Justice Committee
Inquiry into purposeful activity in prisons

Written submission from Carnegie College, Dunfermline, Fife

Carnegie College has worked with the Scottish Prison Service since 2000 as a contracted provider of learning and skills. During this time, the mix of prisons we have worked with has changed, but we currently work in HMP’s Edinburgh, Polmont, Perth, Open Estate, Inverness, Aberdeen and Peterhead. We provide a range of opportunities to offenders in custody to support learning and to encourage engagement in activities. We use a learner centred approach, reflective of curriculum for excellence engaging learners through projects, themes and interests of the individual learner. The college has a robust quality assurance system to ensure standards are consistently high and an Offender Learning Strategy, against which evaluation is carried out.

We have provided what we believe to be the salient points and would note that there is extensive information and experience behind all points made in this document.

1. What is meant by ‘purposeful activity' and how this can be measured

An activity from which a positive outcome can be achieved. Purposeful activity currently includes all structured out of cell activity. The content, input, output, outcomes and measurements from activities are currently measured in different ways and would benefit from a review.

One possible method would be the formulation of a strategy against which a quality framework could be established allowing qualitative measures to be gathered.

2. The extent to which prisoners have an opportunity to engage in purposeful activity

Prisoners can self refer or be referred to the learning centre. There is no real or consistent co-ordination of a prisoner's need to attend different activities.

Engaging in Learning Centre activities is voluntary. Many prisoners disengaged from school at a young age and it is therefore essential that college learning centres are not viewed as an extension to school. The college provides a model that is reflective of curriculum for excellence and uses a range of approaches to engage learners including life skills, theme based and learner interests. The current contract performance measurements can work against this by measuring discrete literacy delivery.

Prisoner engagement is a huge challenge. Attendance in the learning centre is voluntary and most prisoners do not engage in such activities in the community, but it is frequently expected they will engage whilst in prison and this is often not the case. It would be useful to review how this can be encouraged within the system and processes that exist.
3. What are the perceived benefits of purposeful activity and whether there are examples of best practice

*Perceived Benefits:*
- Improved skills in literacy, numeracy and wider essential skills
- Improved self esteem, confidence and ability to see a different and positive future free from prison
- Education gives opportunities for social and behavioural development
- Benefits to prisoners’ families of a more positive outlook
- Benefits to society in general

*Best Practice:*
There are many examples of best practice throughout the prison learning environment which are ongoing and innovative. There are too many to itemise. Some of these are:
- HMP YOI Polmont: College staff work in partnership with the officers in the workparties to support contextualised learning and assessment.
- HMP YOI Polmont: Newly introduced Anti Sectarianism classes have been very popular.
- HMP Perth: partnership working with Perth and Kinross Adult literacies to support learning in the prison and providing community link.
- Use of Virtual Learning Environment supported by dedicated Learning Technologist.
- A variety of themed activities including arts, life skills and interest based to engage and encourage participation and achievement.
- Peer Tutor training and support. Peer Tutors in HMP Perth are given recognition by the prison via a number of initiatives.
- HMP Open: Life Skills delivery through cooking, budgeting and support for the Independent Living Unit where all activities are brought together.
- Use of Carnegie College Essential Skills Mapping tool to provide and evidence essential skills profile and curriculum for excellence profile from activities.
- Creative Scotland funding and support for arts delivery through the learning centres.
- Working with community partners eg. prisoners art exhibition in Inverness; alcohol and drugs project with Youth Work, Adult Literacies in Perth and Kinross, police, SPS and Carnegie College.

4. What barriers may exist to prevent prisoners being engaging in such activities
- Too many competing activities.
- Lack of national and local literacy/learning strategy.
- Low levels of literacy and low expectations of self by prisoner.
- Session times that are too long for literacy learners.
- Lack of internet limits access to learning opportunities that are readily available in the community.
- Performance measures are input based not outcome focused.
- Lack of encouragement/engagement for prisoners to attend activities.
• Operational priorities and lack of consistent key staff.
• Lack of opportunity upon release.
• Low levels of funding comparable to England.
• Too many bodies with external funding to work in prisons which can lead to duplication of work and lack of consistency in understanding, experience, planning, recording and evaluating.

5. Whether access to purposeful activities is consistent across the prison estate
   Access will vary depending upon the population size and mix together with the resources that are available in each prison.

6. Whether access to such activity can be improved
   • Measurement of performance would benefit from being outcome focussed rather than input. Each prison has a Prisoner Learner Hour target to be achieved from which the Learning Centre is a contributor. However, the learning and skills contract has a literacy priority which does not fit with high PLH numbers.
   • Ability for Carnegie College staff to work in partnership with the SPS staff in workparties as a means to accessing prisoners who do not come to the learning centre and also to provide a fully contextualised and embedded approach to learning.
   • Access to internet to enable a learner centred approach to be fully applied providing opportunities to prisoners that are reflective of those in the community.
   • A Learning panel of key partners established in each prison.
   • Improved planning of prisoner journey.
   • Improved skills portfolio the prisoner can take with him/her upon release.
   • CPD for SPS staff to increase awareness and understanding of learning, learning difficulties and how to support engagement.
   • Improved information flow coming in to prison with the prisoner and also improved links and support for prisoner going back into the community.
   • Regionalisation of colleges presents opportunity to link in to college provision upon release.
   • Improved links for community learning opportunities.
   • Employability and linkage to community on release would provide sense of purpose and progression.
   • Carnegie College input to national and strategic policy developments could provide expertise and support to this area.
   • Delivery would benefit from a Quality Assurance and Guidance framework developed across the prison estate in relation to learning and skills training.

Carnegie College
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