**Prisoner Learning Alliance – Curriculum Working Group Meeting**

**Friday 9 July 2021, 3PM**

**Chair:** Toni Fazaeli

**Attendees:** Katherine Malyon, Modupe Bell, Paul Dance, Tom Schuller

**Apologies:** Debbie Leach

**In attendance:** Maha Khan, Natalia Catechis, Francesca Cooney

Toni welcomed the meeting, thanked all the attendees for coming, and they introduced themselves.

**Update**

Toni shared an update outlining the work of the curriculum group to date, including recent conversations at the Learning after Lockdown webinar and a video commissioned by the PLA, which is on developing in-cell materials and being created by an independent consultant. The webinar writeup and audio recording are available here: <https://prisonerlearningalliance.org.uk/2021/07/wednesday-webinar-learning-after-lockdown/>

**Prison Education Inquiry – Education Select Committee**

Collated information on the curriculum compiled from submissions to the inquiry this had been sent round to meeting attendees. Information about the inquiry is available here: <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/817/education-are-prisoners-being-left-behind/> Evidence submissions are available here: <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/817/education-are-prisoners-being-left-behind/publications/written-evidence/>

Katherine mentioned a specific submission that attendees might find interesting, and will be sent round after the meeting. Francesca updated the meeting on the progress of the committee and their plan to visit prisons over the summer. Paul suggested that MPs speak to prison educators without managers present. The inquiry will go on until late autumn or even winter. The meeting agreed that they would like to submit something to the inquiry on curriculum. See actions below.

**Reflecting on the curriculum in prisons**

The meeting discussed:

Length of some courses, and allocation processes which put some learners onto courses that are longer than their sentence Length of classes, which at 2.5, 3.5 hours can be far too long, particularly for people with little experience of education. Meeting highlighted that this is far longer than class lengths in the community. Discussion about rationale for this -operational and for prison convenience.

The importance of in incorporating real world experiences and products into prison education. For example, courses in carpentry could be linked to entrepreneurship and business through selling the products made. Paul provided the example of prisoners working on vintage Ford cars, which were then displayed in museums. Being able to see their work on display makes a significant difference to the meaningfulness of their work and motivation to engage with it.

Toni highlighted that *how* education is delivered is just as important as the content of the education topics and materials - as is *who* delivers it. For example, the role of prison officers, peer tutors and partner organisations need to be developed

Modupe explained that transferring during courses, particularly losing out on qualifications is a key source of frustration for learners – and a personal portfolio, such as a digital account which records qualifications and certifications would be helpful. Maha highlighted that a modular approach, with digital badges, could support learners to continue courses

Katherine mentioned that HMP Eastwood Park, allows learners to be on ‘education hold’ for transfer if completing a high-level qualification. Francesca explained that the PLA has advocated for this in our submissions, but it remains unusual.

Tom mentioned that the Learning After Lockdown webinar had come up with the idea of a national database of education and training. Francesca is making enquiries. Tom suggested that the prison education curriculum should cover support in prison and on release e.g. in adult and further education colleges.

Paul mentioned that arts courses also help people who already have high qualifications or for older people who are not going to be entering the labour market on release, for instance his learners have written books and scripts which have been performed at theatres.

The meeting discussed the severe impact of the lack of access to digital technology and also the importance of training in essential digital skills, which should be a key part of the curriculum for in prison learning to be effective and efficient and being ready for release into a digitally driven world of work and ordinary living.

In cell –technology would enable learners to avoid frustration and boredom, and to develop self-confidence. Attendees shared frustrations about the lack of strategy and progress from the Ministry of Justice regarding digital technology. Francesca highlighted that MoJ recently produced a Digital, Data and Technology Strategy - but only covers a year <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hmpps-digital-data-and-technology-strategy-what-to-expect-in-202122>

Toni asked each attendee to share the one change that they would make to the prison education curriculum:

* Paul – meaningful courses, whether for personal or professional development.
* Katherine - ungendered curriculum and incorporating transferable skills into courses
* Modupe - digital technology to facilitate independent learning
* Maha - the use of digital badges and modular learning
* Francesca - incorporating education into every element of the prison and training prisoners as teachers
* Natalia - more arts courses, as this would support improved mental health, confidence, communication skills, interpersonal skills.
* Toni - the quality and range of services for health are the same inside and outside prison, and it should be the same standard in education, too
* Tom - enabling staff to access opportunities for continuing professional development, networking, good practice and supporting curriculum development

**Possible PLA meetings/roundtables/webinar on the curriculum**

Toni asked the meeting for input. Tom liked the suggestion of real world/vocational training.

Modupe would like something on delivering cross-curriculum work through a whole prison approach to education. Francesca mentioned that previous consultation with members had brought up enrichment, additional learning needs and employment as topics for events, so we are committed to working on these.

Meeting agreed to delegate this to secretariat and the working group will meet again in late autumn after 2 events

**Publication**

Toni explained that we are committed to producing something tangible, possibly a tool kit, or a framework to explain what we want to see in the prion education curriculum. Attendees were asked for input – there was some support for a film, and also for a publication of a tool kit like document, as long as it was clear and attractively presented (?). Katherine mentioned that she has seen some good examples and agreed to send them over,

**PLA/UCU survey**

Francesca and Natalia updated members on the writing of a briefing which outlines the key findings of a recent survey by the PLA and UCU, completed by prison educators.

Toni thanked all the attendees for their excellent contributions and confirmed a date for a meeting in late autumn would be sent out.

**Actions**

1. Francesca – progress video
2. Francesca/Natalia draft information for select committee inquiry
3. Natalia to send Ben Leapman’s submission to attendees
4. Francesca chase idea of national directory
5. Francesca/Natalia – arrange 2 further events
6. Natalia/Toni – agree date for next working group
7. Katherine – provide examples of good publications, including tool kits