



Education Select Committee

Underachievement in Education by White Working Class Children

A response from the Prisoner Learning Alliance

(Chair and Secretariat provided by Prisoners Education Trust)

November 2013

1. The factors responsible for white working class pupils' educational underachievement, including the impact of home and family.

One factor impacting the educational underachievement of some white working class children, is the impact of having a parent in prison.

Number of children with imprisoned parents:

- It is estimated there are about 160,000 children with a parent in prison every year. This is two and a half times the number of children in care and six times the number of children on the child protection register. (MoJ, 2010)
- Approximately 200,000 children in England and Wales had a parent in prison in some point in 2009. (MoJ, 2012)
- The Department of Education estimated that in 2003 that, during their time in school, 7% of children experience their father's imprisonment. (DoE, 2003)
- 54% per cent of prisoners stated that they had children under the age of 18 at the time they entered prison (MoJ, 2012)
- 25% of young men in young offender institutions are, or are shortly to become, fathers. (MoJ, 2007)

Potential impact of parental imprisonment on children:

- Prisoner's families are vulnerable to financial instability, poverty, debt, possible housing disruption, emotional and health problems. (SEU, 2002)
- The main social costs incurred by children of imprisoned mothers is their increased likelihood of becoming 'Not in Education, Employment or Training' (NEF, 2008)
- MoJ research found that over a third of prisoners has a convicted relative
- Research indicates that 'the transmission of criminality from parents to children is found to be stronger when the parent is imprisoned' (Besemer et al. 2011, Williams et al, 2012)

[Barnardo's report on the impact of parental imprisonment on children \(2009\):](#)

Impact on schooling:

Children of prisoners face multiple barriers to educational achievement and later employment. In some cases, new care arrangements mean that a child is moved to a new area and school, resulting in loss of friendship groups and disruption to their education. Incidents of bullying are common - some children of prisoners are goaded into being 'as tough' as the incarcerated parent.

Impact on mental health and wellbeing:

The emotional and physical reactions to the loss of a parent to prison have been likened to the grief felt at death. However, imprisonment does not always elicit the same sympathetic or supportive response of family members and the community. At this time, when a child most needs emotional support, the remaining parent can struggle to provide it. Children who experience the imprisonment of a parent are more than twice as likely than their peers to have a mental health problem.

Impact on behaviour:

Children display a whole range of behavioural responses to the new challenges they face when a parent goes to prison, including defiance; hyperactivity; persistent truanting; lack of concentration; fear and anxiety; nightmares; withdrawal; bed-wetting; aggressive or antisocial behaviour and substance misuse. Children of prisoners are three times more likely to engage in anti-social and delinquent behaviour than their peers and 65 per cent of boys with a convicted father go on to offend.

The prison population is predominantly white and disproportionately working class:

- 74% of the prison population is white.
- 47% of prisoners stated that they held no qualifications (MoJ, 2012). In 2003, the proportion of the population of working age in the UK holding no qualifications was 15% (ONS, 2003).
- Nearly half (49%) of prisoners were classified as working in routine and semi-routine occupations and on average (compared to 22% of the general population)
- Prisoners who had ever worked reported receiving low pay compared with the general working age population in their last job before custody (MoJ, 2012).

2. What role Government can play in delivering educational outcomes for white working class pupils.

The PLA would like to highlight the benefits of a quality learning offer for the parent in prison in helping to improve the educational achievement of their children because:

- Learning in prison can help reduce parental reoffending and improve employability thereby reducing the risk factor associated with having a parent in prison;
- Learning in prison can improve parents' aspirations for their children's education and improve their ability to help with homework;
- Helping parents to learn in prison and after release can help provide a role model for their children;
- Learning in prison can also help improve parenting and communication skills
- Learning in prison can inspire and train prisoners to mentor young people at risk of exclusion or offending.

These outcomes could be achieved by improving the quality of learning in prison. The Prisoner Learning Alliance has recently published a report '*Smart Rehabilitation: Learning how to get better*

outcomes' (2013). Many of these recommendations echo the report of the Education and Skills Select Committee into Prison Education in 2005 (Seventh Report of Session 2004-05).

In addition, the Government should consider amending the criteria for 'Troubled Families' support to include having a parent in prison.

These points are set out more fully in the sections below.

3. Learning in prison can help reduce parental reoffending and improve employability

Education in prison can have wide ranging benefits. There is evidence that learning can help reduce re-offending and therefore make it less likely that the family and children will be disrupted by imprisonment again if the parent is no longer involved in crime. Another benefit is improving the employability of the adult, to help them secure paid work. Work, particularly if it is skilled work paid above the minimum wage, could help lift their family out of poverty and thereby improve educational outcomes of their children through access to educational resources, extra curricular activities and school trips.

- For custodial sentences of less than one year, the proven one year reoffending rate was 9.4 % points lower for those who found P45 employment than those who didn't (MoJ, 2012)
- Analysis by Ipsos MORI and London Economics for BIS: 35% men and 29% of women who had undertaken further education and skills training indicated that they had got a better job, while 18% of men and 12% women indicated they had received a promotion (BIS, 2013).
- Prisoners who reported having a qualification were 15% less likely to be reconvicted in the year after release from custody than those who reported having no qualifications.
- There was a reduction in the risk of re-offending of 13 percentage points for those who participate in correctional education programs versus those who don't (Davis et al, 2013).

4. Learning in prison can improve parents' aspirations for their children's education and improve their ability to help with homework

We know that many prisoners have often not had a positive experience of their own schooling and education (MoJ, 2012):

- 59% of prisoners reported regularly playing truant
- 63% reported having been temporarily excluded from school
- 42% reported having been permanently excluded
- 47% do not have qualifications

Therefore this may impact their ability to help their children with homework, their ability to form relationships with the school and teachers and also their attitudes and aspirations for their children's education.

However evidence suggests that by engaging in learning, this can be reversed:

- Learners indicate the training and qualifications increased their appetite for further learning at a higher level, further reinforcing the possibility of transmitting learning within the family environment across generations. (BIS, 2013).
- Safeground evaluation (Boswell, 2011): 84% of participants reported improved relationships with their children / families
- Inspiring Change evaluation (Anderson et al, 2011): Benefits of arts-based learning in prison were most evident for those whose families attended the performances and shows.
- H. Nicholls (2013) - Distance learning created shared experiences of learning between prisoner parents and their school aged children - both students, which helped maintain ties.

- Prison Reading Groups (2013): Prisoners' families can read the same book which then becomes a point of conversation and a shared love of reading is developed. As literacy and analysis skills develop, parents can better help children with their homework.

5. Helping parents to learn in prison and after release can help provide a role model for their children:

Nicolle's story

In a letter to Prisoners Education Trust for a distance learning course she wrote *"I just want to keep bettering myself so I can live a life free from drugs and crime. I need this chance to better myself and move forward with my life. I've got a beautiful ten year old son who lives with my mother and father but due to my active addiction he lost me. I know without working on myself, and bettering myself and working on my recovery daily I can't be that mother he needs and wants. I need to keep pushing forth to achieve my goals"*.

I wanted to do something positive with my sentence. I applied to the Rehabilitation of Addicted Prisoners Trust (RAPT) programme, got clean of drugs and eventually became a peer supporter. When I wrote the letter to Prisoners Education Trust to fund a counselling skills course I didn't have high hopes. I was so happy when I got funding. I didn't have a lot of education as I got bullied at school. Sometimes when I didn't want to come out of my cell, teachers would come to my door. It meant a lot and it gave me the confidence and drive to go on. I also loved taking part in a Pimlico Opera which increased my self confidence.

I came out of prison May 2011 - I'd been out 3 weeks when someone asked me to come and work with them setting up a project with probation, which helps young people breaking the cycle out of criminality and addiction. I go into schools and run workshops about addiction, criminality and gangs. I even work with the police. I never thought I'd say that! I've been given an award by the Mayor for my volunteering.

I'm still continuing in education as I'm doing a Level 3 NVQ in Health and Social Care at a local college so I can eventually get paid work in this field. Education has also brought me and my son closer together. My son's doing very well by getting all A's and B's at school. We sit together and do our homework side by side and support each other".

6. Learning in prison can also help improve parenting and communication skills.

Some learning opportunities in prison are specifically targeted at developing parenting skills and this includes the role of the parent in helping their children progress educationally. For example PLA member Safe Ground provide courses including Fathers Inside and Family Man.

In HMP Parc they have a Big Lottery funded project called '[Invisible Walls](#)':

Corin Morgan-Armstrong, senior manager at HMP & YOI Parc, said the project would allow its family interventions unit to "focus entirely upon the importance and skills necessary to repair, develop, and maintain a healthy family relationship". He added that they were looking to involve and support families of prisoners through the project. Mr Morgan-Armstrong said the aim was to "derail intergenerational offending, which in itself in south Wales sees a disproportionate amount of young boys following their fathers into the revolving door of crime, court and prison".

Other types of learning, particularly arts and informal learning, can provoke an emotional response, encourage self reflection and help changes attitudes, thinking and behaviour. For example PLA

member Prison Reading Groups highlight the empathy developing properties of informal learning such as reading and analysing literature in facilitated group.

7. Family learning

Programmes in prison that promote family learning can have a positive impact on parenting and the ability of parents in prison to learn how to play with their children and to help with their homework. One example of good practice of Ofsted's website is the accredited '[Inclusive Family Learning Programme](#)' at HMP Wolds:

On a normal visit, an offender has to remain seated on the "red chair" and cannot properly interact or play with his children. The Family Learning Programme provides a structured approach to family relationships where both parents learn about important parenting skills and mum and dad can play and interact with their children together. It has required strong support from senior managers, and staff also needed to be on board. But it's made such a difference. Family bonds are much stronger and children really look forward to the visits. Offenders appreciate their families more and learn how to be better parents. They are less angry and frustrated and so their behaviour in prison improves.' *Children and Family Development Manager*

One offender said: *'I think the Family Learning Programme is brilliant. It has helped me to build a bond with my youngest child who didn't know who I was and called other family members "dad". Now he knows I'm his dad. Sometimes the kids bring their homework and I help them to complete it. I had to discipline one of my kids recently and that helped them and me to understand our responsibilities better. It has made me to realise what I am missing by being in prison and it will definitely act as a deterrent to stop me offending again.'*

8. Learning in prison can inspire and train prisoners to mentor young people at risk of exclusion or offending:

Graham's story

I spent 18 years in prison after going into care at twelve years old and being sent to a school for children who had trouble in mainstream education. I went through the criminal justice system and eventually was sentenced to a two-strike life sentence in 2001. At this stage I thought, 'What are my options?' I went through drug rehabilitation and was clean by 2002. My drugs counsellor encouraged me to take on education, which I'd always seen as boring and authoritarian. Within 6 months, I had passed level 2 numeracy and literacy and getting those certificates was better than any drug I'd taken.

During my time in custody, I did 5 or 6 modules including an NVQ in drug and alcohol counselling funded by PET. I became an education addict. I even did some distance learning courses, including with the Open University. The OU was the first deadline I ever met and sat alongside my sense of responsibility as a father.

Around 2007 I decided I wanted to set up a social enterprise, Youth Empowerment Services. I worked with the Surrey Youth Justice scheme in prison and using this practical experience and my theoretical education I put together a business plan. I was released in 2009 and started working the next day. I started offering my services to schools and PRUs. Within 7 months, I had established a charity and today we work with 3000 young people a year. My previous experience had shown me that young people who were engaging in risky and criminal behaviour identified with my story - and others like me. Sharing our experiences - and the consequences - proved to be a powerful and productive tool for working with some of the most challenging young people around today. We now employ 7 ex-offenders who all did education.

On a personal level, it has been amazing to be involved with something so positive and I continue to apply much of the academic learning I gained through my education. Youth Empowerment has very much been driven by research, evidence and academic understanding - something I would not have had the first clue about before. I know the value of learning and about the need to change attitudes. Education has worked for most prisoners I know.

9. Quality learning in prison

To improve the educational achievements of young people and parents who are taken into custody there needs to be access to good quality education and learning. The Prisoner Learning Alliance have recently published a report '*Smart Rehabilitation: Learning how to get better outcomes*' (2013) which highlights the key values which should underpin learning provision:

- Personalised - effective inductions, individual learning plans, taking time to understand previous learning, thorough assessments of learning levels and types.
- Inclusive - learning opportunities should reflect their diverse needs and motivations.
- Engaging - custody should have a culture of learning. Embedded learning can effectively hook people into learning. What works in learning must trump concerns about public acceptability.
- Aspirational - those who achieve their basic skills should be enabled to progress to higher levels to reach their potential.
- Safe - Both physically and emotionally. A safe space to learn is respectful, comfortable, builds on strengths and is motivational.
- Empowering - enabling learners to take responsibility will improve their outcomes, for example through developing their own learning plans, peer mentoring, service user participation and self-directed learning (as part of a blended learning model).
- Excellence - There should be 'the best teachers, the best managers and the best advisors' (Ofsted, 2013). This requires a commitment to Continuing Professional Development and partnership working.

In addition, to secure the best outcomes learning in prison should be better 'joined-up' including

- Within individual prisons as education is often siloed from other departments.
- Between prison and the community - it is important to liaise with mainstream education providers (schools, colleges, PRU's etc) to both help continue learning disrupted by the move to custody and to ensure it can continue after release. This is particularly important to share information on special educational needs.
- Between prisons - when learners are transferred between prisons this can disrupt learning. Specific support should be provided to young people transitioning from the youth to the adult estate:

As prisoners transition from the youth to the adult estate, more co-ordination is necessary to ensure that it is smooth and that the learning journey can effectively continue. The MoJ's recent consultation on *Transforming Management of Young Adults in Custody* (MoJ, 2013b) deals with arrangements for young prisoners once they reach the age of 18. This consultation has emerged before the Government has responded to the consultation on "putting education at the heart of the youth estate" and is largely silent on the vital question of managing a young person's learner journey from youth custody to an adult prison environment.

The PLA report also recommends:

- Prisons should provide a range and combination of learning opportunities to develop the whole person; their human capital, social capital and imaginative capital. Such learning should form a package which could include; informal, academic, vocational, relationship, life skills, creative, peer-to-peer and e-learning.
- Focus should be on outcomes and not outputs e.g. number of accreditations.

For detail about recommendations for under 18's please also see the following PLA member's responses to the government's '*Transforming Youth Custody: Putting education at the heart of the youth estate*' consultation (2013):

- [Prisoners Education Trust & Kinetic Youth:](#)
- [Institute for Learning:](#)
- [User Voice:](#)
- [Clinks:](#)

10. Amend 'Troubled Families' criteria to include parent in prison

The Troubled Families programme is due to expand. MoJ SPCR research found that over a third of prisoners has a convicted relative and other research indicates that 'the transmission of criminality from parents to children is found to be stronger when the parent is imprisoned (Besemer et al. 2011, Williams et al, 2012)

It is likely that many young people in identified as part of a 'troubled family' may have a parent who is in custody. As the Troubled Families programme expands, the DCLG should work in a more joined-up way with MoJ and BIS to work with the family and parent in prison in a holistic manner. Currently this data is not collected so it is not clear what the overlap is. By Troubled Family workers, Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and Offender Learning and Skills Service (OLASS) providers working together, positive outcomes for the whole family could be improved.

As the Troubled Families programme is expanded, consideration should be given to introducing a vulnerability / referral criteria of 'parent in prison'. For OLASS and CRC providers this might mean facilitating family learning or parenting/relationship - based learning to promote positive outcomes for both the parent and children.

For more information please contact:

[Nina Champion](#), Head of Policy, Prisoners Education Trust (Secretariat to the Prisoner Learning Alliance)