



Prisoners'
Education
Trust

Prisoner Learning Alliance: Minutes for eighth meeting.

Venue: Linklaters, One Silk Street, London, EC2Y 8HQ, Wednesday 24th September 2014, 2pm-5pm.

Present: Alexandra Marks (Chair), Rod Clark (PET), Starie Uwins (PET), Pwyll ap Stifin (PET), Charlie Weinberg (Safe Ground), Paul Warner (AELP), Andrew Wilkie (PRA), Kieron Tilley (PRA), Edwin (Learner Voice), Anne Pike (Speaker, student at OU), Jane Hurry (IoE), Sarah Turvey (PRG), Rachel Halford (Women in Prison), Tanya Tracy (StartUp), Maria McNicholl (St Giles), Ama Dixon (NIACE), Rob Mills (OCR).

Apologies: Alan McDonald (Probation), Theresa Bailey (BIS), Christine Fisher (ICPS), Colin Allars (NOMS), Daniel Smyth (SFA), Eoin Parker (BIS), George Barrow (MoJ), Jess Plant (Clinks/Art Alliance), Louise Proctor (SFA), Mark Blake (BTEG), Michala Robertson (OU), Mimi Prado–Marin (DfE), Richard Ward (BIS), Ann Grant (SFA), Shane Chownen (IfL), Sharron Barrett (NOMS), Tim Waite (DWP), Anne Wilding (SFA)

Update from the Chair

PET has re-launched its website with a page for the PLA; it is now therefore more accessible and easier for other organisations to use. There is new material and resources which can benefit PLA members and other stakeholders. PET had press coverage for their most recent publication, Brain Cells 3, based on the results of a survey of prisoners in *Inside Time*. The Chair congratulated Susannah Henty (Media and Public Affairs Manager at PET) for her hard work and successfully gaining coverage about prison education with BBC Online and ITV's Good Morning Britain with Vicky Pryce.

Membership Committee update

The Chair recapped how the membership committee was formed from volunteers from the PLA. The committee is made up of Charlie Weinberg, Rob Mills, Alexandra Marks and Nina Champion (Starie Uwins and Rod Clark in Nina's absence). As a result of their discussions, the committee designed a self-appraisal tool which focused on the benefits the PLA membership, members' contributions and suggestions for improving PLA functioning. The responses to the self-appraisal tool were anonymised and summarised in Paper 1. The next steps for the committee include reviewing the potential gaps in the membership and approach potential organisations and invite them to apply to be a member; this will ensure the selection process is still selective and competitive.

Action: Chair to approach potential organisations which can fill current gaps to invite to apply for membership.

Paper 1 - Self-appraisal feedback - update from Alexandra Marks

PLA members discussed question three which focused on what improvements can be made to the PLA. There were some very interesting ideas; some which are very easy to implement (such as theming the meetings and arranging networking before or after the meetings) and others which need more time to implement. The discussion emphasised the importance of developing clear role for the PLA to influence policy which had the potential to make a significant impact on prison education.

There are two upcoming events in the next 12 - 18 months on which the PLA should be looking to bring its collective voice to bear:

- 1) Policy discussions around the General Election
- 2) Next round of OLASS

These opportunities are time-bound and the PLA needs to have clear messages specific to each.

AELP also expressed their interest in lobbying and influencing policy. The PLA have great contacts but previously the PLA has lacked a clear sense of what it wanted to change. However, now that there are task and finish groups (TFGs), it focuses thought into particular which is workable areas. The PLA agreed that TFGs clearly defined areas of focus which make up a particular section of the agendas and allow specific organisations to get involved in something specific.

Action: PLA Secretariat to manage the work programme with a view to these priorities.

Given the references to the General Election, there was a discussion on the implications of the Lobbying Act. The Lobbying Act had now come into effect and the regulated period ahead of next May's General Election started on 19 September. In response and as recommended by the NCVO, the PET Board was addressing the question of whether PET needed to register with the Electoral Commission under the terms of the Act. The recommendation to the PET Board was not to do so on the grounds that PET's work to influence policy and practice in prison education would not be seen as an attempt to influence voting intentions. However the recommendation was to keep this under review as it would be possible for issues on which PET sought to influence to assume a party political salience.

It was agreed that similar considerations could apply to organisations via the PLA. It was generally agreed that the PLA was similarly not likely to be seen as seeking to influence voting intentions; however the PLA would also need to keep this under review.

Action: PLA Secretariat to keep Lobbying Act under review and bring it back as an issue to subsequent meetings if circumstances require it.

It was felt that the TFGs galvanised the group into actions to which members were committed; TFGs discussions are productive as they explore specific issues and actions.

Organisations in the PLA are not always specialised to education but have useful resources, insight and knowledge that would be beneficial to share. For example St Giles deliver learning and are subject to inspections and have templates developed for the purpose. The PLA could pool together a toolkit for responses to inspections, how each organisation did this and share good practice. Website resource could also include information about Matrix as PET and other organisations are going through this.

Action: PLA members to develop/share resources and templates and PET to host resources via PLA page on the website.

Update from Task and Finish Groups

Papers 2 - 5 provided written summaries of each group's work to date and Paper 5.1 was written by Michala Robertson to supplement the discussions from the Learning Through the Gate group.

1. Desistance Group - update from Rod Clark

Group members Jess Plant and Mark Blake had sent apologies; they had attended the TFG meeting but could not make it to the PLA meeting. The group had addressed the question of what a prison education system would look like if it was focused on the positive wider outcomes from education rather than focusing solely on employment. The group wanted to design a broad model which included the importance of broad skills for coping, identity, positive use of time and links to families. The group focused on what difference this model could make to prisons and agreed it would increase the provision of education and improve the priority given to soft skills which are not task-based and do not necessarily lead to employment. A recent report from the three inspectorates had followed 80 released prisoners to look at their lives six weeks to six months later and found that none of them were in a job which related to the job specific training they received in prison.

The key route was to capture a theory of change (ToC) which incorporated broader mechanisms of how education changes life routes away from crime. PET have been working with ProBono Economics but there have been delays to this. The group will develop a ToC; it was hoped that this would help to inform and communicate how education changes lives, inform the research agenda and help to define better indeterminate outcomes for NOMS to target.

Comments from PLA members:

We need to bear in mind that for a range of crimes around sex, or arising from personality disorders a single desistance theory of change may not apply; their routes into crime are very different so we need to consider how desistance applies to these groups. There needs to be cross-departmental support for individuals with complex issues. There is no one-size fits all and the desistance journey for women is also often very different.

NIACE have developed the Wider Outcomes Planning and Capture Tool which is piloted in prisons to test personal and social development (PSD), team ability and self confidence which are not covered by conventional accredited exams but which are qualities linked to desistance. The tool includes numerical measures, robust observations and the offenders' point of view.

Action: NIACE to share tool with PLA.

2. Excellence and Engagement - update from Jane Hurry and Ama Dixon

The group talked about the need for upskilling prison teachers. Education providers may be working towards different specific outcomes but need to be able to address the main issues around teaching quality and need to develop continuing professional development (CPD). IfL and Institute of Education (IoE) have tools which can be shared which measure CPD and the group suggested there needs to be a budget for CPD in the OLASS budget. Scotland has developed very good induction materials for prison teachers as they recognise that teaching in a

prison is very different from teaching elsewhere. The group is looking to gain access to these materials and will share them as soon as possible.

Action: IoE to share CPD tools and induction materials.

Good practice examples: HMP Lewes makes very good use of the virtual campus resources. HMYOI Brinsford under Milton Keynes College has initiatives for recycling and has a good model linking with employers. Low Newton Bridge Project is also a good practice example (see the film on the PET website). HMP Holloway are entering discussions with NIACE about induction processes and NIACE want to see indication processes of other colleges and share this information with the PLA to be able to collate good practice examples for use on the PLA resource page on the PET website. Safe Ground is currently training 15 people and had designed an induction for new staff to outline the ethos of Safe Ground.

Action: NIACE to share good practice examples of teachers' induction processes to put on PET website.

Action: Safe Ground to share induction process and provide case studies for PET website.

ETF contacted OLASS, NAICE, PET and others to ask what is missing from their strategy. NAICE responded with their PSD tool and suggested the need for wider opportunities which are more than vocational training. AELP is a co-owner of the ETF and delivers contracts. Rod is meeting Teresa Carroll from the ETF and will update the Excellence and Engagement group members on progress.

Action: PET to report back on progress with the ETF.

3. PSD and Progression - update from all present group members

The group worked on gathering responses to the BIS consultation and collected valuable information from serving prisoners. BIS are due to respond on November. There were four characteristics (being good at communicating, a team player, confident and analytical) outlined in a CBI report which employers prioritise. The group proposed to ask serving prisoners how these four items can be achieved and agreed to outline questions or structure for a focus group using flashcards to prompt responses.

PLA members commented:

Some prisoners are highly skilled on all four of the characteristics identified by the CBI but cannot handle authority. For employment, prisoners may need to understand they may have to adhere to rules they do not agree with learning to cope with authority, compliance, compromise, respect and a range of negative behaviours which are particularly necessary to overcome in order to gain employment. OCR have a suite of mini programmes designed to deal with authority issues and found these were successful throughout the programmes but participants reverted back to their old ways and did not apply what they had learnt into practice. Learning skills is important but prisoners need to practice the skills; reading about skills will not be sufficient.

Changing deeply imbedded, habitual behaviours is quite difficult in practice. The conference in Milton Keynes and the PET Academic Symposium touched on this issue well. It is tough to embed changes but these things can be taught and discussed but there is a huge difference between short-term and long-term changes.

Women in Prison's Introduction to Education course with women and difficult offenders have shown some offenders have difficulty accepting responsibility and accepting help from statutory agencies but there can be very positive changes made. The courses identify needs before education and go through workshops to tackle these issues better to prepare the women for education.

We should not have over ambitious expectations of trying to make positive changes with every individual; making changes with some people is a fantastic result. We need to get the message out there that change is possible but do so in a sensitive way. Statistical data is very important but evidencing soft skills is very hard to do, especially with statistical evidence. It is also very difficult to prove that a particular intervention is responsible for positive changes when an individual receives several interventions from various organisations; there are several extraneous factors to consider. There are valuable outcomes to offer but some that do not always lead to employment.

4. Learning Through the Gate (LTTG) - update from Paul Warner

Learning within prisons is very disjointed to learning within the community. Something needs to be done to smooth out the journey and link education within prison to education in the community. Originally the group intended to make recommendation for the next phase of OLASS but then realised that several of their suggestions were wider than OLASS. Learning for employment seems to be the focus of contracts but this is hindered by several barriers including data transfers, funding and loans through the gate.

Michala Robertson's paper includes figures which show OLASS should be doing more to encourage prisoners to take up education. There also needs to be more consideration for OU courses and all distance learning courses to be counted as purposeful activity. The LTTG group agree there should be the same amount of pay for education as there is for employment in prison; especially as the work that is available in prison often does not enable employment through the gate. ROTL also needs to be used better to engage with apprenticeships. The PLA can pick up on all these barriers and work to suggesting improvements.

PLA members commented:

The issue with ROTL is it has become a very long and legal process; prisoners cannot work in an apprenticeship on ROTL as they need to be in a paid contract where they earn a certain amount of money a day. The use of ROTL would better prepare people for release as current prison regime does not prepare prisoners for the routine of life on release and prisoners face disappointment when things do not work out straight away.

The PLA should get more involved on this, a project Women in Prison worked on included 80% of female prisoners in one prison coming out on ROTL. It was a huge opportunity with NOMS and European Social Fund (ESF) funding for using ROTL to allow more access to through the gate services which start six to nine months pre-release. It is not about getting any job, but about getting a sustainable, living wage. Under TR, everyone released should have a mentor and support; there is an opportunity for the PLA to hold the government accountable for delivering this.

ROTL faces trial by media; previously there were 80 or more people leaving Brixton on ROTL but this was reduced after a high profile individual (the Skull Cracker) did not return to prison. After that, less than 30 people were let out on ROTL. St Giles had carried out a spot survey of programs of education inside the prison which continue into the community but found that several good projects have fallen through due to a lack of prisoners released on ROTL.

Learner Voice

The PLA heard from Edwin who participated in Anne Pike's research into education through the gate. Edwin discussed his experiences of prison and after release summarised below:

"I was in prison for around two and half years and was only introduced to PET and education by a member of staff at the prison. I started an OU course, which gave me something to do and a sense of purpose. I had lost confidence; everything was stripped of my personality going into prison. I did a course and the prison funded the second course for me. I was released with £47; there was no help or support through the door. If I did not have family and my own support systems, I would have fallen and there would have been no benefit from the education. My crime did not mean I could not talk to children or limit my areas of employment, there was just a crime on my record which was holding me back.

"Probation told me I could not carry on with what I was doing before but would not tell me why. I spoke at a Cambridge lecture and the audience agreed with what I said and petitioned probation so that I could find out what the issues were. Everything changed after that. There was only one probation officer who did not want to help me.

"Since then, I have been getting my self-esteem back but everything you have worked to build up in prison, after being stripped of everything going in, is stripped again on release. You are left with nothing but you are still labelled as an offender even though you have done the time you were sentenced to. The prison system say they rehabilitate people but still restrict people on release and stop them being able to continue making positive changes and moving on. Not everyone can be rehabilitated, but so many people want to make a change. Regardless of that, so many people are excluded from doing positive things in the community. It is the simplest story in history but nobody listens.

"Everything I took for granted left me when I went to prison, my confidence, ability to speak out; it took me two years to get used to it and get those things back. Probation never gave me a reason for not being able to talk. Anxiety, depression and insecurity faced me on release. They should let people make the mistake, action it and let them move on. The many are judged on the basis of actions by the few; those who abuse ROTL are the ones who define policy and what people can or cannot do. I have written loads of papers from when I was in prison; I can share them with everyone if you want to read them. I also get really

good support from two MPs whose contact details I can share. People are really dedicated to change and they do not want to go back. Once they are engaged, they are hooked and do not want to reoffend.

“Ex-prisoners are constantly banging on doors and always on the knife edge of being recalled. Establishments need to think they have given someone a sentence and once they have served it, let them go but that does not happen. There is no structure after prison. There needs to be a standard national approach to probation. Intimidation, bullying, thefts are all common in prison so there needs to be accountability to others to motivate people to make positive changes. Edwin wrote an induction program in prison and worked on a magazine in prison which other prisoners contributed to.”

Action: Edwin to share contact details to PLA secretariat and send through papers he wrote.

PLA members commented: Not everyone in the community is characterised by a label (such as mother, father etc.) so this should not dictate someone's whole life. It is convenient to think of those who have offended as separate, but it is not right to do so. Vicky Pryce is not defined as an offender even though she went to prison.

Sometimes people are not allowed to do things because they are on a higher risk rating than they should have been. However, if probation staff are not willing to talk about things and explain the problems, how can the person know what the problem is? We need to move away from risks and look at strength based assessments. Risk and security currently trumps everything else.

Ex-offenders are more at risk of negative consequences in an employment setting; anyone can be unprofessional but as soon as someone complains, if that person is on licence they can be recalled. Safe Ground recently took this into account in drafting their employment policies.

Research

The PLA heard a presentation by Anne Pike about her research into prison-based higher level distance learning and whether it makes a difference to life after prison. The findings showed a bleak reality for people on release from prison. Anne's research was summarised in Paper 6, see also the PowerPoint slides. Anne made the following suggestions:

Improve guidance for distance learning in prison

- Resettlement should begin at induction so plan of learning can be developed
- Dedicated learning-focused initial assessment and guidance at induction is required (see Parc and Low Newton for examples). The learning plan should be linked to the sentence plan and reviewed regularly - so it must be acknowledged by the rest of the prison!
- All levels of learning are required to ensure prisoners start their learning at the right level and progress through the levels. Some provision of L3 classroom-based education is absolutely essential for progression from current L2 provision, to prevent prisoners from being encouraged to do DL when they are not sufficiently ready
- OU have successfully delivered a few group study skills sessions. These are seriously needed and should be expanded if possible

Dedicated space for learning with technology required (in prison)

- Lobby for PHDL to be acknowledged as purposeful activity
- DL providers should push for adequate learning space and time for their students
- What has become of the Virtual Campus? If it worked as it should and distance learners were given adequate access, it could be an answer.

Better information and guidance for continued study on release

- A through the gate pack was required with vital, easy to read, information for students who are ready to leave.
- Mentors to help them through the gate and support the first few weeks and months (coordinated effort - HMP Parc scheme, Convict Criminology, PET, other charities)
- DL providers should record expected date of release and be pro-active in contacting their students before release and establishing when they have been released, gaining post-release address/OM details etc.

Practical help for continued study on release

- Mentor (as above)
- Lobby for 'new' probation service to acknowledge continued learning as a legitimate aim with adequate support

- Coordinate with housing charities - raise awareness of the issues for learners
- IT support for released students
- DL providers improve procedures for online access to their intranet - also improving communication with prison service and probation service
- DL providers should consider a study break to allow released students to adjust to new life and gain online access before dealing with continued study
- DL providers should have amenity for students who text in their requests

Help students to belong to a learning community (in and out of prison)

- Re-institute OU newsletter and encourage similar initiatives from others
- Develop DL provider and PET alumni
- DL providers could supply more peer advice (e.g. dummy forums from OU)
- Many of the other recommendations (above) should also help - especially the Virtual Campus (if it worked as it should), mentoring and the 'through the gate' information.

The PLA thanked both Anne and Edwin for their presentations and agreed to take account of them in the developing proposals of the TFGs.

Action: TFGs to take account of suggestions and recommendations from Edwin and from Anne's research.

AOB

Charlie Weinberg suggested that the PLA should not be silent on the debate about the current state of the prison system; many members had first hand experience of how difficult circumstances were. There were risks of further damage to valuable and important safeguarding programmes as Transforming Rehabilitation is implemented next year. There was a discussion about whether the moment had now passed for getting messages across on the debate of whether the current position constituted a "crisis". However the Justice Secretary had publicly conceded that there were issues and it was agreed that there might be scope for preparing a public statement from the PLA for use given an appropriate news hook.

Action: PET to draft suggested key messages and send via email to PLA members for comment. This would ensure when stories emerge the Chair can issue a pre-signed off response adapted from the messages quickly.

END