



Prisoner Learning Alliance: Minutes for ninth meeting.

Venue: Linklaters, One Silk Street, London, EC2Y 8HQ, Wednesday 14th January 2015, 9.30am-12.30pm

Present: Alexandra Marks (Chair), Rod Clark (PET), Starie Uwins (PET), Susannah Henty (PET), Charlie Weinberg (Safe Ground), Lesley (Learner Voice), Jane Hurry (IoE), Michael Henderson (StartUp), Maria McNicholl (St Giles), Ama Dixon (NIACE), Max Tucker (User Voice), Stephen Miller (Ofsted), Melanie Jameson (Dyslexia Consultancy Malvern), David Ahern (Shannon Trust), Olivia Dorricott (ETF), Nicola Drinkwater (Clinks Policy Officer).

Apologies: Paul Warner (AELP), Rob Mills (OCR), Andrew Wilkie (PRA), Sarah Turvey (PRG), Rachel Halford (Women in Prison), Alan McDonald (Probation), Theresa Bailey (BIS), Christine Fisher (ICPS), Colin Allars (NOMS), Daniel Smyth (SFA), Eoin Parker (BIS), George Barrow (MoJ), Louise Proctor (SFA), Mark Blake (BTEG), Michala Robertson (OU), Mimi Prado—Marin (DfE), Richard Ward (BIS), Ann Grant (SFA), Sharron Barrett (NOMS), Tim Waite (DWP), Anne Wilding (SFA)

Update from the Chair

Overview of PLA's 2014

The PLA had a very successful year due to the inputs from members. Smart Rehabilitation was published at the end of 2013 and the PLA continued to promote the recommendations made in the report through 2014. Prisoners' Education Trust (PET) also published Brain Cells 3 through the result of survey responses from Inside Time. The PLA hosted a Spring Conference which was a very successful event which many of the PLA members attended and held presentations. Four key themes emerged which the PLA set out to explore through task and finish groups; Desistance, Learning Through the Gate, Excellence and Engagement and Personal Social Development (PSD) and Progression.

There were also several films which were presented at the PLA's conference which are on PET's newly launched website. There is now a page dedicated to the PLA which has information about the members, resources and the PLA's reports and policy responses. The PLA also actively responded to the Advanced Learning Loans and Secure College Rules consultations.

Membership

The PLA reviewed its governance and members completed a self-appraisal. The PLA also identified gaps in expertise which resulted in the PLA inviting new organisations to apply to join the PLA. The following organisations and their representatives have been accepted as members of the PLA:

- 1) Education and Training Foundation - Olivia Dorricott
- 2) Shannon Trust - David Ahern
- 3) Dyslexia Consultancy Malvern - Melanie Jameson
- 4) Prison Governor's Association - Stephen O'Connell

The PLA also welcomed the High Court decision overturning restrictions to books in prisons in December 2014.

Secure Colleges Consultation

The PLA's response to the Secure Colleges consultation was submitted since the previous meeting. The response questioned whether the plans for such a large institution will enhance education for young offenders compared to smaller and more local alternatives. Education is set to be 'at the heart' of the new secure colleges which will house approximately 300 young offenders. Amendments to the primary legislation in the House of Lords had voted to take girls and children under the age of 15 years old out of the proposed scope but it was not yet clear how the Government would respond to that.

The group discussed concerns regarding the delivery of education within the secure colleges and agreed to follow up with official contacts to gain insight about the proposed education provider. The PLA agreed that delivery must be holistic and needs to take the specific needs of youth offenders into account.

Comments made by members explored how the PLA can respond to policy developments effectively to get their views into the media. Members discussed forming a publications committee whereby members can contribute relevant articles to current affairs. It is possible for the PLA to issue joint letters, press releases or responses to the media, but there are difficulties in responding to news stories quickly on behalf of the PLA if approval is required from all members before publishing under the PLA's name. An alternative suggestion where responses are needed immediately was that members publish their own views and members then show that they agree by commenting, retweeting or promoting the post.

Action: Develop publications committee to post written pieces which include user voices. Suggested members for this group include: Max Tucker, Maria McNicholl, Charlie Weinberg and Susannah Henty from PET with other members' comments welcomed. A potential article could relate to upcoming research on youth offenders which is being conducted by a colleague of Jane Hurry's.

Task and Finish Groups

Learning Through the Gate

There are hubs which were considered in Transforming Rehabilitation. Maria McNicholl will continue to monitor these and share information about specialist hubs. Quality and support is still very important and the PLA members restated that it is important to share resources and templates.

Action: PLA members to share resources (matrix tools, templates, quality assurance tools and research) for PET to host on PLA page on website.

London's Women Consortium is setting up StartUp in Westminster as a specialist hub.

Desistance

PET has had discussions with ProBono Economics who have agreed to help us develop a Theory of Change (ToC) encapsulating how education can contribute to desistance from crime. The aim will be to develop a wide model covering all aspects of education in its widest sense as a tool for communicating the importance of wide educational outcomes for reducing re-offending. It would be helpful if this work could build on PLA members' own theories of change. The end result is to produce a ToC which holistically explains how education ties into desistance.

Action: Clinks to send their documents regarding ToCs and PET to gather PLA members' ToCs

As there is already a large literature base for links between education and desistance, we must ensure that the PLA's ToC captures wider thinking and conceptualises skills that are difficult to measure with quantitative data. Education can help by doing more than providing people with qualifications; it can also improve coping skills. There are also extraneous factors which can help or hinder desistance which need to be taken into consideration. It is also important to take issues that people go into prison with which are never dealt with as these can all affect desistance (such as mental health or learning difficulties).

Action: follow up with Anne Pike regarding her desistance research to input into ToC

Action: Melanie to send round research publication regarding specific learning difficulties

Excellence and Engagement

Updates since the previous meeting and suggested actions include ETF's new section on their [website](#) supporting offender learning. It will be important now to encourage education providers to become more involved with the ETF and use their resources. The PLA T&F group will have the opportunity to support the ETF in taking this work further.

PSD and Progression

NIACE are working on a curriculum for female establishments which is wider than education, training and employment while retaining a focus on supporting women to gain employment. NIACE are working with all the OLASS providers and will be evaluating the effectiveness of the project over the next four months. There are four key course topics included in the delivery; personal attributes, attitudes and behaviour; interpersonal relationships; working in a group; and dealing with problems. NIACE welcomes comments from the PLA regarding the suggested course curriculum and is mindful to pitch the content at a suitable level. NIACE are looking to engage private women's estates in this project.

Action: Ama to send presentation slides to PET to distribute to PLA

Action: PET to collate PLA comments regarding curriculum and consult with NIACE

One challenge NIACE have identified is to find credible tools to measure personal social development and gaining honest and accurate responses at baseline.

Input via email: it would be useful for the PLA to do an audit on what is available above level 2 courses and the figures for those taking these courses up. This could be done through PQs and the SFA's and PET's data. This type of information may be helpful in gaining support from members of the public through a greater understanding of the benefit of making higher level courses available rather than spending money on several lower level

qualifications. A contributory problem is the loss of data in prison transfers which means prisoners end up repeating the same qualification at their new prison. The PLA should continue to draw attention to this issue and to promote solutions.

Learner Voice

The PLA heard from Lesley who recently joined PET's alumni. Lesley discussed her experiences of prison education and how prison changed her life. Read our summary below. Lesley brought her folder of certificates to show to the PLA.

'I went to prison with a degree but I was still put on several level 1 courses. I finally managed to do the 12 step recovery programme which helped me with my own problems. When I went to prison I became a mentor because I decided to embrace prison and make use of the time.'

Lesley showed the PLA several of her ICT certificates:

'I was very grateful for the ICT training but it did not help me get a job. I was not the only person to face this; several people in the prison I was in had higher education but were still going through levels 1 and 2. I did every course available to get me through my sentence. The restorative justice course is so important because it taught me about the impact of crime; the course was run by the chapel and should be a fundamental course for all prisoners to take. Because I was an addict my thinking and values were not what they are now. Unfortunately now, the provider (Sycamore Tree) is not running the course.'

'Being a Samaritan Listener also really helped me to listen to the problems of others, I think it would help a lot of girls and the five month Rehabilitation for Addicted Prisoners Trust (RAPt) course was incredible, it has really good results in reducing reoffending but lots of prisons have stopped RAPt.'

'I have always been very academic, but it was only when I did my Art Level 1 in prison that I found that I was good at art. Art changed my life and it came down to having an amazing tutor. I received Koestler awards for arts but I didn't think I could paint or draw before then. It helped me, helps people rehabilitate. I could have been very negative [without art]. My children had a terrible time with my alcoholism but they had no help. Look at how much help I had, I had the time to look at myself and make the change. Now my daughter is doing drugs and alcohol counselling. It has changed my children's lives. They also saw me graduate. Thanks to PET, they saw me in a cap and gown graduating with my TESOL qualification - when I graduated in 1972; they were not even born, so that was amazing.'

'There should be a buddy system at induction and skills should be tested at induction. The prisons do not know about how much talent is available in the prisons. The certificates are really important, the girls are always so proud of them; they stick them on their walls. There is not enough support and celebration of success in prison. We need to keep celebrating success, however small, it is still success. I knew I would be dead if I did not go to prison; and that is what prison can do.'

The PLA agreed that Lesley's messages were important and were worried by how many initiatives that were so beneficial to Lesley are no longer available.

Action: arrange an opportunity for Lesley to present to the NIACE team working on the women's curriculum.

The PLA heard from Melanie Jameson about her recent visit to HMP Long Lartin and about the education provision for offenders with long term sentences. There is currently a move to develop the Shannon Trust reading programme to support individuals with learning difficulties more effectively. There are also plans to develop and use the virtual campus more. There needs to be more focus on long term prisoners and what the education provision is for this group of people.

Action: follow up with Fine Cell Work regarding VCS propositions to support long term prisoners. PET to circulate for comments.

AOB

Rod, Rachel and Maria recently went to a consultation meeting with NOMS about their commissioning intentions and what role VCSOs can have. Dates for the next PLA meeting will be sometime in the Spring.