thinking about the purpose of prison education and move on to what the research into prison education does and does not tell us. It will also review some of the current strands of research on UK prison education and some important developments in the evidence that we might look for in the medium term future. Before doing that there will be a brief introduction to the work of PET and the role we play in bringing together research into prisoner education to influence policy and practice.

Introduction to the work of PET

Since 1989, Prisoners Education Trust (PET) has provided access to broader learning opportunities for prisoners, to enhance their chances of building a better life after release. We do this through an advice service and a grants programme which assists around 2,000 prisoners each year to study distance learning courses in subjects and levels not available in prison.

Through our policy work, PET raises awareness of the importance of education for prisoners in aiding rehabilitation and makes the case for better access to academic, creative, informal and vocational learning in prison. Key to this is incorporating the voices and views of prisoners towards education provision, using their experiences to influence policy and practice. A range of research methods are used to gather views from prisoners and former prisoners depending on the issue under investigation and the section of the population under study.

In 2012, PET also established the Prisoner Learning Alliance (PLA), which has a membership of 23 expert organisations involved with learning in the criminal justice system. The aim of the PLA is *'to bring together diverse non-statutory stakeholders with senior cross-*

departmental officials, to provide expertise and strategic vision to inform future priorities, policies and practices relating to prison education, learning and skills'.¹ The PLA meet on a quarterly basis and meetings are attended by a range of senior officials from government departments, including Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and National Offender Management Service (NOMS). Current and former prisoner learners feed into the work of the PLA by speaking at the quarterly meetings. The PLA also hosts frequent roundtable events and an annual conference to gain views from practitioners, teachers, providers and other stakeholders.

What is the purpose of prison education?

Speaking at a conference held by the PLA in 2013, Clive Martin, Director of the charity Clinks asked the audience the question, *'What is prison education all about? What is the theory of change?'*² This is an important question for social researchers interested in the area of prison education and depending on what their interests are, will come at it from a different angle. The fact that there is no universal theory of change means that the purpose of learning in prison can be unclear. Is prison education all about making prisoners employable and improving their employment prospects? Is it about changing attitudes and behaviours? Is it about promoting desistance? Is it about reducing reoffending? Is it about helping people cope with their sentences? Is it simply about keeping people busy? Or is it about all of the above? At PET, we take a broad view to the purpose of prison education and believe that it has many benefits for prisoners, former prisoners, their families, prisons, prison staff and wider society.

In England and Wales, the focus of prison education under the current Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) 4 contracts is in practice focused heavily on basic literacy and numeracy and vocational qualifications at GCSE equivalent level or below (up to level 2).³ According to the Skills Funding Agency, responsible for managing the education contracts in

1. Champion, N. (2013) Smart Rehabilitation: Learning how to get better outcomes. London: Prisoners' Education Trust. Available at: https://fbclientprisoners.s3.amazonaws.com/Resources/PLA_Smart_Rehabilitation_Report.pdf
2. <http://www.clinks.org/community/blog-posts/what-purpose-learning-prison>
3. Skills Funding Agency and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (March 2015) Statistical First Release. Further Education and Skills: Learner Participation, Outcomes and Level of Highest Qualification Held. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/428402/SFR_commentary_March_2015_FINAL.pdf

adult prisons, prison education is defined as allowing 'offenders in custody, according to need, to receive education and training. This in turn enables them to gain the skills and qualifications they need to get sustainable employment and have a positive role in society'.⁴ It is perhaps not surprising there is this focus when the cost of prisoners re-offending forms a significant portion of the cost of crime to society. In the UK, the cost of re-offending by all recently released prisoners during 2007-2008 was estimated to be between 9.5 billion and 13 billion.⁵ Employment is regularly stated as a key factor in reducing the risk and the costs of re-offending.⁶ However, the evidence suggests that it is not just any job that will lead to reduced re-offending; steady employment, particularly if it offers a sense of achievement, satisfaction or mastery, can support people to stop offending.⁷ Furthermore, employment alone cannot prevent offending and some people can desist from crime without employment.⁸ Although OLASS providers are encouraged to think about employability, they are paid by numbers of accreditations rather than by outcomes of prisoners entering employment.⁹

Whilst PET acknowledges the valuable relationship between prison education and employment it also takes a broader view of the relationship between prison education and its wider rehabilitation outcomes. The view we take is similar to one shared by the Education and Skills Committee in 2005;

'The purpose of education and training in prisons should be to play a key role in improving the employability of prisoners and therefore contribute to reducing recidivism. However, we would wish the purpose of prison education to be understood in broader

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terms than just improving the employability of a prisoner. We would emphasise the importance of delivering education also because it is the right to do in a civilised society. Education has a value in itself and it is important to develop the person as a whole, not just in terms of the qualifications they hold for employment. The breadth of the education curriculum is important and employability skills should not be emphasised to such an extent that the wider benefits of learning are excluded'.¹⁰

We also take a broad view of prison education research, acknowledging that a wide range of studies, both qualitative and quantitative, are needed to piece together the story of how prison education works in supporting people to desist from crime and participate constructively in society as engaged citizens. This article will now highlight some recent studies and new initiatives that have explored different aspects of prisoner education and the benefits that they bring as well as their limits.

The Justice Data Lab evidence on PET applicants

Since the Justice Data Lab (JDL) was launched in April 2013, the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) has been giving organisations working with people involved in

the criminal justice system access to central reoffending data through the service¹¹ to evidence how effective their work is at reducing re-offending. The Data Lab service includes the following four defining characteristics;

- ❑ Not-for-profit organisations can access government-held data concerning their clients through the Data Lab.

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4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/olass-funding-rules-and-guidance>
 5. National Audit Office (2010) Managing offenders on short custodial sentences. London: National Audit Office.
 6. Hawley, J., Murphy, I., & Souto-Otero, M. (2013) Prison Education and Training in Europe. Current State-of-Play and challenges. http://ec.europa.eu/education/more-information/doc/prison_en.htm
 7. Farrall (2002) *Rethinking What Works with Offenders*, Cullompton, UK, Willan Press; Ministry of Justice (2013) *Analysis of the impact of employment on re-offending following release from custody, using Propensity Score Matching*. London: Ministry of Justice.
 8. Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph (2002) 'Gender, crime and desistance: Toward a theory of cognitive transformation', *American Journal of Sociology*, 107, 990-1064.
 9. Champion, N. (2013) *Smart Rehabilitation: Learning how to get better outcomes*. London: Prisoners' Education Trust. Available at: https://fbclientprisoners.s3.amazonaws.com/Resources/PLA_Smart_Rehabilitation_Report.pdf
 10. House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (2005) *Prison Education Volume 1. Seventh Report of Session 2004-05*. London: The Stationary Office.
 11. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/justice-data-lab>

- ❑ A comparison group can be established either through quasi-experimental statistics or by drawing on a previous process of random assignment.
- ❑ The impact of a not-for-profit organisation can be presented as a comparison of treated versus non-treated groups at an aggregate level—as a group, rather than as individuals.
- ❑ The results are then shared across the sector to build a body of evidence for what works to achieve particular outcomes.¹²

The JDL is pioneering work, for the first time giving the voluntary sector access to quantitative analysis, usually only available to the public sector. PET has submitted data to the JDL twice, first in January 2014 and more recently in September 2015. In January 2014, the findings suggested that overall the difference in re-offending rates between a sample of 3,085 prisoners who had accessed distance learning courses or arts and hobby materials through PET and those who had not from a matched control group was a quarter less (19 per cent compared with 26 per cent).¹³ Similar results were found in September 2015 where, with a larger sample of 5,846 of PET's beneficiaries, the findings indicated that they again re-offended a quarter less than the control group (18 per cent compared with 25 per cent).¹⁴ The analysis went further in 2015 by also looking at a smaller sample of prisoners who had applied for a grant but who PET did not go on to fund. These prisoners also demonstrated a significant reduction in re-offending, compared to a matched control group, suggesting that prisoners who aspired and were motivated to change their lives through education and pursue the process of applying to PET were more successful in moving away from crime. This is in line with desistance theorists who highlight the importance of providing hope and aspiration to people in prison.¹⁵

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However, although the JDL has many benefits, it is not without its limitations. The minimum sample size required to submit data for analysis is 60. However, in order to get significant results, the ideal size would be much more. Many smaller voluntary sector organisations do not have large enough numbers of service users to submit big enough data sets in order to produce significant results. Some of the early results from the Data Lab in 2013 from smaller organisations did indeed produce mixed results. Furthermore, although the JDL can give statistics on re-offending rates, they cannot give the whole picture and explain the how and why someone does desist from crime. Quantitative analysis needs to be supported by qualitative evidence.

Looking ahead however, there is potential for quantified data matching techniques to cast more light on the desistance mechanisms at work. The MoJ have successfully enabled a data match between the prison and police data and that held by the HMRC/DWP which gives information on individual's employment record. Further analysis could therefore show whether PET beneficiaries, in addition to showing reduced re-offending behaviour, were also more successful than the control group in securing employment. It could also show whether PET beneficiaries who had not yet secured employment showed reduced re-offending compared to a matched group who had also not secured employment. This would inform the question of the extent to which the link between education and reduced reoffending is mediated through an employment mechanism.

Literacy and numeracy data

Prisoners' levels of educational achievement are generally found to be lower than in the general population. Published self-reported information from a MoJ survey of 1435 adult prisoners¹⁶ showed that; just

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12. Gyateng, T., Pritchard, D., de la Casas, L. (2013) Creating a 'Data Lab' Increasing not-for-profit organisations' access to, and demand for, data for impact measurement. London: NPC.
 13. Ministry of Justice (January 2014) Justice Data Lab Re-offending analysis: Prisoners' Education Trust. London: Ministry of Justice. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/270084/prisoners-education-trust-report.pdf
 14. Ministry of Justice (September 2015) Justice Data Lab Re-offending Analysis: Prisoners' Education Trust. London: Ministry of Justice. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/459470/prisoners-education-trust-report.pdf
 15. Maruna (2001) Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives, Washington DC: APA Books.
 16. Representative of 90% of prison receptions. Prisoners sentenced between one month and four years in 2005/06. Reported in: Hopkins (2012) *The pre-custody employment, training and education status of newly sentenced prisoners*. Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR). London: Ministry of Justice.

over half (53 per cent) of prisoners in the survey reported having any qualification, compared with the 85 per cent of the general population and 21 per cent self-reported needing help with reading and writing or ability with numbers. These findings do need to be put into context as levels of literacy and numeracy overall in England are low. In an OECD report from 2013,¹⁷ England was ranked 22nd for literacy and 21st for numeracy out of 24 countries. Furthermore, 24 per cent of adults scored at or below Level 1 in numeracy compared with an average of 19 per cent across all OECD countries.

Although prisoners' educational levels are generally relatively low, there has been a lack of up to date and robust statistics available; the last well publicised statistics were from the 2002 Social Exclusion Unit's (SEU) report 'Reducing Re-offending of Ex-prisoners'.¹⁸ PET questioned the statistics quoted in the report, that between 50 per cent and two thirds of all prisoners were at or below the literacy and numeracy levels expected of a ten year child, because the assessments they were based on were aimed at secondary school ages rather than primary. Due to this data being unreliable and over a decade old, PET had been calling for more up to date and robust statistics.

A recent development since August 2014 has been the roll out of stronger literacy and numeracy assessments at the start of prison sentences. The results of these assessments have recently been published,¹⁹ based on the results of 74,300 prisoners assessed on entering prison since August 2014. The statistics show that 46 per cent of people entering the prison system have literacy skills no higher than those broadly expected of an 11 year old child. This is three times more than the 15 per cent of people with similar skills levels in the adult population generally (based on the statistics from the 2012 MoJ research).²⁰ 52 per cent of those prisoners assessed have the equivalent capability in numeracy which compares with 49 per cent of the general public. The statistics also show that 46 per cent of newly assessed prisoners have Level 1 and Level 2 literacy skills, (GCSE equivalent) which compares to 85 per cent

of the general population. In contrast, 40 per cent of prisoners assessed had the equivalent level of numeracy skills compared with 50 per cent of the general population. 8,880 (12 per cent) of those assessed were at the level of GCSE grade A*-C, indicating that prisons also need to provide opportunities for them to progress in their education and gain accredited qualifications that employers are looking for. By doing so, they will inspire others and can provide additional support to staff by mentoring their peers. On the other hand, almost a third (23,550) of those prisoners assessed self-reported having a learning difficulty or disability, indicating that prisons need to provide new approaches to engage, incentivise and support them to get essential skills in English and Maths and then to keep learning.

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Whilst PET welcomes this new data, the mandatory assessments the data is based on only assesses the attainment of prisoners going into prison, most of whom are serving short sentences. The statistics are therefore not a reliable assessment for the snapshot population in prison at any one time, which has a higher proportion of prisoners serving long sentences, many of whom will have progressed and have a higher level of education. We also have concerns about the timing of the assessments, especially if they are done on the

first or second day of an individual's sentence when they are likely to be feeling vulnerable and in a state of shock and confusion. However, as PET has long called for better information on the education attainment levels of people in prison, this new data does signify a step forward.

One final note about literacy and numeracy is that it is often only discussed as being about the provision of 'basic' level, due to the low levels referred to above, instead of creating an understanding of the opportunities and benefits of progression. For example; there is no document which brings together research into desistance, employability and other benefits of literacy progression for prisoners. This is a potential gap in this area of research. The Reading Agency has recently been commissioned to carry out a large scale

17. OECD (2013) OECD Skills Outlook 2013: First Results from the Survey of Adult Skills. OECD Publishing.

18. Social Exclusion Unit (2002) Reducing Re-offending by ex-prisoners. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

19. Skills Funding Agency and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2015) OLASS English and Maths: participation2014/15. London: SFA and BIS.

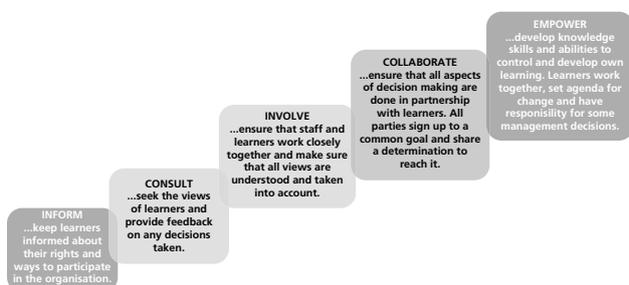
20. Hopkins (2012) *The pre-custody employment, training and education status of newly sentenced prisoners*. Results from the Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR). London: Ministry of Justice.

research project on the benefits of reading programmes in the general population, but this will not include prisoners specifically. We therefore also eagerly anticipate the findings from the evaluation into OLASS 4, which is being conducted by Ipsos Mori in collaboration with Sheffield Hallam University and London School of Economics and has been commissioned by MoJ and BIS. The evaluation should help to understand how these changes to literacy and numeracy assessments have worked in practice, how they have led to educational progression and the impact on employment and re-offending outcomes.

Learning Culture

One important aspect of prison education is the extent to which the culture of individual prisons promotes educational outcomes effectively. Between April 2014 and March 2015, PET worked on an innovative pilot project to support the development of rehabilitative cultures in eight prisons. A full evaluation of the project was conducted using action research.

In each prison the initiative involved: a one day training session for staff from a range of prison departments focused on 'Learner Voice' principles and activities; a further two facilitated meetings which saw staff work together with prisoners to co-produce initiatives based on the training, which were appropriate to the needs of each prison. Learner Voice is a means of enabling participation and promoting learners' involvement in various ways. It has been described as: *'developing a culture and processes whereby learners are consulted and proactively engage with shaping their own educational experiences'*²¹ as well as *'considering the perspectives and ideas of learners, respecting what everyone has to say, taking risks, sharing, listening, engaging and working together in partnership'*.²² The LSIS Ladder of Engagement²³ diagram below illustrates different levels of engagement:



The project design built upon our earlier publication: 'Involve, Improve, Inspire: A Learner Voice Toolkit'²⁴ and films which were used to inform the training for staff around Learner Voice. All prisons already had some level of Learner Voice activity at the beginning of the project; the aim was to push them further along the ladder of engagement, increasing the opportunities for prisoner involvement in meaningful learning activities. A further aim was to engage with hard to reach learners through the projects. Initiatives to come out of the prisons included: two prisons that introduced Prisoner Information Desks (PIDs) onto prison wings, one prison that introduced Skills Mentors to recruit those not engaged in activities into work or education, one prison that rebranded their education department to the college provider delivering the contract and another prison that set up a Learner Council to represent the views of learners.

The project aimed to fill in gaps in knowledge as limited research is currently available on the effectiveness of Learner Voice initiatives within prison environments. This study evaluated the effectiveness of the project in cultivating a rehabilitative culture using a multiple baseline research design. The evaluation included a baseline and follow up questionnaire for staff and prisoners; telephone interviews with a sample of staff; observations from all prison sessions; feedback from training participants; and focus groups with prisoner participants. PET worked with Dr. Auty at the Institute for Criminology at Cambridge to conduct the evaluation, including developing the survey to measure the learning and rehabilitative culture in the prisons. The survey is based on the design of the Measuring Quality of Prison Life (MQPL) and Staff Quality of Life (SQL) surveys. The methodology and structure of these questionnaires are well known as they are carried out across the prison estate either by the University of Cambridge Prisons Research Centre or by the NOMS audit team. Overall, throughout the project almost 1,200 prisoner completed questionnaires were collected but in some cases the sample sizes were quite small. Sample sizes for staff surveys were much smaller although some significant changes were measured too.

The survey was used to measure conceptual dimensions which we defined as being essential to a learning and therefore rehabilitative culture. These dimensions included: empowering, inclusive, aspirational, engaging and relevant and safe. Quantitative survey data was analysed by looking at the

21. Rudd, T, Colligan, F and Naik, R (2006). Learner Voice. Bristol: Futurelab.

22. Ibid.

23. LSIS (2012) Talking Learner Voice. Collaborating with and empowering learners in quality improvement. A practical guide for leaders, managers and practitioners. Coventry: LSIS. Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130802100617/http://lsis.org.uk/sites/www.lsis.org.uk/files/LSIS%20-%20Talking%20Learner%20Voice%20A4.pdf>

24. Champion, N. (2013) 'Involve, Improve, Inspire': A prisoner Learner Voice Toolkit. London: Prisoners' Education Trust. Available at: <https://fbclientprisoners.s3.amazonaws.com/Documents/PET%20Learner%20Voice%20Toolkit%20F.pdf>

difference in the dimension scores between the baseline and follow up survey results using t-tests. All analyses were conducted using statistical software packages SPSS and STATA. Qualitative data was analysed using a content analysis approach. All but one dimension (safe) held together and produced statistically significant increases for some of the prisons.

The project was informed by the diffusion of innovation theory developed by Rogers²⁵ which seeks to explain how, why and at what rate new ideas and technology spread through cultures. Rogers proposes the following factors determine the rate of adoption of innovations: the perceived attributes of the innovation itself, the type of innovation decision, communication channels, the nature of the social system and the efforts of the 'change agents' to promote the innovation. The innovation must be widely adopted in order to self-sustain. Within the rate of adoption, there is a point at which an innovation reaches critical mass. The categories of adopters identified by Rogers are: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. The project was also influenced by the Behavioural Insights Team EAST Model,²⁶ which states that if you want to encourage a particular behaviour, for example a new innovation, then it needs to be: Easy, Attractive, Social and Timely (EAST). This is based on the Behavioural Insight Team's own work and wider academic literature.

Findings

Full and detailed results for the project and individual dimensions will be published in 2016. However, overall we found the intervention to be successful in supporting the development of Learner Voice activities in some of the prisons. The results suggested that in a similar fashion to Rogers's theory, prisons could be grouped into three main clusters:

- ❑ Visionaries and enthusiasts — Three prisons had quantified statistically significant evidence supported by qualitative evidence of improvements in some of the dimensions measured, even in the short timeframe of the project. These groups tended to embrace change and be internally motivated to change, for example: *'Our can-do attitude here at [prison] is what is driving us forward.*

Within the rate of adoption, there is a point at which an innovation reaches critical mass.

We will carry on consulting with [prisoners] here to see how this culture is embedding. It's a really positive project and a privilege we can all be part of shaping their futures' Staff member.

- ❑ Mainstream adopters — Two prisons had qualitative evidence of improvements but limited quantitative evidence in the period. This group tended to be pragmatists who accepted change but often out of necessity rather than choice, for example: *'It's better than it was. The desks have helped. Other prisoners can get through to prison officers now if they want anything'* Staff member.
- ❑ Resisters — Three prisons had qualitative evidence showing little or no improvements over the timeframe of the project and no statistically significant increases from quantitative findings. This group tended to be suspicious of new innovations and resistant to buy into new ideas, for example: *'We need reps in education. I would love to be one, but every time you ask you get nowhere'* Prisoner.

The overall findings led to the conclusion that Learner Voice activities can support the development and advancement of a rehabilitative learning culture, providing prisons meet the following conditions: good levels of prisoner involvement and engagement, good levels of staff involvement and engagement and effective communication systems are in place before starting this kind of work. The visionaries and enthusiasts group were characterised by: commitment from staff and prisoners throughout the project; effective communication between staff, between different departments and between prisoners and staff; there was buy in from senior members of staff including Governors and staff on the ground; there was consistency in approach throughout the project and control and autonomy was given to prisoners. One of the limitations of the study was the relatively short time frame and we predict that with longer time some of the prisons may have been able to achieve more change in their cultures.

PET is looking forward to further opportunities to develop the survey tool and work with more prisons to develop their rehabilitate learning cultures. We would also like to see opportunities for NOMS to develop this

25. Rogers, E. (1962) Diffusion of innovations. Glencoe: Free Press.

26. Service, O., Hallsworth, M., Halpern, D., Algate, F., Gallagher, R., Nyugen, S., Ruda, S., Sanders, M., Pelenu, M., Gyani, A., Harper, H., Rheinhard, J., & Kirkman, E. (2012) EAST: Four simple ways to apply behavioural insights. London: Behavioural Insights Team. Available at: http://38r8om2xjhh125mw24492dir.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/BIT-Publication-EAST_FA_WEB.pdf

area of work further by conducting research to test whether a more rehabilitative culture generates more effective rehabilitative outcomes as measured by rates of prisoner re-offending on release.

Other research strands: developing an academic network around prisoner learning

Another area of work PET has been focusing on is building up a network of researchers and academics involved in the area of prisoner education. On the 9th June 2015, PET welcomed academics from around the world to the University of Cambridge for our second annual symposium, Academic Prisons. The aim of the event was to explore education in a wider sense exploring the programmes, benefits and research that is currently going on.

The three central themes of the day were: creating rehabilitative cultures through learning; bringing together universities and prisoner education and finally technological innovation; breaking the digital divide. This symposium built on the work of the previous year when we held our inaugural symposium at Oxford University. On the day we had international representation from the United States, Australia and Turkey. Below is a snapshot of some areas that researchers are currently looking at in relation to prison education.

Working with Universities

Professor Dreisinger, from John Jay College of Criminal Justice introduced a discussion on university and prison education initiatives, with an overview of the successful Prison to College Pipeline programme.²⁷ Combining prison-based teaching, holistic support on release and a guaranteed place at the City University of New York on release, the programme has been working with prisoner learners for the past four years. Central to the approach is seeing the purpose of prisoner education as outside of reducing reoffending and taking a broad view of the purpose of prison education. Improving access to education in this sense is viewed as a civil right and reparation for what prisoners should have received in the first place.

We also heard from Dr Amy Ludlow and Dr Ruth Armstrong from Cambridge University who had recently finished their first term of the Learning

Together project. Learning Together takes criminology students from Cambridge University into Grendon prison, to take part in a college based system in the prison. Sessions begin with a lecture from some of Cambridge's finest teachers, including Alison Liebling and Anthony Bottoms, on a range of selected topics in criminology, from legitimacy to desistance. Lectures are then followed by a seminar of shared learning and shared experiences. Over the course of the programme, students will take part in five substantive workshops, one essay writing workshop and a graduation. The project has the following aims; to create spaces of learning for students from different walks of life to learn together; to connect people who might not otherwise meet through shared learning experiences; to capacitate people to use their knowledge for social good. The project works to reduce stigma and social

distance between students and to help them to see greater fluidity in possible identities and behaviours. One student stated that *'Not only do I want to help people, I'm starting to believe that I can'* because of the *'completely genuine example of normalisation that has taken place here'*. As he pertinently explained, *'the more we feel like we are part of society, the more likely we are to continue to try and stay part of it'*.

Technological innovations

Speaking about technological Innovations and breaking the digital divide was Associate Professor Farley from the University of Southern Queensland in Australia. Farley is leading on a \$4.4 million government-funded project called 'Making the Connection' which is using digital technologies in prisons to increase access to higher education.²⁸ Building from a pilot scheme, which provided E-Readers for in-cell work, Farley is beginning work to roll out the provision of netbooks for the students to continue on their distance learning projects. Dr Anne Pike also discussed the Virtual Campus, a secure web-based learning environment which is used in the UK, and the opportunities and challenges that arise from this system.

Creating Rehabilitative cultures through learning

Professor Alison Liebling from Cambridge University began this session by talking about the work

Improving access to education in this sense is viewed as a civil right and reparation for what prisoners should have received in the first place.

27. <http://johnjayresearch.org/pri/projects/nys-prison-to-college-pipeline/>

28. <https://www.usq.edu.au/research/research-at-usq/institutes-centres/adfi/making-the-connection/about>

that the Prison Research Centre does with conducting the Measuring the Quality of Prison Life (MQPL) study in prisons across England. Education, she said, is work that goes on in the background and is not directly addressed by the work of the MQPL. However, she went on to cite many examples of prisoners and staff from her work who stated education as being one of the most important keys to rehabilitation. She went on to describe education as being *'like food and water inherently meaningful'* and having *'transformative power'*.

Along with main speakers we heard from many other workshop leaders sharing findings from their research on a range of topics, including the impact of responsibilities on peer mentors (Sophie Eser); the importance of student identity and community in helping learners resettle in the community after imprisonment (Dr. Anne Pike); creating rehabilitative cultures using theatre in prisons (Dr Bridget Keehan), using philosophy classes in prison to give learners the opportunity to access personal development and Dr Caroline Lanskey discussing caring educational approaches towards young people in secure institutions.

The work of the Academic Network will continue to grow with more events planned for the future. We will be collating the work of the 2015 speakers to develop an online compendium from the event and will be developing a formal academic network to keep the discussion as 'energetic', 'inspiring' and 'empowering' as delegates found it on the 9th June.²⁹

Conclusion

Prison education is currently a focus of policy development in UK prison policy with the launch of the Coates review of Prison education in September 2015.³⁰ In this context this article has summarised some strands of recent and current research into:

- ❑ Links between education and outcomes such as employment and reductions in reoffending.
- ❑ Levels of basic literacy and numeracy attainment in prisons.
- ❑ Work in understanding learning culture in prisons.

Current strands of thinking by prison researchers as presented at PET's academic symposium on prison education have also been summarised.

PET looks forward to significant improvements in the evidence base in the near future from:

- ❑ The imminent publication of better data on prisoner educational assessment.
- ❑ Improved understanding through the application of data matching techniques of the links between education and employment and reoffending either through the Justice Data Lab or through the current major evaluation of the OLASS contracts and
- ❑ Further understanding of the relationship between aspects of the prison culture and prisoner outcomes.

29. If you are interested in being a part of the academic network please do get in contact with PET at info@prisonerseducation.org.uk or clare@prisonerseducation.org.uk

30. Ministry of Justice (September 2015) Review of Prison Education: Terms of Reference. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-prison-education-terms-of-reference>