



**Prison Educators:
Professionalism Against
the Odds**

**Dr Lynne Rogers
Margaret Simonot
Angela Narthey**

February 2014



Contents

1 Executive Summary	3
2 Recommendations	7
3 Introduction	9
4 Methodology	13
5 Findings	17
6 Discussion	39
7 Conclusion	43
8 References	44

Executive Summary

The research

This report summarises the findings of research conducted by the University and College Union (UCU) and the Centre for Education in the Criminal Justice System (CECJS) at the Institute of Education, University of London to learn more about prison educators and to explore the impact of offender learner funding on their professionalism and practice. To date, whilst there have been a number of significant reforms to the prison education regime, there has been a lack of research into the professionalism and practice of prison educators and their professional insights. This study seeks to address this. The findings are based on a questionnaire completed by 278 prison educators working in England.

Findings

Prison education as a professional career

The career and role of prison educators suffers from having a lower professional status than that of teaching staff in Further Education (FE) Colleges or in Adult Education. Their professional status is restricted by the:

- . conditions dictated by the funding available;
- . structures through which this funding is allocated;
- . frequent shift of management responsibility that militates against stability and experience; and
- . constraints of working within tight security arrangements.

Policy and funding

Much of the criticism voiced concerning the professional aspects of being a prison educator focused on the *consequences of prison education policy and funding*. Respondents were heavily critical of two main aspects of prison education policy: the practice of competitive tendering for prison education that takes place every three to five years; and that funding had been dependent on educational outcomes achieved.

- . Sixty two per cent of the open responses to prison education policy criticised the *negative effect these two factors are having on the prisoners as learners and on the overall quality of education* offered. In their view, profit was the overriding concern of the prison contract providers.
- . Almost 20% referred to the negative impact of re-tendering on staffing and the perceived negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning.
- . Fifteen per cent raised issues of poor management in relation to how education was managed both on a local scale and at provider level.
- . Other factors included lack of appropriate qualifications for learners; the lack of consultation on the views of prison staff; and government prioritising political priorities over demonstrated need.

Prison educators as a professional group

Prison educators are a *highly qualified group of practitioners* with 97.1% possessing a qualification at Level 4 or above and/or a teaching qualification.

The profile of prison educators in terms of gender was similar to the profile of teaching staff in FE colleges with approximately two thirds being female. The majority of staff in both prison and FE were white British and there was a slightly higher percentage of staff from BME backgrounds in FE than in prison education.

On average there was a lower proportion of younger people teaching in prisons than in FE, and a comparatively greater proportion of older people teaching in prisons than in FE.

The research showed that prison educators constitute a *motivated workforce* that had *chosen to work in prison education* rather than in mainstream FE or Adult Education: 75% of those who responded had previously worked in other educational settings and were attracted to working in prison to make full use of their experience. For over a third of respondents the initial motivation for teaching in a prison was to make a difference and improve the life chances of prisoners, whom they perceived as having been failed by the system.

Professionalism

Although 38% of respondents highlighted the transforming aspect of prison education – giving prisoners an educational opportunity and a second chance in life – and, for 34%, that the purpose of prison education was rehabilitation or reducing re-offending, many of these respondents regretted the fact that the context and circumstances of being a prison educator had changed over time in what they felt was a negative direction. Examples cited included learners unable to access education appropriate to their needs, inappropriate scheduling for learner needs and lack of availability of one-to-one support where necessary.

The notion that prison education could be a fulfilling career was dismissed by a third of those surveyed and half said that they were likely to look for a new job in the next 12 months. Positive comments were in the minority although a few participants felt that management were positive and the working conditions were fine.

The findings point towards a workforce whose terms of employment have become increasingly casualised, who are given very little recognition of their experience and little opportunity to use their judgement independently, and whose views are not consulted by those who manage them. The following factors contributed to this situation.

- . *Contractual arrangements* did not offer security of employment with just half the respondents being on full time contracts; the other half were either employed part time with a contract, or hourly paid.
- . *The workload* of prison educators exceeded the hours they were paid to work. Over 85% of respondents worked between five to over eleven unpaid hours per week.
- . *Comparison in terms of salary and role with FE* staff showed that a greater proportion of prison educators were paid at the lower end of the salary scale than was the case for FE staff. Part-time staff were likely to be employed on lower salary points than full-time staff.
- . Although recognised to be important in the prison environment, *security measures in the prison context* had a negative impact on learning and teaching. Major concerns included restricted access to ICT, the loss of teaching time due to the movement of students within the prison environment and restrictions on the use of specific teaching resources.
- . Further factors that hindered a fully professional approach to prison education included:
 - insufficient teaching resources for educators to carry out their job effectively;
 - insufficient access to adequate past education records of their learners;
 - insufficient staff to deliver a continuous quality education;

- a lack of appropriate assistance for learners with physical or learning disabilities; and
- bullying by managers.

Together, these issues reduced the capacity of professionals to teach and learners to learn.

- . Most respondents considered that their role was different from that of colleagues working in a college or university and that prison education presented greater challenges for which they would appreciate recognition as a specialist group. The challenges which had the most impact included high workload, behaviour management, and high turnover of prisoners.

Professional training and continued professional development

Prison educators in this survey were highly qualified. Nonetheless, respondents often stated that their Initial Teacher Education had not covered their particular needs as prison educators and that funding, time off and payment for *Continuing Professional Development* to develop both subject expertise and teaching methodologies were *either in decline, or in many cases, non-existent*.

Where training for prison educators did exist, the quality of the provision was criticised by 50.7% of the respondents, even though 64% reported that the training received over the last 18 months had been relevant to their role, but not to the subjects taught. Approximately 30% of respondents found training that related directly to security and associated issues about working in a prison useful.

Conclusion

This research has shed greater light on who prison educators are, their backgrounds and inspirations for working in the field. In highlighting the professional aspirations and challenges of the role, alongside prison educators' experiences of prison education policy, this survey has shown important tensions between the aims of prison education and what happens in practice.

The survey enabled prison educators to give voice to a number of serious concerns around: health and safety; recruitment to the profession; professional autonomy; salary, terms and conditions; and training and professional development opportunities. In many case respondents highlighted how the negative features of their work environment had an impact on the quality of education and the effectiveness of the teaching and learning provision they were able support.

There were strong messages that, if prison education policy is designed to support learners in their personal development, rehabilitation, and successful re-entry into society then the capacities of the professionals who enable this would be improved if their work was adequately supported with more appropriate recognition, training and conditions.

Recommendations

The following eight recommendations are offered to support improvement in the prison education sector.

Supporting teaching and learning

- 1 The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Skills Funding Agency (SFA) should collaborate to gather existing evidence and support new research exploring the benefits of offender learning and to establish a greater evidence base on what works.
- 2 The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Skills Funding Agency (SFA) should commission an assessment of the effectiveness of the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) system. Such a review should include:
 - a summary of the existing evidence on the effectiveness of prison education pre and post-implementation of OLASS;
 - an analysis of the relationship between educational provision and investment and outcomes for learners in prison, and
 - an assessment of stakeholder voice, including and specifically, prison educators and learners.

Prison education contracts

- 3 The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Skills Funding Agency (SFA) should establish a timetable for the cessation of the competitive retendering of prison education contracts. In the interim, Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) contracts should be issued for a fixed term of five years (with appropriate risk management and accountability clauses) instead of the current three to five year term.

Professionalism

- 4 The Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) should publish a timescale for establishing baseline parity of salary and terms and conditions for prison educators in line with FE lecturers.
- 5 The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) should commission a health and safety audit of prison educators' working conditions.
- 6 The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) should coordinate a nationwide campaign to improve the status of prison educators and to encourage recruitment into the profession.

Teacher education and continuing professional development

- 7 The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) should support the development of specialist prison education modules for Initial Teacher Education programmes.
- 8 The Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) should establish guidelines on continuing professional development (CPD) provision for staff employed under OLASS contracts. In the interim, education providers applying for an OLASS contract should be required to set out how the CPD needs of its employees will be supported and funded.

Introduction

Between April and May 2013, University and College Union (UCU) and the Centre for Education in the Criminal Justice System (CECJS) at the Institute of Education, University of London conducted a survey of UCU members working in prison education to learn more about prison educators and to explore the impacts of the offender learning funding mechanism on their professionalism and practice. This publication reports the findings of the survey.

The aims of the research were to:

- . highlight prison educators as a distinct professional group;
- . explore the professional aspirations of prison educators;
- . identify the professional challenges that are particular to prison educators;
- . explore the impact of any identified challenges on offender learning, and
- . harness the unique insight that prison educators have in order to develop a set of recommendations and identify lines for influencing policy.

In particular the research sought to gather evidence on the following:

- . Who are prison educators?
- . What are prison educators' philosophies on the purposes of prison education?
- . What are the career aspirations of prison educators?
- . What are the routes in to working as a prison educator?
- . What are the support and development needs of prison educators?
- . What does professionalism look like in the prison education sector?
- . What are prison educators' perceptions of the terms and conditions, and job security of their employment?
- . What has been the impact of offender learning policy in recent years on prison educators and on offender learning?

UCU is the largest trade union and professional association for academics, lecturers, trainers, instructors, researchers, managers, administrators, computer staff, librarians and postgraduates in universities, colleges, prisons, adult education and training organisations across the UK. CECJS provides a focal point for practitioners, policymakers and researchers to collaborate on collecting, improving and disseminating the best and most promising evidence and practice in the field of education in the criminal justice system.

The prison education system

Education and training are acknowledged at an international level as one method of reducing re-offending and social exclusion. Indeed research has shown that offenders who receive prison education can be three times less likely to reoffend than those who do not (Social Exclusion Unit, 2002). In the American context, evaluation by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy has found that prison education yields a reduction in recidivism and a 20:1 return on investment for every dollar invested in adult basic, general educational development and post-secondary education (Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2012).

In May 2013, the prison population in England and Wales was 83,151 (Ministry of Justice, 2013a). Young people under the age of 18 are held in either a secure children's home (SCH), a secure training centre (STC) or a young offender institution (YOI). Provisional figures for the end of March 2013 indicated that there were 1,291 children (under-18s) in custody in England and Wales. The overall population including those of 18 years age was 1,420. (Some 18 year olds remain in the secure estate if they only have a short period of their sentence to serve, to avoid disrupting their regimes.) There were 51 children aged 14 and under in the secure estate. (Youth Justice Board, 2013). Women prisoners are in the minority in England and Wales, currently numbering around 3,893 Ministry of Justice (2013a).

The UK has the most privatised prison system in Europe. In England and Wales, almost 13,000 prisoners (15% of the total prisoner population) were held in private prisons as at 30th September 2012 (Prison Reform Trust, 2013a). It is noteworthy that the prison system as a whole has been overcrowded every year since 1994. At the end of March 2013, 60 of the 124 prisons in England and Wales were overcrowded (Ministry of Justice, 2013b).

In an overarching Recommendation, the Council of Europe (1989) proposed that 'the right to [prison] education is fundamental'. In England and Wales it is legislated that 'every prisoner able to profit from the education facilities provided at a prison shall be encouraged to do so' (Prison rules). However, of the adult population in prison, only around 25% will be receiving education of some kind.

Education departments in prisons and YOIs are ultimately funded and overseen by the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS), with separate arms for juveniles and the adult prison population. More directly, education providers bid for the contract to manage education departments, currently on a three-yearly basis, frequently resulting in three-yearly changes in management and the employment conditions for teachers on the ground. Introduced in July 2005, OLASS is in its fourth iteration, often referred to as OLASS 4. Providers range from FE Colleges to private organisations. The stated aim of OLASS is that:

offenders, in prisons and supervised in the community, according to need, should have access to learning and skills, which enables them to gain the skills and qualifications they need to hold down a job and have a positive role in society. (OLASS)

Halsey et al. (2006) assessed the impact of OLASS a year after it was implemented and reported that there was a balance of both positive and negative impacts on the workforce.

Whilst some problems were reported, such as increased workload, a decline in morale and staff anxiety about the TUPE process, these may be perceived as temporary impacts arising from a period of change. In time, staff would hopefully adjust to the new service and some of the reported difficulties may subside. Meanwhile, positive repercussions for the OLASS workforce included greater partnership working (facilitated by the regional boards) and increased opportunities for professional development (for out-of-scope staff, college tutors, workshop instructors and even prison officers). (p.iii)

The extensive difficulties of providing education in prison contexts are, however, well-documented. In particular there is much that is expected from prison and its various departments. As an illustration, society and government anticipate that a period of incarceration, treatment and intervention can turn prisoners away from crime. Since the expectations and investments are high, prisons are under constant pressure to raise standards, provide evidence and cope with on-going cuts, while being subject to supervision and scrutiny from various inspectorates such as Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons (HMIP) and Ofsted.

“ There is a view that prisons should maximise opportunities for offenders ”

In addition, the setting within which prison education takes place is influenced by the prison routine, security constraints and the relationship between the Prison Service and the education provider. One of the main criticisms of provision at present is that the offer of education and training is still too narrow and the provision too small in numbers. There is a view that prisons should maximise opportunities for offenders to receive employment-linked training, even apprenticeships, that will be useful to them on release (Hurry et al., 2012). Prison education is subject to a wide range of constraints of an organisational and pedagogic nature. They

include the attitude of the prison management and governors, relationships between different agents within the institution, the state and age of the buildings, the education provider, the intake and size of the prison, and the qualification and background of the teachers. Prison educators must work within the time afforded by the sentence terms of their learners, which can range from six weeks on remand to life imprisonment. Furthermore, the high prevalence of mental health issues and dependence on alcohol or drugs add further challenges to the delivering of learning and skills to offenders.

Learning in prisons takes various forms, including vocational training (which includes some paid work), Literacy, Numeracy and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Physical Education and Sports, and a variety of other classes such as Art, Music and Drama. In many cases, vocational training is the responsibility of the prison, not the education department.

...education and training classes in prisons are taught and delivered by a combination of teachers from the Lifelong Learning Sector and vocational instructors mainly employed by the Prison Service. These two main groups of teachers are employed under different conditions by different agencies, and according to anecdotal accounts, each may have allegiance to rather different kinds of culture, tradition and ethos regarding learning, teaching and training (Simonot et al., 2008, p.2).

The government has been concerned over the last decade to ensure that education and training supports prisoners in gaining qualifications, as this is regarded as making an important contribution to reducing re-offending (HM Government, 2005). There are therefore high expectations as well as pressures on those staff involved in education and training services in prisons.

In May 2011, the government published a review of offender learning, Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation. This set out a new skills offer for offenders with a focus on making prisons places of work and shifting learning delivery towards the end of prisoners' sentences. Though the paper reviewed the entirety of offender learning, there was little reference to prison educators, the professionals responsible for this work. Whilst it is acknowledged that prison educators can have a positive effect on prisoners' lives (Braggins and Talbot, 2003 and Prisoners' Education Trust, 2009) there remains a lack of research into prison educators' themselves. This study seeks to address this.

Methodology

Data collection

A questionnaire was designed specifically for this study to gain an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of prison educators working in England. Part of the questionnaire gathered quantitative data concerning the educational and employment background of the prison educators, including their working conditions, training received, length of service and specialist subject areas. These questions made use of tick boxes for categorical responses and rating scales to assess level of importance/agreement. A number of questions were left deliberately open in order to capture differing points of view and to enable a much more in-depth understanding to be gained about perceptions of prison education, prison education as a career and the impact of the security and policy regime.

A steering group was established at the onset of the research to guide the development of the questionnaire. This group was composed of volunteers from UCU's prison education membership. Throughout the project, the steering group made a number of suggestions regarding the lines of questioning and the content of the questionnaire and report. The group was broadly representative of the sector in that they were from a range of male, female and youth institutions, OLASS providers, and prison categories. The panel members worked to a range of contracts including full- and part-time, and sessional and taught across a range of subjects and comprised both teaching and managerial staff.

The final questionnaire contained 71 questions and was designed using an online survey tool to enable ease of completion. Although the number of questions was extensive many of these took only a short time to complete since they were in the form of multiple choice responses, rating scales and tick boxes.

The final version of the questionnaire was distributed by UCU to those members who work in prison education. This was done electronically and 'advertised' directly to prison education members using UCU mailing lists and through the union's weekly mailings to all members. The invitation to respond to the questionnaire included a clear statement about the anonymity and confidentiality of the responses received. This was particularly pertinent as prison educators are subject to strict confidentiality clauses. UCU has approximately 1300 members working in prison education.

Completed questionnaires were received from 278 members: a response rate of 21%. Respondents were not required to respond to every question hence; in the findings references to respondents refer to those that answered each particular question. The qualitative data were analysed using the iterative process described by Cooper and McIntyre (1993) in which emerging themes are identified, and amended by revisiting the data.

The sample

Respondents came from all regions across England. The South East region had the highest number of per-region respondents 21.2% (see Table 1).

Region	Percentage	Number
East of England	11.7%	32
East Midlands	8%	22
London	12.8%	35
North East	6.6%	18
North West	12.8%	35
South East	21.2%	58
South West	6.9%	19
West Midlands	7.7%	21
Yorkshire & Humberside	12.4%	34
Total	100.1%	274

Table 1: Region where respondents were working

Responses were received from members in each of the prison categories except local authority Secure Children's Homes where UCU does not operate. The majority of respondents worked in Category C men's prisons (See Table 2).

Category	Percentage	Number
Men's prison – Category A	9.4%	24
Men's prison – Category B	34.3%	87
Men's prison – Category C	48.4%	123
Men's prison – Category D	8.3%	21
Women's prison – Restricted status	0.8%	2
Women's prison – Closed	3.1%	8
Women's prison – Semi-open	1.6%	4
Women's prison – Open	0.4%	1
Young Offender and Juvenile – Secure Training Centres	3.1%	8
Young Offender and Juvenile – Local Authority Secure Children's Home	0	0
Young Offender and Juvenile – Young Offender Institutions	21.3%	54

Table 2: Category of prison

All OLASS providers were represented among the participants (see Table 3).

OLASS Provider	Percentage	Number
A4E	31.8%	77
The Manchester College	47.9%	116
Milton Keynes College	18.2%	44
Weston College	7%	17

Table 3: OLASS provider

Nearly all respondents (96.3%) delivered education face-to-face with a small number delivering education by distance (1.7%), or both (2.1%). Prison education was reported as the main form of employment for 95.5% of participants.

It was not possible to identify the total number of staff employed under OLASS contracts. However, it is acknowledged that in the analysis that follows, the sample of respondents may not be representative of all those who work as prison educators within England. This is since the survey was only open to members of UCU. The findings of this report reflect the perceptions of prison educators who participated in this study and although small constitute one of the largest research efforts solely focused on prison educators in England to date.

Findings

Being a prison educator

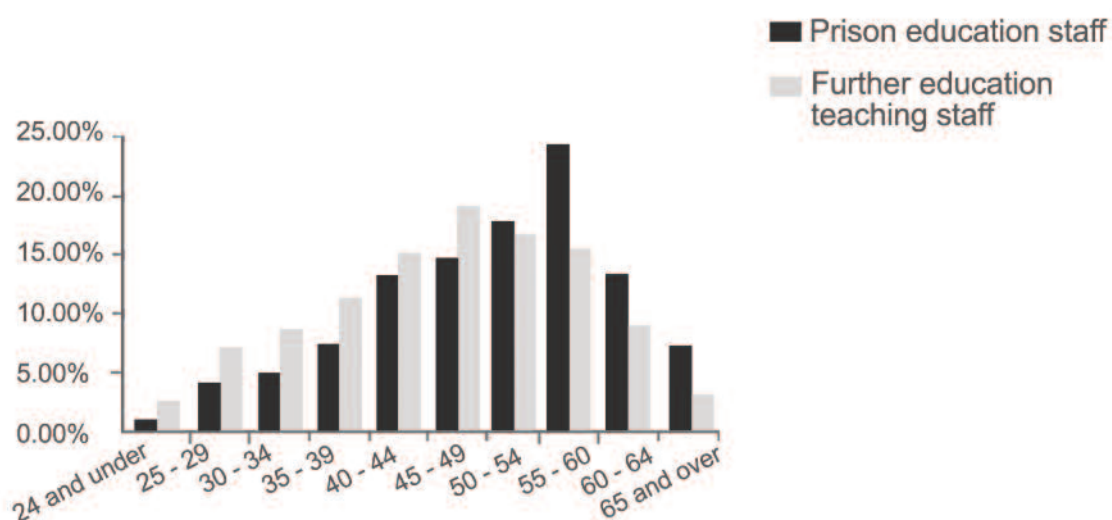
To provide a comparison with the overall profile of the Further Education (FE) college workforce, data from the latest (2011-2012) Staff Individualised Record (SIR) dataset has been included.¹

Gender – 68.4% of respondents were female and 31.6% were male. No respondents reported themselves as transgender. This was a slightly higher representation of females in were female and 36.5% were male.

Age – The profile of prison education staff was an ageing one. Respondents were mostly skewed towards the middle and upper ends of the working age group. Almost three quarters (73.9%) of prison education staff were 45 or over compared with just over half of teaching staff in colleges. Over a third of prison education staff were aged 50 to 59. Within FE there was generally a higher proportion of staff under the age of 49 than in prison education. However, there was a higher proportion of staff aged 50 and older in prison education than in FE (see Figure 1).

The longitudinal nature of the SIR research indicated that the FE workforce is experiencing a steady influx of new staff aged about 30 years old. It was not possible to explore the corresponding data for prison educators within this survey. However, the findings here indicate that there are nearly three times more FE staff aged 30-34 years old than prison education staff, and more than double the proportion of 55-60 year olds working in prison education when placed in comparison with the FE teaching staff population. The small sample size in this survey is acknowledged but nevertheless these findings raise important considerations for succession planning in the prison education sector.

Figure 1: Age profile of prison educators and FE teaching staff



¹SIR data is collected for the following types of colleges: general FE colleges (including tertiary education), national specialist colleges, sixth form colleges, special colleges (agriculture and horticulture, special colleges) art, design and performing arts, and specialist designated colleges. The results from the SIR data for teaching staff in further education colleges are based on a significantly larger dataset with percentages based on a total of 28,793 full-time teaching contracts.

Ethnic background – The majority of respondents identified themselves as white British. Five point one per cent indicated that they were any other background, 2.2% of respondents indicated that they were white Irish and 1.9% of respondents were black and minority ethnic (BME). The comparative percentage of BME FE staff is 8.3% and so there are comparatively more BME staff teaching in FE than in the prison education sector.

Disability – 84.7% of respondents did not consider themselves to have a disability. Ten point nine per cent of respondents considered themselves to have a disability. Four point four per cent reported that they were unsure if they considered themselves to have a disability. When asked, 'Has your employer made adequate adjustment(s) to enable you to carry out your work?' 7.7% of respondents replied 'No'. Within the FE workforce 3.75% of all college staff and 3.5% of teaching staff disclosed having a disability. However, the rate of staff disclosure is reported to remain extremely low.

Sexual orientation – of respondents indicating their sexual orientation, 95.4% of respondents stated that they were heterosexual. Three point one per cent of respondents stated that that they were lesbian or gay and 1.5% indicated that they were bisexual. The comparable SIR data is not available for the FE workforce. This data was collected for the first time under the 2010-11 SIR and although there was an improvement on the previous year's data, 83% of records were returned as 'unknown'.

The majority (91.3%) of respondents reported that they worked in one prison. Almost 5% of respondents worked in two prisons, and 6.1% of respondents worked in three prisons. A small minority (1.6%) worked in four prisons or more. Almost 90% of respondents said that they had worked in between one and three prisons during their career as a prison educator. Just over 8% said that they had worked in between four and six prisons and 1.2% had worked in ten or more prisons.

Nearly 20% of respondents had worked in the prison education sector for more than 12 years. Under 10% had worked as prison educators for 16 or more years. Nearly 80% of respondents stated that they had previously worked in a teaching role in a different educational establishment. This may also account for the comparatively older age profile of prison educators, since they have built up experience elsewhere in the sector before moving into prison education. Nearly 20% of respondents indicated that they had previously worked in a prison in a non-teaching role.

Most respondents held a teaching qualification. The most frequently held teaching qualifications were the Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) (39.4%) and the Certificate of Education (CertEd) (33.6%) (see Table 4). A number of respondents held more than one teaching qualification. The SIR no longer collects information on qualification level. However, the previous 2010-2011 dataset showed that the corresponding figures for FE teaching staff possessing a PGCE and CertEd were 24.2% and 23.9% respectively. In this survey a higher percentage of prison educators possessed these teaching qualifications than FE staff.

Teaching Qualification*	Percentage	Number
Bachelor of Education(BEd)	6.2%	15
Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Sector (CTLLS)	7.5%	18
Certificate of Education (CertEd)	33.6%	81
Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS)	19.1%	46
Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP)	0.4%	1
Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)	39.4%	95
Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector (PTLLS)	11.2%	27
Overseas qualification	2.1%	5
No teaching qualification	2.5%	6
Other (please specify)	10.8%	26

Table 4: Teaching Qualifications

*Participants could tick against all teaching qualifications that they held.

This is a highly qualified workforce. The data on the highest qualification level showed that 97.1% of staff in prison education possessed a qualification at Level 4 or above and/or a teaching qualification (see Table 5).

“ 97.1% of staff in prison education possessed a qualification at Level 4 or above ”

Highest qualification Level	Percentage	Number
Level 1-2 (e.g. GCSEs, awards, certificates and diplomas)	2.1%	5
Level 3 (e.g. AS/A Level, BTEC)	0.8%	2
Level 4-6 (e.g. University/Foundation Degree, HND/HNC)	54.7%	133
Level 7 (e.g. Masters Degree)	20.2%	49
Level 8 (e.g. Doctorate)	1.2%	3
Teaching qualification	21%	51

Table 5: Highest qualification level

Motivation

A complex picture emerged from the analysis of what motivated people initially to become a prison educator. There was not a single response concerned with the opportunities the job might offer for career progression or financial gain.

The survey explored the initial motivation for becoming a prison educator. When asked directly, how they chose the profession, there was a fairly even split between respondents who had made a deliberate choice to become a prison educator (49.4%) and those who did not (50.6%). However, analysis of the accompanying qualitative text revealed that a large majority of the respondents (71%) said it was part of a deliberate choice and that they had answered advertisements, or made enquiries as to how they could teach in prisons. A far smaller group of 16% had been encouraged by others to teach in prison. A small, but nevertheless identifiable, group (8%) had been introduced to teaching in prison as part of their initial teacher education.

The initial motivation for teaching in a prison for over a third of those who responded (36%) was to make a difference and improve the life chances of prisoners who had been failed by the system. For many educators the reasons for entering this work had been altruistic and are an indication of a highly committed workforce, as this selection of responses shows:

I want to help empower those for whom education has been a difficult and troubled journey.

I have been involved in work-based learning before and it seemed a natural progression. I wanted to reach people who have slipped through the educational net. Make a difference by teaching a vocational skill leading to employment and inspiring others who may never had much of a chance.

Many prisoners don't have a secondary education, I believe prison education is not just for gaining qualifications but also to improve prisoners' self-confidence and social skills

A substantial number of responses came from teachers who had moved into prison education as a way of making better use of their skills and experience. This group included professionals who had moved from other careers in administration, the arts, counselling or business management as well as from other sectors in statutory and adult education. Many prison educators had worked in other educational settings (see Figure 2). As such, respondents reported that they typically held dual identities, both as teachers and as subject specialists. This group also included many who chose to teach in prisons after having spent their teaching practice placements there as part of initial teacher education.

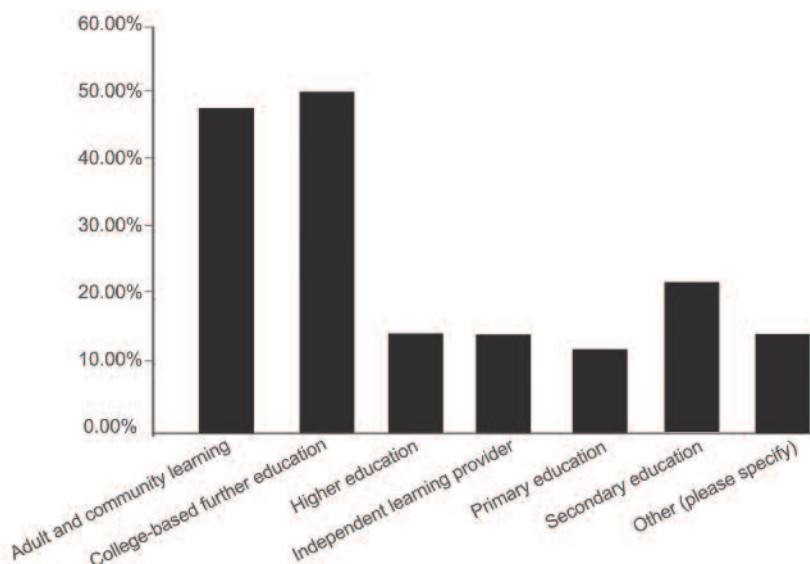


Figure 2: Prison educators who had worked in other educational setting

Many respondents spoke of the skills they possessed in working with learners with learning or behavioural difficulties and of their own desire to put these skills to good use in a prison context.

I have a Level 3 Counselling Qualification and an interest in working with people. Working as an art teacher in a prison allows me to utilise all of my skills as an artist, teacher and listener.

Left a headship wanted to stay in educ. and this gave me the opportunity to teach in a different environment.

When I was no longer able to teach school children I decided to take my knowledge and skills - and experience with teaching students with moderate learning difficulties and EBD students into the prison.

A third category of responses focused on the pragmatic advantages of teaching in prisons. These ranged from its being the best of other options for reasons of location or the possibility of part-time employment whilst bringing up a family.

Overall, most prison educators have been motivated to join the profession because they thought that their skills would be better used in this sector than in statutory education or private business. Most deliberately chose this sector rather than drifting into it.

I love the enthusiasm and interest of my students. I get a buzz out of hearing the "yes" when they have cracked a difficult problem. I dislike the importance placed on admin - e.g. imposition of generic ILPs which are just a time-consuming nuisance and much less useful than my own previous monitoring system.

The intentions and aspirations of the prison education workforce coincided with what one would hope for in terms of professional ethos in such a complex sector. The workforce was skilled, committed and experienced. The data gathered, however, revealed that the contractual, physical and emotional context within which these teachers work went very little way towards recognising their professionalism.

Contractual arrangements

There was variation in the terms of employment. Half of the respondents (50.4%) reported being on full time contracts and 26.9% of respondents reported being on part-time contracts. The remaining quarter of respondents were on hourly-paid contracts (16.1%) or on other types of contract (7%) (see Figure 3).

Two thirds of respondents (66.4%) were on an open-ended/permanent contract. As such, a third of staff lack the inherent job security of an open-ended contract. Fixed-term, zero hours, variable hours and other contracts appeared to be in high use by employers. The 'other' category of responses indicated a range of casualised working practices in place including: sessional, annualised hours, cover, fractional and 'per assignment marked' contracts. One respondent reported 'no contract'.

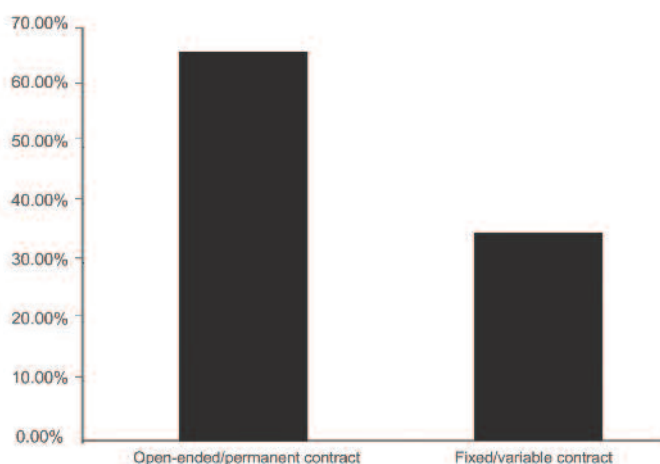


Figure 3: Contractual arrangement

Workload

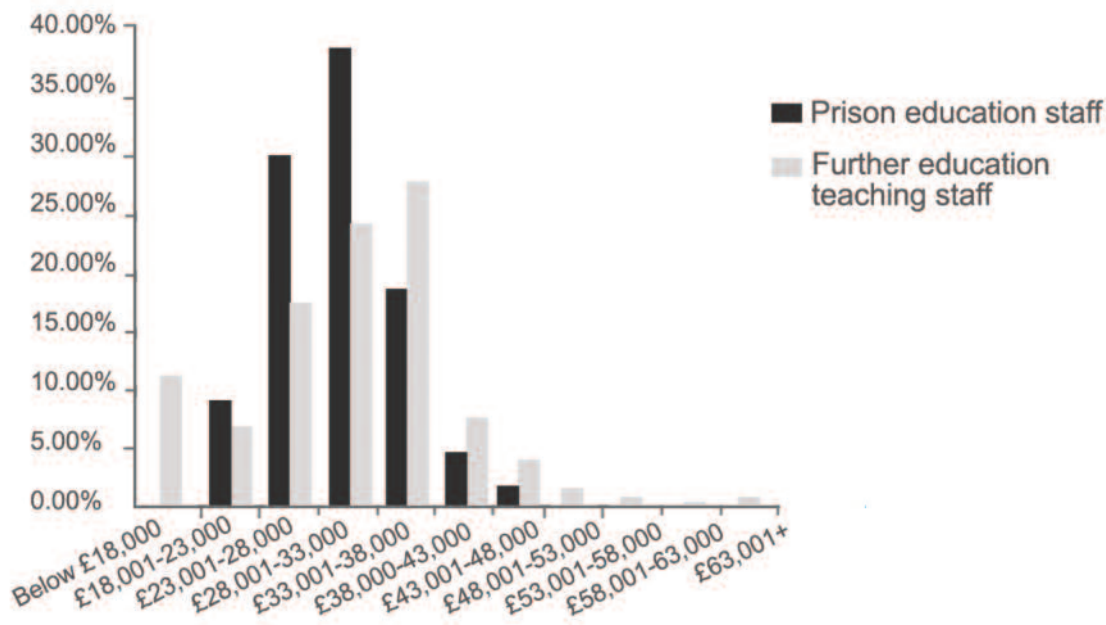
Responses indicated that prison educators had significant concerns about workloads in the offender learning sector. There was wide variation in the total number of weekly teaching hours and the number of hours respondents were contracted to be at work. This was in addition to a substantial number of unpaid hours per week. Just 13.6% of respondents stated that they completed no unpaid hours over and above their contracted hours. Over 44% of respondents completed up to five hours unpaid work, 34.7% of respondents completed between six and ten additional hours per week and 7.4% of respondents completed 11 hours or more unpaid hours per week. High workloads were referred to in many of the free text boxes throughout the survey. When asked about the types of tasks and activities undertaken during these unpaid hours the majority of free-text responses stated lesson and curriculum planning and administration.

Comparability and parity

Allowing for data caveats given the different sizes of both datasets, a comparison with the SIR data for teaching and learning staff revealed an overall picture of varying modal salaries for prison education staff and those teaching in FE. There was a higher proportion of salaries at the lower end of the salary scale for prison educators compared to FE staff (see Figure 4). This was accompanied by a higher proportion of salaries for FE staff at the higher ranges of the salary scale than for those working in prison education. The incidence of salaries beyond the modal salary for prison education staff of £23-£28,000, begins to decline extremely rapidly with the highest salaries at £43-£48,000 per annum. Conversely, the range of salaries of staff in the FE sector appeared across a wider range of salaries from below £18,000 up to over £63,000. The modal salary for FE staff was noticeably higher than for prison education staff, at £38,000-£43,000.

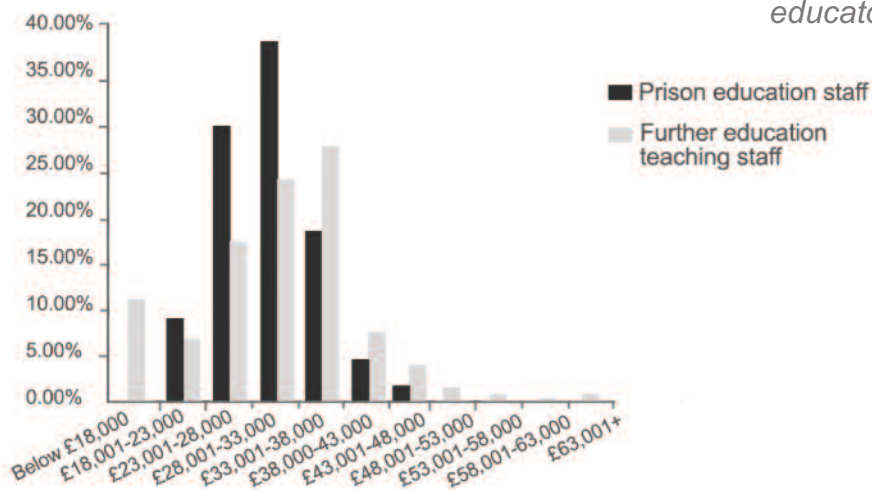
“The modal salary for FE staff was noticeably higher than for prison education staff”

Figure 4: Salaries of full-time prison educators and FE teaching staff



The pro rata salaries of part-time, hourly paid or 'other' prison educators showed a differing pattern to those of full-time staff. The most frequent salary reported was below £18,000 followed by £23,000 and £28,000. The most frequent salary reported by full time staff was £28,000-31,000 (see Figure 5). The SIR data is collected for full-time contracts only, and so it was not possible to make a comparison with FE teaching staff on this basis. This data shows that part-time staff were more likely to be employed on lower salary points than full-time staff. Of respondents who are paid by the hour, the most common was an hourly rate of between £21-25 per hour (77.4%).

Figure 5: Salary bands for full-time and pro rata prison educators



When respondents were asked if their roles were comparable to the roles of colleagues doing similar work in a college or university most (52.3%) strongly disagreed or disagreed. Over 37% strongly agreed or agreed, whilst 10.4% of respondents answered 'neutral'.

Almost 70% of respondents either strongly disagreed or disagreed that their own salary was in line with the salary of someone doing comparable work in a college or university. This viewpoint was further supported by the qualitative responses:

Trainers seem to be treated as second rate and of less importance in the college. We get fewer holidays and even Bank Holidays than the main site along with less pay. We have more workload than the teachers in my view with workshops and health and safety issues to manage, material handling and ordering along with prison regime paperwork and procedures to strictly adhere to and there is no time given for any admin time as all of the teachers receive even those on part-time contracts.

The questionnaire concluded with an open section in which participants could make any further comments about being a prison educator. Over 20% of participants (16 out of 73) drew attention to the fact that the pay and working conditions of teachers employed by the OLASS providers were worse than those teaching in FE. Some respondents also pointed out that many experienced professionals were leaving the profession because of this – some even expressed satisfaction at reaching the end of their working life, because of the constant erosion of good working conditions.

Challenges of the job

When respondents were asked to select the three challenges which have the most impact, by ranking these, from one to three where one is the highest priority, the results were as follows:

- High workload seemed to present the most challenge to prison educators: it received the highest number of responses and the highest rank on the rating scale;

- Bullying by managers, behaviour management and high turnover of prisoners were also seen as key challenges that had an impact on the job;
- Manipulation by learners was seen as less of a challenge, and
- Physical violence and bullying by learners were least likely to be selected as career challenges which have the most impact (see Table 6).

	1	2	3	Number of responses
Behaviour management	43	48	60	151
High turnover of prisoners	33	43	44	120
Manipulation by learners	4	13	28	45
Physical violence	3	1	10	14
Bullying by learners	3	4	5	12
Bullying by managers	57	37	25	119
High workload	76	63	32	171

Table 6: Key challenges of the job

How the security regime impacts on prison educators

Participants were asked about how the security regime impacted upon their work as prison educators. Free text responses were received from 183 respondents. The majority of respondents identified mainly negative impacts on education and the teaching and learning provision overall in relation to the availability of ICT (21.3%), the movement of students within the prison environment (13.7%) and difficulties with specific resources (12.6%). In addition, respondents identified concerns relating to employment issues (12%) and the overall impact of security on educational provision (14.2%). By contrast 11.5% indicated that no issues were apparent in relation to the impact of the security regime and 8.2% recognised the importance of security measures in this context.

The restricted access to ICT was a particular concern:

Cannot use any online teaching materials we have to re-invent the wheel every day and prepare teaching materials from scratch. SUCH A WASTE OF TIME!!

Hugely difficult to teach IT in a relevant manner when all forms of modern technology are barred.

Participants were also concerned about the amount of teaching that was lost due to lockdowns and associated security issues:

Many teaching hours can be lost due to lockdowns and incidents beyond our control.

It can be very difficult at times to teach with the disruptions during class from security and appointments which can take learners away from the classroom. Overall though the security is good and I sympathise with why it is there, the security is excellent.

Security measures impacted on the use of specific materials and resources:

It restricts the kind of materials we can use, being a practical subject, it is sometimes difficult to manage with certain materials. Also we would like to bring in more resources from home to stimulate work, but again we are restricted.

Many materials are prohibited, which makes the lessons we can plan very limited.

Twenty six respondents commented on the overarching presence of the security regime at all times:

Constant restrictive presence.

Some stress is involved as you need to make sure that you are teaching and behaving within the parameters of the security regime. You have to be very aware of what is going on around you at all time.

For other respondents the security regime was seen as an accepted part of working in a prison:

Security is necessary it keeps everyone safe. You learn to work within the limitations it places upon you.

It creates some challenges and frustrations but is necessary for the safety of all.

For a minority the regime did not impact on teaching:

I have worked in two different regimes a men's secure prison and a women's open prison. Even with the extreme it doesn't really effect [sic] what I deliver for teaching.

Training provision for prison educators

Slightly more prison educators had completed their initial training on-the-job (53.8%) as opposed to undertaking a pre-service programme (46.2%). Participants were asked to indicate the different types of training they had received as a prison educator. As might be anticipated given the working context, the keys training was the most frequent, followed by security and equality and diversity.

When asked about the job-specific training received 50.7% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were happy with the training (see Table 7). However, in a separate question 64.2% of respondents reported that the training received over the last 18 months had been relevant to their role.

<i>I am happy with the job-specific training I have received</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Number</i>
Strongly agree	2.6%	6
Agree	33.8%	78
Neutral	13%	30
Disagree	35.5%	82
Strongly disagree	15.2%	35

Table 7: I am happy with the job-specific training I have received

Where concerns were raised, these were often in relation to subject specific training. When asked about the relevance of CPD in relation to the subjects taught 51.3% felt that this had not been relevant in contrast to 48.7% who felt that the CPD had been relevant. It should be noted that there is no inherent offer of CPD included in the prison education contract.

Respondents were asked to comment on in-service training that they had found particularly useful. Most referred to training that related directly to security and associated issues (28.8%). This included personal protection training, security training, and safeguarding. Respondents also took this opportunity to comment on the usefulness of the training received (19.2%). As one participant indicated 'All prison related training has been useful and relevant'. Training received relating to managing behaviour was commented on by 17.8% of participants and included training on challenging behaviour, manipulation by prisoners and conditioning. Fewer prison educators commented on training received about teaching and learning (13.7%) and well-being (9.6%).

Respondents were also asked to comment on the education, training and development of prison educators. Here the overall responses were less positive.

Prison Education is a specialist field and should be treated accordingly. Far too often we are considered and paid as 'second rate' and this is far from the case. Any teacher who teaches the learners and in the conditions that we do could teach well anywhere. We should receive appropriate pay for the work we do - my own pay was reduced by six thousand pounds a year when the last provider took over due to a 'miscalculation' in the bid. The whole concept of re tendering is humiliating and worrying. We have to give total loyalty to the provider, learn their systems and comply with their requirements knowing that it may well change in a couple of years or so. We need stability and consistency.

There should be some specific modules in all teacher training/education courses telling people what it is like to teach in prison, even if they don't go on to teach there it will raise awareness that prison education exists as I in my experience most people don't even know we exist, colleagues who have completed Cert Ed courses find a lot of it does not apply to prison education.

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide comment in free text boxes on the education, training and development of prison educators. Here 113 comments were received, each demonstrated an overwhelming sense that this provision was inadequate. Respondents commented that the range of support across the professional journey was inadequate. As an overview, respondents often stated that their initial teacher education had not covered their particular needs as prison educators, that mentors were not automatically assigned to staff that are new to prison education and that that funding, time off and payment for CPD to develop both subject expertise and teaching methodologies were either in decline, or in many cases, non-existent.

The professionalism of prison educators emerged as a main theme from the comments received with 23% of respondents drawing attention to this.

There needs to be a strong emphasis on prison-specific training and working within the restrictions of the prison system; the job is more complex than working in a college. We all need to be properly qualified for the roles we carry out with appropriate subject specialist training.

Recognize staff professionalism and reward staff with proper work contracts and comparison with main college staff.

I think that we are not taken seriously as educators but are thought of as second class.

Almost 20% of prison educators perceived the quality of training that they received to be of poor quality:

All aimed at ticking OFSTED boxes - none really aimed at development of educators.

CPD is actively encouraged but very little training of relevance or quality is provided locally.

An additional 18.6% of respondents commented on the lack of availability of training:

Not enough or adequate training especially when first starting the job.

Haven't had any formal training for more than 2 years and prior to that for probably 3 or 4 years before that.

Linked to the availability of training were concerns about the lack of funding: this was mentioned by 12.4% of respondents.

It is woefully under-funded.

Not prepared to invest in educators.

Fourteen participants (12.4%) commented on the initial training needs of prison educators with some suggesting that specialist training should be provided as part of the PGCE:

All new teachers in prison should have a period of induction into prison systems and life. A PGCE module on teaching in secure environments would be useful.

Almost 11% of the respondents highlighted the on-going need for CPD:

Prison educators need more CPD opportunities.

It could be improved by a very useful CPD system such as IFL or previous professional bodies but it could be improved by involvement of management and employees discussing this through staff appraisal. Wide options should be encouraged and developed.

Prison education as a career

This sense of professional dissatisfaction was further evidenced by responses to the question 'Are you likely to look for a new job in the next 12 months?' Half of the respondents said that they were likely to look for a new job in the next 12 months. Nearly a quarter (23.5%) answered 'don't know' and 26.5% stated that they were not likely to look for a new job in the next 12 months. Furthermore, there was an indication of high levels of discontent as 53% of those who indicated that they were likely to look for another job said that they would not look for another role as a prison educator, rather 'something else'. Only 10.5% of respondents said that they would look for a role as a prison educator, and 36.5% said that they would look for roles in both prison education and something else.

I like my job but am frustrated at times because the extra skills needed in working with such learners is not recognised or appreciated by the college. I feel that prison education is looked upon as an add-on by the college and something to be tolerated. The college's main concern is generic teaching on campus, and we are paid little regard. I do not feel valued by my employer.

In the free text responses 161 participants commented on prison education as a career. Of these nearly 30% of respondents felt that prison education was not a true career, often alluding to the features of a career that they felt were absent from their own. The lack of stability was a common feature of responses.

There is little opportunity for career progression and although that does not concern me, we have lost a lot of very good younger teachers because of this. The constant change in provider makes our employer seem very distant and senior management is generally unconcerned with the long term, but rather looking for short term profit.

There are few prospects for progression. Pay rises for good teachers are refused due to tight budgets leaving an over-worked and de-motivated work force. Due to this many excellent young teachers will move on within a year or two due to lack of support and incentives. This is sad as I love working in the prison environment as it can be so rewarding but I too feel that I will move on as soon as an appropriate opportunity elsewhere arises.

A small number of respondents (five) felt that prison education was a good career, stating, however, that it was time limited and not tenable for the long-term. One respondent stated, 'A great career but not for more than a few years then it's time to move on'.

Respondents also cited the impact of changes in funding (15%) and the sense of a lack of recognition of their specialist roles (13%) as factors which limited the capacity to have a real career in prison education.

The funding for certain subjects (drama, family man etc) has gone as they are not deemed to be rehabilitative, but these very subject areas help to teach the inmates the most about responsibility and changing their lives.

A number of respondents (11%) felt that prison education was a good career whilst including a number of 'but' arguments. These included long hours, too much change, emotionally demanding and little opportunity for progression. ²

Prison education as a career

I wouldn't recommend prison education as a career. The pay is appallingly low for the 'high risks' associated with working with offenders. The increase in class sizes, the holiday entitlement is low (4 weeks per year excluding bank holidays), the stress levels and illness is high amongst teaching staff. The redundancy pay is also low if staff are made redundant and there is a general disregard by managers as to the high risk factors and how they could be reduced. There is no additional pay or TOIL for working additional hours and no enhanced pay for working in a potential dangerous situation and feeling vulnerable. There is also no mentoring or supervision on a regular basis and there are too many observations of teaching without any training or updates of skills. There is bullying and harassment by managers which generates a climate of fear and too many changes e.g. classroom moves, class closures (without adequate reason or notice). If cover work is offered and then cancelled the employee doesn't get paid, there is huge disparity between hourly and full-time staff (work and conditions).

² See also *A Punishing Regime, (2013) A UCU report on occupational stress and well-being among prison educators 2013 available at http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/8/b/ucu_punishingregime_prisonstress_mar13.pdf*

Prison education can be very rewarding and you truly get to teach. If you put a lot in you get a lot out – from the prisoners – unfortunately not from management or providers... Providers are only interested in the bottom line, finance, nothing else matters... People are overworked, undervalued and yet they have great specialist skills.

I would have once said this is a wonderful career however, I now feel with current changes, there is no opportunity to teach properly.

I have worked in many colleges and schools and can honestly say it is the most rewarding career I have ever had. I really believe I can make a difference to some people. The paperwork, however and constantly increasing workload for no more reward is stressful and demotivating. It is also physically and mentally exhausting and time off is insufficient compared to school and college educators and other prison staff. This is why I believe it is so stressful.

Despite these concerns participants also commented on how rewarding their work was:

Although highly challenging, a career as a prison educator can be very rewarding.

I love working in prison education. I believe that it is the role of a teacher to put extra work in and in any teaching job would do so. The rewards and benefits of teaching in a prison outweigh any negative sides.

Working in a prison environment

For sure you have to be a certain kind of person to work in a prison environment because you are called to be fair but firm, tolerant but not taken advantage of, supportive, caring, willingness to go the extra mile, you need to be able to look at the whole person and not the criminality. You need to show respect and acceptance regardless as to why they are in prison. Not one day is the same and rarely is the day quiet or smooth as so many people have so many issues coming up for them. Working in a prison education environment is nothing like working in an establishment outside. You are often dealing with emotional issues, health issues, anger issue, sometimes very bad attitudes, very low motivation and rock bottom confidence. Sometimes just the fact that the student turns up the next day is an achievement. You also need a great sense of humour as the depression that the men carry is huge and the medication that they take, so a little encouragement to lighten their mood is vital. It is also important to be prepared for change, working with the class instead of being stiff and rigid complying to a lesson plan for example if there has been a death in the prison, many will be affected by it. Anything can kick off and you need to be able to manage incidents in order for you and your class to be safe. There are so many rules and regulations to following working in a prison environment. I am sold out to the job that I do as a prison educator but when it comes to doing it as a career I feel a little let down by all of my employers as not being part of any huge college, only being an isolated department I feel forgotten about and there does not seem to be any interest from my employer to take me on as a full time/part time employee. I live with the knowledge hanging over me that being on zero contract hours my employment could end by giving me enough notice to tell me I am no longer required. It has always been a battle to get financial support to do any professional development which does grieve me as it is only done to improve my teaching skills.

Change in the nature of being a prison educator over time

A further theme running throughout the qualitative responses was that the context and circumstances of being a prison educator had changed over time in a negative way.

Respondents often also referred to the negative impact that this had on the learners.

When I first entered prison education I believe it was a totally different environment to the way it is now. Inmates respected and related to teachers who in turn responded with the same positive attitude. Over the course of time with changes in college regime, prison attitude to teacher and a general lack of support this is now the worst area to begin a career in teaching.

I'm rather glad I'm leaving prison education. I feel so sorry for my colleagues remaining in this downhill spiral. The young inmates are so suffering in lack of education it's appalling to see inmates and teachers used as pawns by college, prison and government. Trouble is no one can breathe a word of this to the outside community, so it continues while society believes the inmates are where they should be. But surely without some help from good teaching staff this will never be corrected.

I used to love my job. Now it is changing dramatically. The new core day will impact negatively on education. Prisoners will have to do all their literacy work in one solid day, rather than two or three separate mornings. Prisoners in need of learning support do not receive enough one-to-one support and are unable to achieve.

Prison education policy and its consequences

Government policy

In 2011 the government published the policy document Making Prisons Work: skills for rehabilitation which set out the case for investing in the skills that learners in prison need to help them find and keep jobs on release. This policy document referenced the National Audit Office report Meeting Needs? The Offenders' Learning and Skills Service (House of Commons, 2008) which highlighted a lack of coordination between prison funding and learning need. The government's policy paper set out that these challenges were to be resolved in part through raising the profile of education for employment within prisons and also through a major shift in policy towards preparing prisoners for the world of work on release. A payment by results model was also introduced and the Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) contracts were retendered and thereby called OLASS 4, the fourth and current iteration of the prison education contracts.

Prison education: perceptions of prison educators

Prison educators, however, reported a broader view of the needs of prisoners. The survey asked for their perception of the purpose of prison education. Of the 222 responses only 27% said that the point was to prepare prisoners for employment. This, in part, explained the strong sense of a tension between the purpose of prison education and the work that prison educators do. Thirty per cent of respondents answered 'no' or 'unsure' when asked, 'Does your work correspond with your understanding of the purpose of prison education?'

As is evident from the responses below, even when prison educators saw preparation for employment as the main purpose of prison education, this aim was closely linked to being able to raise the self-confidence and esteem of the adults they were teaching.

To expand knowledge and skills, prepare for work or self-employment and gain qualifications.

Up-skilling defendants so they can manage their lives more effectively and have greater prospects in looking for a job. Many men in prison have had a negative experience of education. Prison courses give men a chance to build skills and self-esteem.

To gain qualifications to help on release with employment: to have the experience of socialising with different people, to enable those who have opted out of education a chance to improve.

“ many responses focussed on providing an opportunity for learners’ self-development ”

A further 34% identified the purpose as being rehabilitation or reducing re-offending but without mentioning either employment or self-development explicitly in their responses:

To give offenders the skills to function in society and to reduce reoffending rates.

To educate prisoners that there are other options to live without breaking the law and that with education they can learn the skills needed to live a law-abiding and fulfilling life.

To stop re offending by giving the offenders tools to help them make better choices.

However, many responses focussed on providing an opportunity for learners’ self-development, on changing lives and on giving prisoners an educational opportunity and a second chance in life. Thirty eight per cent of the responses to this question focused on this transforming aspect of prison education:

To offer a second chance at education, to allow someone to see their potential, to encourage and motivate the learner to reach their potential. To build their self-respect and esteem by treating them with respect and courtesy.

Rehabilitation of the whole person - I believe in 2nd and 3rd chances.

To unlock the prisoners’ potential, give them choices and qualifications to change their future.

To help give men back their confidence in terms of learning and achieving and to show them that they can return to society and pursue a more positive way of life.

The group of responses from which the above quotes have been taken suggested an awareness that many adults who are sentenced to prison have not been successful educationally or socially. Many have left school with few or no qualifications and feel that school has failed them, and many do not possess the skills to learn whilst sitting in classrooms. Adult educators are aware of the need to build basic social skills and self-confidence in learners before they can tackle the issue of learning for employment. This role of adult education is also recognised (BIS, 2011) as being one of its chief characteristics:

...offenders should have access to a wider offer of informal learning that brings with it other benefits, such as improved health, including mental health, with it... We recognise the important role that the arts, collectively, can play in the rehabilitation process through encouraging self-esteem and improving communication skills as a means to the end of reducing reoffending. (p.19)

What emerged here was a professional concern for the learning process; in the view of these professionals, learning cannot take place without personal change. Unless prisoners are given the opportunity to develop their self-confidence and self-awareness as people they are unlikely, on release, to be able to put to good use any skills that they may have acquired through the prison education system. The current policy in the view of prison educators runs the risk of ignoring this vital step through being too narrowly focused on profit and employability.

Thoughts on professionalism and working conditions

The majority of prison educators in this survey reported poor working conditions (see Table 8). Almost 85% of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that the available ICT resources enabled them to carry out their job effectively and 54.5% strongly disagreed or disagreed that they had adequate access to computers. Over two thirds of respondents (67.1%) strongly disagreed or disagreed that the available teaching resources enabled them to carry out their job effectively and almost half strongly disagreed or disagreed that they had adequate desk space to carry out their job effectively. The majority of participants strongly disagreed or disagreed that they had access to sufficient past education records of their learners (63.3%) and that they had access to destination information/data for their learners (68%). Almost two thirds of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that there were sufficient staff to deliver a continuous quality education and 64.9% strongly disagreed or disagreed that management systems were clear and readily available. For learners with physical or learning disabilities more than 60% of prison educators strongly disagreed or disagreed that appropriate assistance was available.

Table 8: Prison educators' perceptions of working conditions

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I have adequate desk space to enable me to carry out my job effectively (N=231)	11.3%	36.85	2.2%	23.8%	26%
The teaching resources available to me at work enable me to carry out my job effectively (N=231)	3%	24.2%	5.6%	35.5%	31.6%
I have adequate access to computers to enable me to carry out my job effectively (N=231)	5.2%	28.1%	2.2%	28.6%	25.9%
The ICT resources (including internet and software) available to me at work enable me to carry out my job effectively (N=230)	1.7%	10%	3.5%	31.7%	53%
I have access to sufficient past education records of my learners (N=232)	1.3%	25%	7.3%	34.9%	28.4%
Management information systems are clear and readily available (N=228)	1.3%	25%	8.8%	35.1%	29.8%
I have access to destination information/data for my learners (N=229)	0.9%	23.1%	5.2%	36.7%	31.3%
There are enough education staff to deliver a continuous quality education (N=230)	3.5%	25.2%	5.2%	34.8%	31.3%
Appropriate assistance is available for learners with physical or learning disabilities (N=228)	2.2%	26.8%	8.8%	32.9%	29.4%

Prison educators from my experience mainly do a fabulous job and stay in the job for the spiritual rewards reaped from helping people to change. However, the benefits and rewards are not comparable to other teachers outside of prison. The job is extremely emotionally and physically exhausting and stressful. yet, for those of us on annualised contracts, we had to sacrifice some of our pay in order to receive 'holiday days' but essentially, this is unpaid leave as we have cut our hourly rate in order to get these holidays. Even with these holidays, the time off we can take is insufficient for the stress levels of the job and is in no way comparable to other educators outside of prison.

We need better pay, some sort of break system if we are expected to teach for more than three hours at a time, more PAID holidays and more recognition for our successes. We don't even get congratulated when we are above our achievement rates! We need to feel more valued with the three things mentioned.

Participants used the open-ended question in this section to describe in more detail the poor conditions in which they worked. Forty three respondents (34.4%) commented in depth on the poor working conditions in relation to the physical space both in classrooms and in staff areas, cleanliness, poor resources and equipment.

Facilities at our establishment are poor. Far too much clutter means the space for working away from learners is inadequate.

We have no cleaners in our prison except for the education orderly who works only when we teach. Have to remind staff in charge to clean and replenish toilets or empty staff room bins and I have to ask for or get resources for toilet facilities every week. Our classrooms are not cleaned unless we do it ourselves. ICT resources are in a state of disrepair as is a lot of the furniture.

Sixteen per cent of responses reflected a perception of a lack of professional respect:

I'm not treated, respected as a subject specialist with experience. There is no training whatsoever and currently no funding available. There is no opportunity to develop new resources or examples of work and I frequently work additional hours unpaid with no recognition. There is no promotion, incentive, reward or praise from my employer and little empathy recognising the stressed and hardworking staff.

Some respondents (15.2%) took the opportunity to comment on the impact of the tendering process and the changes in providers and 12.8% drew attention to poor management.

The frequent change of providers over the years is highly negative and has led to a situation where things are always unsettled.

Lack of respect and support from Prison Management impacts very negatively at present as does lack of space.

The inadequacy of ICT provision was commented on by 14 participants (11.2%).

Lack of IT support - no specialist provided and no industry standard software upgrade authorised over 3 years. No back-up - learners work is at risk.

Participants used the open-ended question in this section to describe in more detail the poor conditions in which they worked. Forty three respondents (34.4%) commented in depth on the poor working conditions in relation to the physical space both in classrooms and in staff areas, cleanliness, poor resources and equipment.

Facilities at our establishment are poor. Far too much clutter means the space for working away from learners is inadequate.

We have no cleaners in our prison except for the education orderly who works only when we teach. Have to remind staff in charge to clean and replenish toilets or empty staff room bins and I have to ask for or get resources for toilet facilities every week. Our classrooms are not cleaned unless we do it ourselves. ICT resources are in a state of disrepair as is a lot of the furniture.

Sixteen per cent of responses reflected a perception of a lack of professional respect:

I'm not treated, respected as a subject specialist with experience. There is no training whatsoever and currently no funding available. There is no opportunity to develop new resources or examples of work and I frequently work additional hours unpaid with no recognition. There is no promotion, incentive, reward or praise from my employer and little empathy recognising the stressed and hardworking staff.

Some respondents (15.2%) took the opportunity to comment on the impact of the tendering process and the changes in providers and 12.8% drew attention to poor management.

The frequent change of providers over the years is highly negative and has led to a situation where things are always unsettled.

Lack of respect and support from Prison Management impacts very negatively at present as does lack of space.

The inadequacy of ICT provision was commented on by 14 participants (11.2%).

Lack of IT support - no specialist provided and no industry standard software upgrade authorised over 3 years. No back-up - learners work is at risk.

It was apparent that some of these issues related more broadly to the provision of education in prisons. Prison educators spoke of the poorer quality of the teaching and learning offer being made to offenders:

The implementation of OLASS 4 has been disastrous on our prison provision; most former teachers have left and limited recruitment advertising has been ineffective and many course are not currently possible due to lack of any qualified teachers. There is no linkage to learner needs; each class is a roll-on: roll-off of learners with varied backgrounds/needs/levels. Many are just placed in a class (by the Prison) with no explanation to teachers. The emphasis is on short-term outcomes (quals) not on effective learning/understanding. Attendance by each learner on each course is limited by the prison to a fixed number of weeks.

Participants felt that working conditions had deteriorated over time:

I don't feel that teachers and prison educators in general are given the respect they deserve in line with the level of professionalism that is required. In my experience, most teachers carry out their jobs with a very high level of professionalism, but I don't think this is recognised or acknowledged.

Therefore, high levels of professionalism operate at all times but due to changes in funding structures and a punitive OFSTED system, it goes unnoticed or is ignored. Working conditions have worsened, as the informal organisation is continually eroded, something I have noticed in schools and the prison.

The qualitative comments suggested that many prison educators felt that they were not valued by the providers, college staff or prison staff. As one participant commented:

We are simply units of production having every last drop squeezed from us.

Important was the impact of the poor working conditions and opportunities on the educational experience of the prisoners themselves in addition to those delivering the teaching and learning:

We are not given the tools or the opportunity to carry out our job sufficiently. I feel that prisoners are provided with second-rate education due to this and that nobody will listen to them complain about it like they would a college or university student.

I feel that working conditions sometimes border on dangerous regarding space and number of prisoners. Prison regimes make no allowance for prisoners with physical disabilities such as wheelchair users, other disabilities and the deaf. Sometimes prisoners are all crammed together in a small classroom, making it impossible to seat learners appropriately - this is because the prison dislikes the class sizes to be too small.

Positive comments were in the minority although a few participants felt that management were positive and the working conditions were fine:

Management is very professional.

I have never had any issues with regards to this.

The consequences of prison education policy/ funding

The poor level of professional recognition of prison educators by society and the prison service, and the poor working conditions that they experience, can be attributed at least in part, to prison education policy.

As outlined earlier the express purpose of prison education is to prepare prisoners for employment in order to reduce re-offending. The respondents were heavily critical of two main aspects of prison education policy: the first was the practice of competitive tendering for prison education that takes place every three years and the second was linked to this in that funding has been dependent on educational outcomes achieved.

The majority (62%) of the open responses to prison education policy criticised the negative effect these two factors are having on the prisoners as learners and on the overall quality of education offered.

The current funding structure for OLASS 4 will work for a sizable portion of learners who have not achieved qualifications as yet. Unfortunately the fixed and reduced GLH will have a negative impact on those who need the most academic help and who often have associated behavioural problems. We are simply going to be reinforcing those individuals' prior negative experiences of education rather than making it something positive.

The achievement-focused policy may lead to high levels of 'achievements' but this is different to outcomes. If 'outcomes' relates to how the education received benefits the learner overall, I think that this is negatively impacted in the following ways here: Learners can only do level one courses, thus more able learners lack opportunities.

Payment by results is all very well but it actively discourages low ability learners from attending any form of education because they are unlikely to complete the course within the specified time - so the provider doesn't want to take the risk of them failing and costing them money. We are told 'personalised learning' is the main focus of education but government policy goes against this completely with its 'one size fits all' view.

OLASS 4 contract is not suitable for prison education. Guided Learner Hours are too restrictive for offender students often with mental health issues, drug and alcohol dependencies, various other health issues and tension from being in a closed environment.

I strongly believe the current policy of payment upon results is totally WRONG - there should be a policy to help offenders once they are released from prison, currently they are thrown out with no support, often with nowhere to live, and no job - prison education is not valued by employers therefore the offenders feel they have no option but to reoffend to get a roof over their heads. Rehabilitation of the offender is not working at the moment.

Approximately one fifth of the responses were critical of the effect that the current practice of competitive re-tendering of the prison education contracts every three years had on staffing as a result of changes in the provider, and hence, the employer of prison education staff. Respondents perceived that this had a negative impact on the quality of the teaching and learning conditions. In addition, participants were critical of the way in which prison education is now funded: in their view this was to in order to ensure that a profit is made.

Competitive retendering of contracts has been wholly disruptive and stressful for staff and learners, aimed as it is at providing the cheapest service above all other considerations.

How can a good teacher complete his or her career with the constant threat of losing his or her job every three years and a downward spiral of worse colleges vying for cheaper education prospects, I've had to bring my own pens, paper etc into work because the college " couldn't afford" the education requirements

Teachers at our establishment... are not given any say into how they can improve courses and therefore outcomes for learners, whereas previously we were listened to. This has led to very low morale with staff as well as inmates as the quality of teaching is not being allowed to continue. It's a huge step from when I began teaching in prisons 13 years ago. Why the contract was shifted from a 'not for profit organization' to a 'for profit' organization is beyond me. It's simply leading to more qualified, successful and passionate teachers losing their jobs.

OLASS 1 – College A, OLASS 2 – Private provider, OLASS 3 – College B, OLASS 4 – College C. Changing employer every three years is not beneficial to a department. It can take up to two years to get properly acquainted and set up smoothly with a new employer. Changing so often is unsettling for staff and does not allow continuity of systems for learners.

“ Changing employer every three years is not beneficial to a department ”

Retendering will lead to long term job insecurity and the requirement to continuously move pension arrangements. It makes employees insecure about the future and will lead to less long term commitment to prison education.

A further perceived impact of the retendering mechanism was the way in which prison education was managed. Fifteen per cent of respondents (11/73) raised issues of poor management, both on a local scale and at provider level. OLASS providers were criticised for bullying, for putting statistics before value, for lack of genuine interest and for inefficiency.

Over 12+ years of experience I've witnessed a shocking deterioration in standards of education management - no formal appraisals, observations only prior to external inspection, negligible training, no collaboration with subject staff, autocratic management style, nepotism and fraud (claiming teaching hours that haven't been delivered).

Greater accountability of providers is needed - offenders and staff have no voice. Gagging orders prevent open comment.

Greater communication between staff in regional prisons would benefit provision and morale, but would clearly not be welcomed by management.

Prison teachers are being treated horribly in many cases, I think. The prisoners, on the whole are a joy. The work is too important not to be organised with real vision. It is letting down all of society not to do the best with this.

Other critical statements (7%) focused on lack of consultation of the views of prison staff; government prioritising votes over shown need; and lack of appropriate qualifications for the prisoners.

Discussion

Prison education as a career

On a personal level I have found it to be very satisfying and have enjoyed improving the curriculum by embedding creative work into basic literacy classes so that the men develop skills in using professional design programs and also audio skills in the form of radio production. I have always found that the demands of the funding bodies/government/provider are generally at odds with what you would hope to provide - i.e. a rich learning experience, at all levels, that would encourage learners to continue study, finding alternative lifestyles, on release. All providers, whether public or private have been totally focussed on targets and achievements. There is a lot of rhetoric about responding to the needs of the learners/diversity and providing a quality experience but they are not really interested in that at all; the focus of all providers is to retain the contract - whether profit is returned to education or to shareholders. As inequality in wealth and opportunities continues to increase, so will crime. Prison education is limited in what it can provide without contextualising it within the wider society.

This report represents the largest analysis to date of prison educators' thoughts on their professionalism and practice. Whilst respondents came from a range of backgrounds, there was a fairly united voice with respect to the professional concerns of prison educators. These professional concerns were often linked directly to the resultant impact on the learner and the quality of education delivered.

“A highly qualified hugely committed workforce”

This survey has raised serious concerns about future recruitment to the profession. Responses to this survey suggested that the age profile of prison educators was an ageing one. There was evidence of discontent among a quarter of respondents indicating a desire to leave the profession in the next year. The majority of respondents in this survey felt that there were not enough staff to deliver a quality education. This was further supported by the high number of unpaid hours that respondents reported they typically worked per week. Analysis of the types of activities that were completed during this time revealed that these additional hours were spent completing activities that are necessary to perform the role successfully, including lesson planning, and administration. There was a commonly held perception amongst prison educators that there was limited scope for a true career in prison education due to the high workload, the limited opportunity for progression and the lack of professional autonomy. Indeed, high workload was identified as one of the most significant professional challenges of working as a prison educator. Respondents also pointed towards the low profile and status of prison education. These are all concerns which must be addressed in order to support recruitment to the profession and staff retention.

The competitive retendering of prison education contracts was repeatedly highlighted as having a negative impact on both the education delivered and the prison educators themselves. In this sector staff are subject to ongoing uncertainty about their long-term job security because their employment, terms and conditions and pensions arrangements are subject to change every three years when the OLASS contracts are retendered. It was difficult to see how subject expertise, continuity, or morale could be maintained or developed in light of the huge change of systems and personnel which typically follow the tender exercises. Each new retendering process was reported to be followed by a series of new systems and reporting mechanisms which prison educators must adapt to. Furthermore many respondents made a direct link between competitive retendering, payment by results and the reduced quality of education offered.

There were several responses that suggested that the payment-by-results model was at odds with the profit-orientation of many providers because it rewards providers who maximise revenue by providing short, low level courses that typically secure high success and completion rates. Prison educators argue that this

methodology does not secure the best outcomes for learners, society or the economy. In particular, respondents voiced strong concerns about not being able to provide sufficient support for the most vulnerable learners and those with a need for the most educational support. It was interesting to note that many of the restricted curriculum and delivery practices that were taking place in prisons seemed to go

“ Prison educators argue that the payment by results methodology does not secure the best outcomes for learners, society or the economy ”

against the freedoms and flexibilities that are being devolved in the rest of the further education and skills sector, so that whilst colleges are increasingly able to deliver services that are responsive to the local community and the students that they serve, prison educators feel that they are increasingly restricted in the range and depth of provision that they are able to offer their learners.

There appeared to be real disparities between the terms and conditions of prison educators and staff teaching in other areas of the education sector. This survey has identified a £15,000 difference between the modal salaries reported for prison educators and those teaching in FE colleges. This differential warrants attention. Nearly a third of respondents to this survey lacked the inherent job security of a permanent contract. This survey has also highlighted the poor working conditions in which prison education staff work. This ranged from dirty working environments to inadequate working spaces and resources for staff. Whilst some of these concerns were subject to the limitation of the prison estate, if prison educators and learners are working in conditions which risk their health and safety this must be reviewed urgently. Whilst some of the concerns raised were attributable to the working environment, many were not. The high reports of bullying by managers were an example of this.

Whilst respondents reported that the security regime had a significant impact on their work, there was a sense that most prison educators did their best to work around this with the caveat of ICT. Respondents did however raise concerns about the level and extent of their ability to access CPD, and in particular in relation to subject-specific CPD. In many cases funding and/or remission had not been available to complete this. Initial Teacher Education was also felt to not always be fully relevant to the specific needs of prison educators. Respondents were generally positive about the prison and security related training they had received.

“ Initial Teacher Education was also felt to not always be fully relevant to the specific needs of prison educators ”

The responses to the survey showed an overall picture of a highly qualified and hugely committed workforce that was extremely motivated in relation to achieving the best outcomes for their learners. Prison educators had typically made a deliberate decision to enter the profession. The ranges of response demonstrated that prison educators are indeed a distinct professional group with sector-specific concerns.

Respondents reported an overwhelming sense that there had been a diminution in the terms and conditions of the employment of prison educators, particularly since the introduction of competitive tendering. Further research could usefully explore the full extent to which there is a two-tier system between prison educators and those teaching in other education sectors, and the relationship between prison education reform and outcomes for learners.

At the time of writing this report there was much external scrutiny of the prison education system. It seems fitting therefore to close with comments from the most recent Annual Report by the Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales that have drawn attention to the relationship between funding reductions, service reform, quality and risk.

No one should fool themselves that these financial and organisational pressures do not create risks. In prisons, there are fewer staff on the wings supervising prisoners, there are fewer managers supervising staff and less support available to establishments from a diminished centre. Quite apart from the impact of the savings themselves, there is clearly a danger in all forms of custody that managers become 'preoccupied with cost cutting, targets and processes' and lose sight of their fundamental responsibilities for the safety, security and rehabilitation of those they hold. (HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales Annual Report 2012-13, p.8)

Conclusion

This survey sought to learn more about prison educators and to explore the impact of offender learner reforms on their professionalism and practice. This research found that the prison education workforce was highly qualified and attracted professionals from other teaching sectors as well as professionals who had moved from industry into prison education. The depth and length of responses received aptly demonstrated the dedication of those working in prison education. These responses demonstrated the unique insight that prison educators have, the complexity of the role that they undertake and their desire to engage with prisoners in a meaningful educational offer.

The survey revealed an overall picture of a hugely committed workforce that was highly dedicated to their learners. It also, however, highlighted an evidence base which suggested that prison educators were working in extremely difficult circumstances and that there was a groundswell of professional discontent particularly around workload, the consequences of competitive tendering and the lack of continuing professional development opportunities. A key message throughout the responses was that whilst prison education had the potential to transform individual lives and thereby secure improvements for society and the economy, the way in which it was currently organised was reducing the potential for its life-changing impacts and creating an extremely unhappy workforce.

References

- BIS (2011) Making Prisons Work: Skills for Rehabilitation. Review of Offender Learning. London: Department for Business Innovation and Skills.
- Braggins, J. and Talbot, J. (2003) Time to Learn: Prisoners' Views on Prison Education. London: Prison Reform Trust.
- HM Government (2005) Green Paper: Reducing Re-offending Through Skills and Employment. London: The Stationery Office.
- Cooper, P. and McIntyre, D. (1993) Commonality in teachers' and pupils' perceptions of effective classroom learning. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 63, 381-399.
- Council of Europe (1989) Recommendation No. R (89)12 of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on Education in Prison http://www.epea.org/uploads/media/Education_In_Prison_01.pdf accessed 20th August 2013.
- Halsey, K., Martin, K. and White, R. (2006) The implementation of OLASS: An assessment of its impact one year on. Research Report 810. London: DfES.
- HM Inspectorate of Prisons (2013) Annual Report 2012–13 HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for England and Wales. London: The Stationery Office.
- Hurry, J., Rogers, L., Simonot, M. and Wilson, A. (2012) Inside Education: The Aspirations and Realities of prison education for under 25s in the London area. A Report for Sir John Cass's Foundation. London: Institute of Education, University of London.
- Simonot, M., Jeanes, J., MacDonald, J., Nicholl, M. and Wilkinson, I. (2008) Initial teacher training project for teachers and instructors in prison and offender education. London: London Centre for Excellence in Teacher Training.
- Ministry of Justice (2013a) Population and Capacity Briefing for Friday 10 May 2013. London: Ministry of Justice.
- Ministry of Justice (2013b) Monthly Population Bulletin March 2013. London: Ministry of Justice.
- OLASS The vision for the Offender Learning and Skill's Service, <http://olass.skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/> accessed 10th June 2013.
- Prisoners' Education Trust (2009) Brain Cells: Listening to Prisoner Learners, http://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/fileadmin/user_upload/doc/Learning_Matters/BRAIN_CELLS._THE_REPORT.pdf accessed 28th August 2013.
- Prisoners' Education Trust (2012) Brain Cells: listening to Prisoner Learners, second edition http://www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/fileadmin/user_upload/doc/Learning_Matters/PET_Brain_Cells_Report_2nd_edition.pdf accessed 13 September 2013.
- Prison Reform Trust (2013a) Privatisation will not rehabilitate our prisons. London: Prison Reform Trust. www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/ProjectsResearch/PrivateSectorPrisons accessed 10th June 2013.

Prison Reform Trust (2013b) Bromley Briefings Summer 2013. London: Prison Reform Trust.

Social Exclusion Unit (2002) Reducing Re-offending by Ex-prisoners, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
http://www.thelearningjourney.co.uk/file.2007-10-01.1714894439/file_view Accessed 2 July 2013

The Prison Rules 1999, Rule 32.
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1999/728/contents/made>.

Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2012) Correctional Education in Prison
<http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/1000.CorrEdPrison.pdf> accessed 2 July 2013.

Youth Justice Board (2013) Monthly Youth Custody Report – March 2013. London: Youth Justice Board.