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The Experiences of Prison Educators in England & Wales



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Introduction

This review was carried out on behalf of UCU between May and September 2018, drawing largely on responses from 288 prison educators who between them have amassed over 1000 years of experience teaching over 50 different subjects in prisons across England and Wales. It presents qualitative and quantitative data and culminates in a set of recommendations targeted at prison governors, senior managers and education providers.

The consultation findings paint a grim scene: prison teaching staff are undervalued, under supported and under resourced. They feel unsafe and vulnerable and their roles have by necessity expanded to include duties more closely aligned with uniformed staff: carrying radios, escorting prisoners and carrying out security checks. Their classes are disrupted by a regime which fails to prioritise – or even facilitate – education. They are left alone and are required to manage violent and difficult behaviour, drug use and mental health problems in their classrooms, typically for lengthy periods of time with no comfort breaks or administrative assistance. They lack support from uniformed staff and senior managers and morale is low. If our prison teachers are struggling to discharge their responsibilities in a safe and professional environment, what hope do we have for the educational outcomes for our prison learners?

Two years after Dame Sally Coates delivered her review of education in prison, the findings from this report echo many of the recommendations presented in the Coates review (2016), in particular that teachers, prison officers and instructors must be given appropriate professional development to support them to deliver high quality education. The Coates review also drew attention to the importance of the recruitment of high quality teachers, and in the light of the current findings I would extend that to include an urgent need to *retain* the high quality and experienced teachers already within our prisons. These findings highlight the fact that many prison educators now feel driven to seek alternative roles outside of prison education, such is their frustration and feelings of vulnerability and isolation.

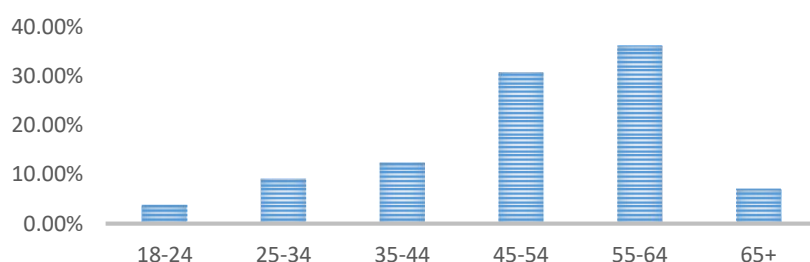
The findings presented in this report offer some insights into the bleak state of prison education in England and Wales today, and the recommendations that follow have been derived directly from the lived experiences of those who are operating at the centre of prison education: the teachers. Anyone who has knowledge of our prisons and the individuals they contain will know how critical education is in supporting those convicted of offences to turn their lives around and desist from further offending, but until we place education at the heart of our prisons, and support prison educators to carry out their duties to a high professional standard, any efforts to promote rehabilitation will be short lived and futile.

Consultation findings: the prison educator sample

The online consultation that contributed to this review ran for three weeks during June-July 2018. In total, 288 responses were received. 68% of those who participated in the survey identified as female and 32% as male. The majority (67%) of responses were from those aged between 45-64 years, suggesting an ageing staff profile of prison educators, as previously noted by Rogers, Simonot & Nartey (2014).

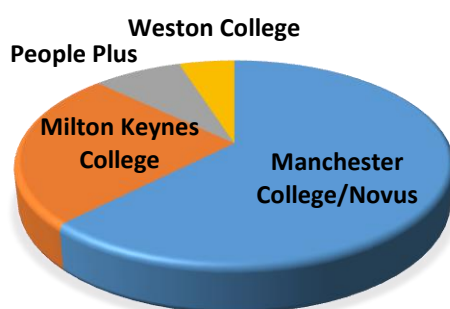
A further 74 respondents agreed to take part in follow-on discussions, which were conducted by telephone and via email.

Figure 1: Ages of consultation respondents



Our teachers reported having worked in prison education for an average of 3.5 years, with time in service ranging from one month to 28 years. The majority of respondents reported that they delivered their teaching through Novus / Manchester College (63%), with a further 25% representing Milton Keynes College, with smaller numbers representing People Plus (8%) and Weston College (5%).

Figure 2: Education providers represented by consultation respondents

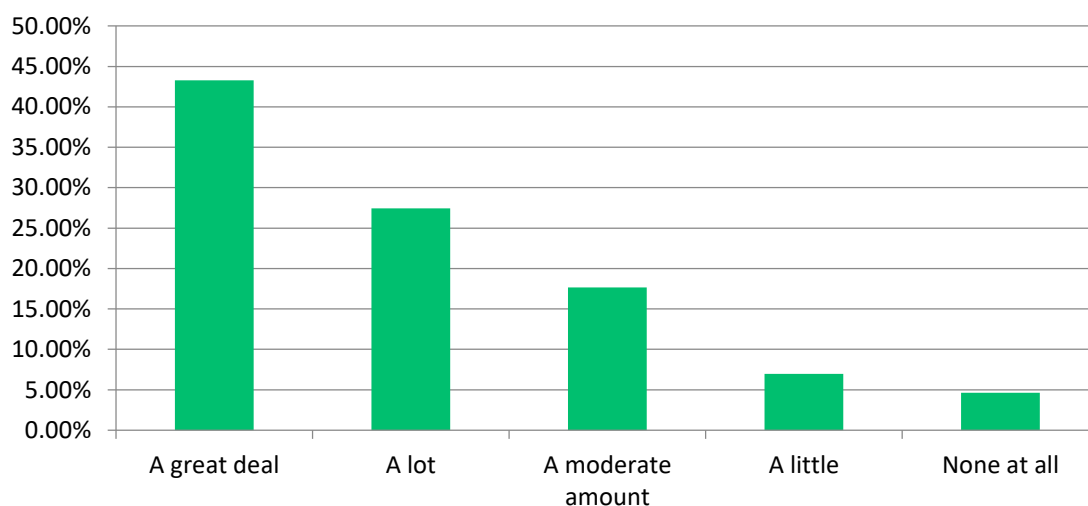


In terms of geographical reach, responses were broadly representative of the national picture, with respondents operating from over 100 different prisons establishments throughout England and Wales (some teaching in a number of different prisons concurrently), thus representing a substantial 83% of prisons in England and Wales. One third of our teachers reported delivering maths/English/functional skills and the remaining teachers were covering a further 50 subjects between them, including IT/ICT (8%), art (5%), business (5%) and hospitality/catering (4%). More than one in five (21%) of our teachers reported delivering teaching across a number of different subjects.

The impact of wider prison staffing issues on prison educators

The most prominent concern amongst the prison educators who participated in our survey was of wider staffing issues, where 70% reported that non-teaching prison staffing concerns in prisons had impacted on their teaching role ‘a lot’ or ‘a great deal’. Only 5% reported no impact on their teaching from wider staffing issues. There were no statistically significant differences in perceptions of the extent of impact wider prison staffing issues on prison educators’ work according to respondents’ age, gender, length of time working as a prison educator or which education provider worked for.

Figure 3: To what extent do you think non-teaching prison staffing concerns (staff numbers, staff experience, etc.) in prison have impacted on your teaching role?



Key themes in terms of the impact of wider staffing issues on prison educators included a hugely disrupted provision due to lack of uniformed staff to facilitate the regime and fewer officers present, thus compromising safety and leading to education staff being drawn into non-education tasks. Staff shortages were cited as resulting in education sessions being disrupted or cancelled, students arriving late and attendance not being encouraged, for example:

‘Low Prison Officer numbers and high turnover regularly affect my teaching role negatively. This can range from weeks of “shut downs” at a time with no contact hours, to poorly managed contact hours where young prisoner movements are consistently late, meaning we deliver up to 5hrs over our contracted hours each week’.

‘The impact of not enough prison officers has meant that attendance in classes has been low’.

Broader issues of safety within prisons were cited as having an impact within prison classrooms, not only by drawing teachers into other duties, but also by the manner in which a lack of safety leads to increased levels of general anxiety and stress for prisoners. Both of

these inevitably decrease opportunities for effective teaching and learning to take place in prisons:

'Some wings are not good at promoting education, probably because they have more to worry about. A stressful environment on the wing leads to unhappy and unsettled students: students scared to ask for what they are entitled to'.

Teaching staff cited feeling unsafe themselves, which in turn would reduce their ability to promote a safe learning environment for their students. In particular, a reliance on new or inexperienced uniformed staff, in combination with staff shortages, evidently resulted in teaching staff feeling less safe in carrying out their duties:

'We also find that prison staff are thrown into their role with minimal training or support resulting in more paperwork for us reporting mistakes, "near misses" and incidents, but also there is more responsibility put onto us for disciplining behaviour and reporting which should fall to officers'.

'Not enough officers to feel safe in job if an incident were to occur'.

'My safety and security have been compromised.'

'Less checks that I am safe. No staff toilet breaks'.

Another key theme regarding the impact of wider changes across the prison estate concerned the fact that education staff reported that they were increasingly having to carry out non-educational duties such as moving prisoners, conduct searches, respond to non-educational issues raised by prisoners and dealing with behavioural issues both within and outside of the classroom.

'Lack of visual officers. And making non prison staff do more of the officers' work'

'Inexperienced and unsuitable officers ineffective managing prisoners' behaviour - leaves tutors to choose between enforcing discipline outside classroom or ignoring poor behaviour'.

Teaching staff carrying out non-teaching security related tasks in addition to decreasing teaching time, may also negatively impact upon the teacher student relationship. For example, teachers may be seen in a custodial role where they are more likely to get into conflict with students, which could then deter students for seeking educational support from educators:

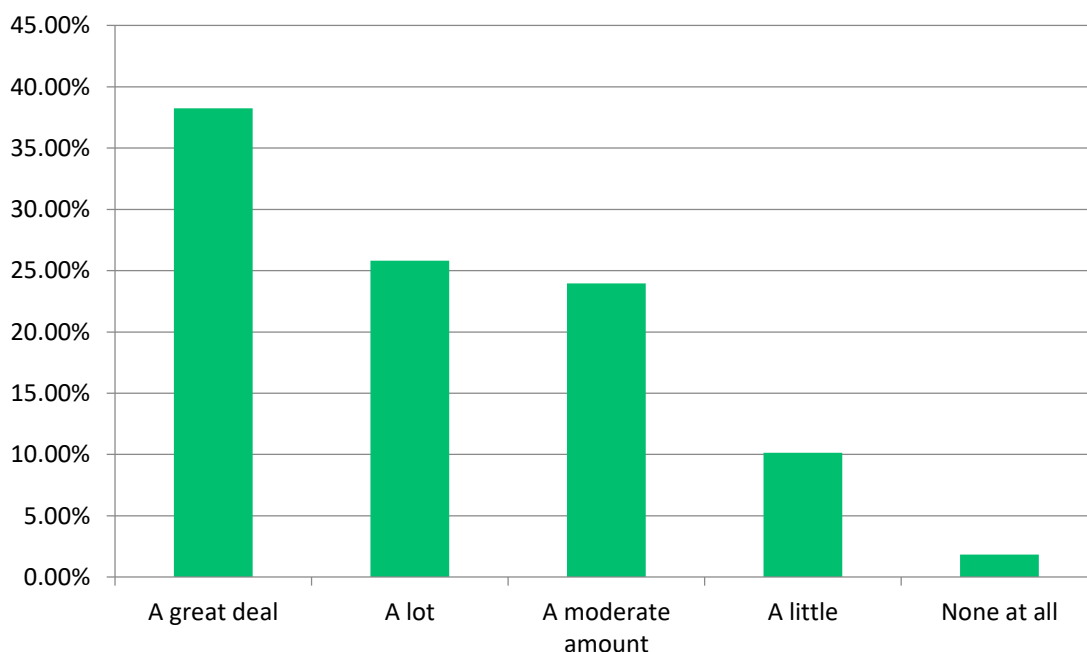
'The prisoners are not searched prior to arrival at the workshops, then the trainer (who works alone) is then expected to remove any items brought off the wings'.

Prison learners’ mental health

The second most prominent concern amongst our prison educators concerned prisoner mental health, whereby 64% of our respondents reported that such psychological issues impacted on their work ‘a lot’ or ‘a great deal’ over the past year. Perceptions of the extent of impact prisoner’s mental health had on prison educators’ work did not differ according to respondents’ age, gender, length of time working as a prison educator or who they worked. Only 2% reported no impact from prisoner mental health issues (and these were staff typically operating in establishments housing solely sex offenders), making this issue the one which has impacted on our respondents the most.

It is well established that the prevalence of mental illness is substantially higher in incarcerated populations compared to community populations (Fazel & Seewald, 2012; Linehan *et al.*, 2005), with on-going contention that prevalence of mental health problems amongst prisoners may be increasing. Worldwide meta-analyses have identified prevalence rates of 4% for psychosis for men and women, 10% for major depression in men and 14% in women (Fazel *et al.*, 2016) and 65% for personality disorders in male prisoners (Fazel & Seewald, 2012). Undetected and untreated mental health problems amongst prisoners have been correlated to increased risk of self-harm and suicide, disciplinary infringements and violence as well as risk of victimisation and reoffending (Martin *et al.*, 2013). In terms of education, mental health difficulties can impact upon a prisoner’s motivation to engage with education, the ability to concentrate in the classroom, and educational attainment as well of course in being able to manage behavioural manifestations of distress.

Figure 4: To what extent have issues associated with prisoner mental health had a negative impact on your work as a prison educator over the past year?



Examples of how mental health problems were impacting upon prison educators included increased demands on staff, students being unable to engage in learning, and disruption in classes:

'The prison tends not to check on prisoners prior to admitting to education and have restricted us from refusing entry. So anyone that can be seen to be under the influence or have serious mental health issues has to come to class and then causes disruption to all teaching.'

'Teaching prisoners with mental health issues is very disruptive to lessons and is of great concern due to our lack of training in this area.'

'In any class, up to 50% of men might be on suicide watch (ACCT), others are depressed, easily triggered, afraid, anxious, experiencing side effects of methadone including being too dopey to learn after lunch and too stressed to learn before lunch (drugs are given out at lunch, prior to being fed). I have had men experience withdrawal in my class.'

Educators highlighted how they did not feel they had adequate training or additional support and time to support the effective learning of those with mental health problems:

'Mental health is the biggest issue, helping people to access education and manage their mental health takes a lot of time. This is the kind of thing that isn't measured and therefore not recognised as important.'

Providing support for those with mental health difficulties was highlighted as another area of non-educational work that could reduce time for teacher's core role of teaching:

'Over 95% of the population has a learning or mental health declaration, we therefore have to provide extra support and log it, absolutely absurd for a tutor to do all of this with no LSP staff.'

'When on your own, you have a class of 12 learners many with mental health / anger management issues, the opportunity to effectively teach can be challenging.'

One respondent described being able to support prisoners with mental health issues to access education, although it is noteworthy that this testimony was from a teacher who had a unique and specific role in engaging those with mental health issues, and as such provides an exception to the prevailing view that there are inadequate resources and training to work with learners experiencing mental health problems:

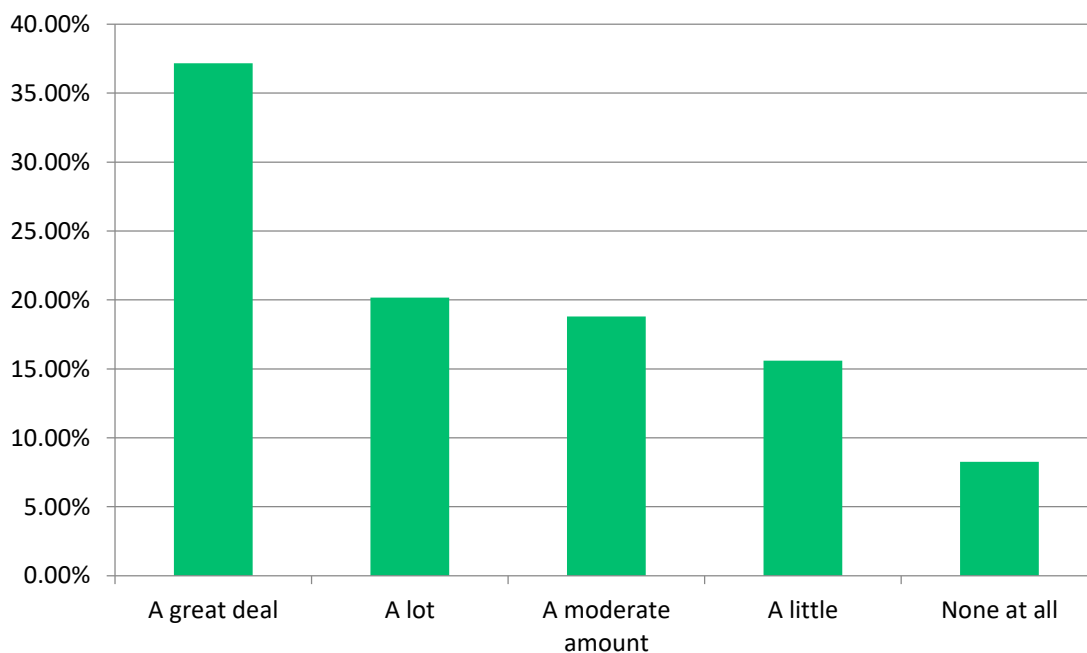
'I teach a PSD course and we encourage prisoners with mental health conditions to enrol. The main issues experienced are anxiety, depression and substance addiction / dependency.'

Substance misuse

Research demonstrates that drug use is widespread within our prisons with as many as one third of prisoners reporting that it is easier to get drugs in prisons than in the community (O’Hagan & Hardwick, 2017). The acceleration in availability and use of new psychoactive substances such as ‘spice’ or ‘mamba’ have also introduced new challenges in recent years. Broadly, drug use in prisons has been associated with increased violence, bullying, burden on health care provisions, security issues and deaths (HM Inspectorate of Prisons, 2015). With regard to education, drug use is likely to impede the ability to comprehend and retain new information, and to maintain concentration and motivation in lessons, as well as in bringing broader issues of drug related violence and bullying into the classroom.

Amongst our respondents, substance misuse emerged as the third most prominent area of concern. Fifty eight percent of participants reported that prisoner drug use had had a substantial negative impact on their teaching in the last year. Only 8% reported no negative impact on their teaching from drug use in the past year, and these teachers were typically operating in juvenile facilities or those holding adult sex offenders, two types of establishment where drug use is reportedly less of a problem than elsewhere in the secure estate. Perceptions of the extent of impact prisoner drug use had on prison educators work did not however differ according to respondents age, gender, length of time working as a prison educator or who they worked for.

Figure 5: To what extent have issues associated with prisoner drug use had a negative impact on your work as a prison educator over the past year?



The cited impacts of substance misuse were wide ranging and included decreasing individuals' motivation to attend education, the disruption of lessons, a reduced ability to learn, and the introduction of new security issues in term of drug dealing and violence in classrooms:

'More prisoners in workshop taking drugs being sent back, prisoners coming off house blocks under the influence causing more violence in workshops due to their unpredictable behaviour - have to wait a long time for a response if something happens.'

'There seems to be an increase in the number of prisoners who can't attend education because they are using drugs. The lessons don't pay as well as workshop jobs so I feel that prisoners don't come to Education because they need money. Problems from violence on the wings affects classes when the wings are on lock down. But it doesn't happen often.'

'Prisoners on the course have been high on drugs or I have had to prevent a prisoner being beaten up.'

'Learners are not being screened properly in the need to reach out of cell activity targets - spice is a huge problem but learners are not excluded as this will have a negative effect on attendance targets.'

Several respondents reflected on how the regime prevented education from being organised in a way that could support individuals with complex needs such as co-morbid mental health and substance misuse problems (as previously identified by Rogers, Simonot & Nartey (2014)):

'Prisoners with mental health and drug issues should not be expected to be in lessons for more than three hours. They do not have the capacity to concentrate for long periods. Education is organised to suit the prison regime, not the needs of students.'

Some prison educators commented on how an inability to respond flexibly to an individual learner's complex needs could reinforce earlier negative learning experiences and low self-esteem, consistent with Rogers, Simonot & Nartey's (2014) review findings:

'Most of my students have learning difficulties, mental health problems or drug issues, some all three. Results are varied but most significant is the inability to retain information. A prisoner cried today, apparently due to poor school experience about 60 years ago.'

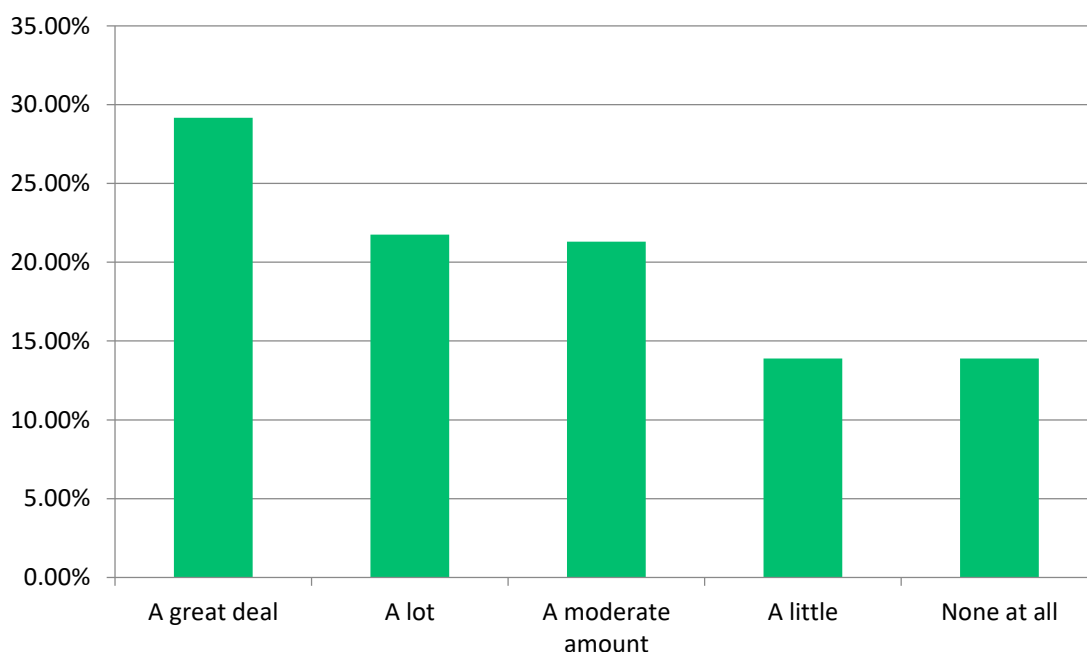
The requirement of teachers to support and manage prisoners with highly complex needs with little additional specialist support further demonstrates how the prison educator's role appears to encompass many non-teaching elements that can limit the most effective opportunities for teachers to teach and students to learn.

Teaching curriculum and commissioning arrangements

After issues associated with staffing, mental health and substance misuse, teaching curriculum and commissioning arrangements were of most concern to our respondents. These bureaucratic issues were reported to have ‘a lot’ or ‘a great deal’ of a negative impact on education for 51% of our respondents. Perceptions of the extent which issues associated with the teaching curriculum and commissioning arrangements impacted on prison educators work did not have a statistically significant difference according to respondents’ age, gender, length of time working as a prison educator or which provider they worked for.

Our findings are consistent with Rogers, Simonot & Nartey’s (2014) previous findings which highlighted prison educators’ concerns that re-tendering negatively impacted upon the quality of educational provision, as well as contributing to lack of job security and opportunities for career progression.

Figure 6: To what extent have issues associated with the teaching curriculum and commissioning arrangements had a negative impact on your work as a prison educator over the past year?



Teaching curriculum

The increased emphasis on achievement and qualification based courses was identified by respondents as problematic, particularly in the way that such a focus was seen to fail to meet the needs of the many prisoners who lack basic skills:

'The removal of soft skills and behaviour courses have taken away personal developments of the learners. Makes an educator's job harder because much needed skills are lacking in offenders.'

'Tight schedules and a large demand on pass rates conflict with prison priorities.'

'Teaching a curriculum in a set time with an exam to pass at the end is why most prisoners have failed in the past - prisoners should be given time to develop their confidence in a subject before being put forward for an exam. Education in prisons has become too business focussed with not enough focus on the individual.'

Linked to this there appeared to be a trend toward a narrowing of the curriculum cited by several respondents:

'Less flexibility in what you teach, less time, more paperwork and higher class numbers.'

'Not enough variety - too rigid timetables'

However, a minority of other respondents reported a change in curriculum in the opposite direction in terms of offering more non-qualification courses:

'Changed the delivery of curriculum - but would have changed anyway - delivering more non-qualification courses.'

Changes in not only the content of the curriculum but also the structure of delivery in terms of the move toward the rolling registration of programmes were noted by some to have a negative impact on attendance and quality:

'Sporadic learner attendance. Pressure from college to complete and achieve learners. Lack of quality delivery due to roll on, roll off and poor learner attendance. Low morale of learners, officers and education staff.'

'Roll on Roll off courses. New learners each week as inmates are transferred, every learner at a different stage.'

Changes in curriculum were also noted to create additional bureaucratic demands in terms of paper work:

'Too much paperwork not enough on quality.'

Also related to the teaching curriculum, but in the context of the associated practical issues in delivering the curriculum, many respondents cited a lack of the resources required to deliver the curriculum adequately, further undermining our teachers' ability to carry out their roles:

'Lack of basic, mandatory equipment in a class to be able to deliver full NVQ qualification. For example I'm waiting for photocopier from last April (2017) and my learners are not able to achieve full qualification. My line manager has other duties as Deputy Manager so he has no time to manage my team.'

'No resources, no new equipment. Not valued. Extra teaching hours above own hours.'

'When new courses have to be implemented, the lack of resources has a tremendous effect.'

Commissioning arrangements

The primary issues regarding commissioning arrangements that were raised by our respondents concerned the perceived increased emphasis on what was seen as an education provision being directed by profit as opposed to a needs-based provision:

'[Education provider] only care about money, they provide inferior training to milk as much money from the prison as possible. The courses offered are poor.'

'All about money and bums in seats to get funding and targets such as English and maths level one and two passes to increase.'

'Decisions made more based on money than educational reasons; curriculum decisions made by non-educators; pressure to use sub-contractors.'

Our respondents were clearly concerned that such an emphasis on profit or payment-by-results would undermine the quality of the learning provision in such a way as to have a negative impact on the meaning and relevance of education for those serving prison sentences, particularly in terms of rehabilitative outcomes:

'It feels sometimes like it's all about the money and not helping the young people stop offending.'

'Everything is about money, nothing is about what is best to stop re-offending. People who have always seen crime as a way of life need more than we can give them to change.'

'It's teaching for exams, bums on seats and never mind the impact on the learners or the teacher. It's all about money, money, money.'

Commissioning arrangements and the short term nature of contracts also appeared to create concerns regarding job security and satisfaction:

'Threat of redundancies due to prison taking over running some courses - not directly affected but impact on staff morale generally.'

'It causes stress, we don't know where we are or where we stand. It also means managers put more pressure on us to do things in order to fulfil the contract and be in the governor's good books.'

'Unstable contracts.'

In some establishments participants reported a move toward unqualified prison staff delivering education provision, adding another level of threat to job security as well as concerns around teaching standards and quality:

'The prison staff have a teaching element built into their pay. This is now being activated by the Senior Management Team even though the prison staff have no teaching qualifications, which has taken various subjects away from the education department. One subject now being taught (forklift) is not providing the students with a valid qualification.'

Of particular concern, in some cases staff cited instability, constant change and increased pressure resulting from commissioning processes as creating a culture of disillusionment and bullying by senior managers:

'The constant timetable changes, the increase of paperwork and the high education staff turnover because of unnecessary pressure put on outside of the classroom in order to meet and track targets can make for disillusionment.'

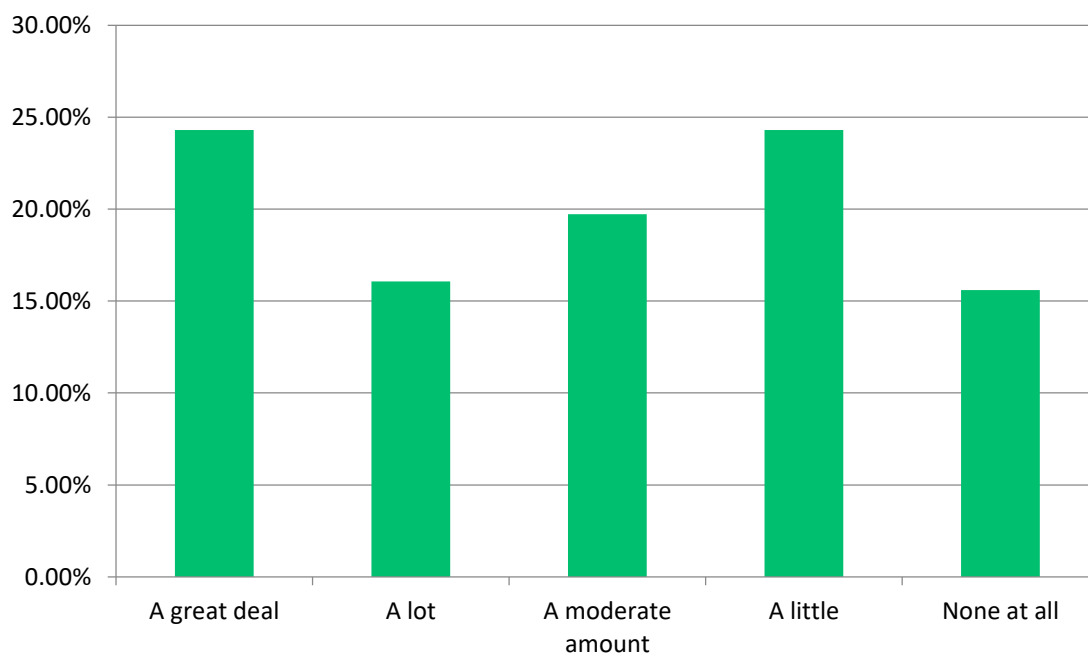
'Impossible contracts have bred a corrosive bullying culture in the [named education provider] provision, making the default management environment one of bullying and harassment.'

Overall, the consultation responses regarding the curriculum and commissioning arrangements for prison education illustrate a teaching and learning environment of continual change, regular restructuring and a general lack of job security which are clearly having a particularly negative impact on the wellbeing of teaching staff and their ability to carry out their teaching responsibilities. This is of concern given that previous research has found that restructuring, particularly when there is low job security and job control, has a negative impact upon employee well-being in the short and long term (de Jong *et al.*, 2016). Low job satisfaction and commitment have also been linked to increased staff absences and turnover (Garland, 2007). Such staffing issues will inevitably negatively impact upon students' learning experiences, decreasing opportunities to access education and/or consistency in teaching.

Prisoner violence

Since 2012 there has been a decline in prison safety, evidenced by increased rates of assault, self-harm and deaths, with possible causes being attributed to staffing reductions, difficulties with staff retention, increased drug use and overcrowding (Beard, 2017). In the Ministry of Justice’s most recent published statistics (which cover the period running up to the time of the prison educator consultation being reported here) assaults on staff and prisoner-on-prisoner assaults continued to rise, reaching record highs (Ministry of Justice, 2018). However, only 24% of our prison educators reported that prisoner violence had ‘a great deal’ of negative impact on their teaching in the past year, perhaps suggesting that educational spaces are protected from some of the most serious and routine violent incidence that have been recorded in our prisons. Perceptions of the extent of impact prisoner violence had on prison educators’ work did not differ according to respondents’ age, gender, length of time working as a prison educator or who they worked for.

Figure 7: To what extent have issues associated with prisoner violence had a negative impact on your work as a prison educator over the past year?



Despite violence appearing to be perceived to have a lesser impact on prison educators than broader changes within the prison system, mental health, substance misuse and bureaucratic issues, many respondents cited alarming examples of violence having a disruptive influence within their classrooms:

‘Classroom peer negative behaviour has increased, violence in class both bullying and assault increased.’

'In my establishment the violence, drug use and mental health issues spill over in to the classroom and the students will quite often fight in education. It is distressing to see and can sometimes make you feel unsafe at work.'

'If trained Wing Staff cannot keep them under control what chance do we have?'

Those who reported examples of violence also highlighted the negative impact upon their own wellbeing as well as broader impact on the morale of teachers and learners:

'The violence impacts on the morale of the lecturers and make the students insecure.'

'I have taken time off work, due to being signed off by my GP with work related stress and anxiety. This was following two incidents [of violence].'

As well as impacting the learning opportunities of those directly involved in violent incidences, violence was also described as having a broader negative impact on prisoner learning, for example resulting in prisoners being too scared to come to education, not being able to finish courses, or having limited educational access due to a risk of violence to themselves or to others:

'Violence has led to learners being shipped out and not finishing their courses'.

'Although we are not at capacity, the amount of learners we have that have non-associates [people they can't mix with] means that many learners are left on outreach. It also means many learners are frightened to come to education, they are pressured into acts of violence and otherwise well-mannered learners become institutionalised.'

The issue of non-associates in the classroom echoes concerns made elsewhere about the use of keep-apart lists undermining educational attainment in prisons, and the need for mediation and conflict resolution techniques to be employed (rather than favouring sustained separation) in order to promote safe and effective learning environments (see Meek, 2018).

Teaching staff also highlighted the manner in which, although they had experienced limited direct violence in the classroom, violence more generally in the prison had a detrimental impact on staff availability in supporting education:

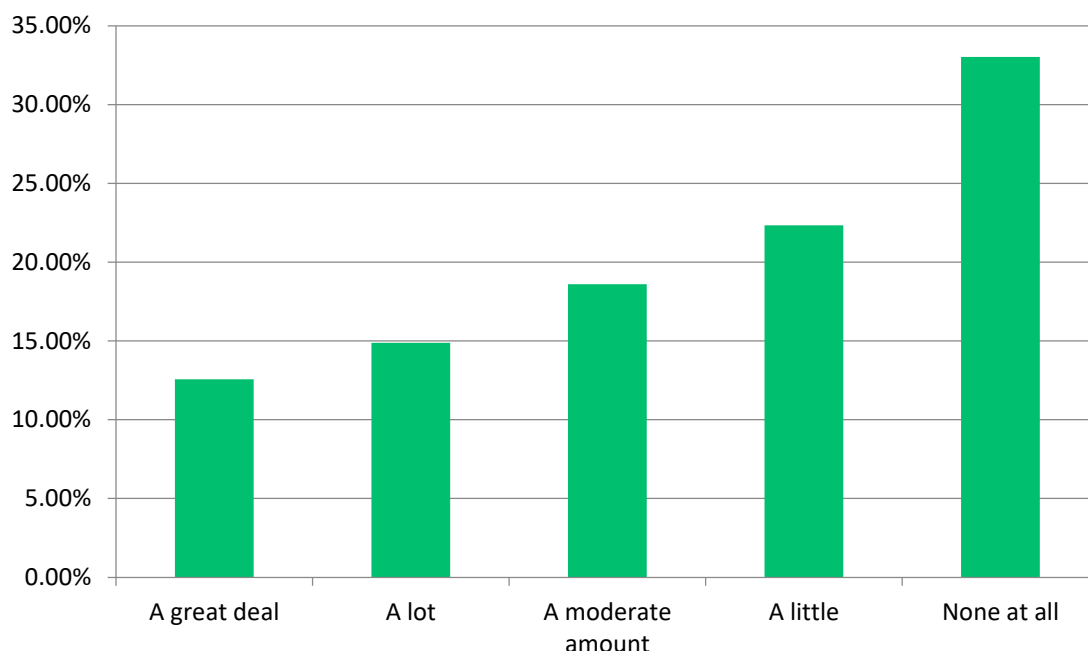
'Generally violence within education is rare, I have had one fight in my classroom over the last year which led to both learners being removed from my class. Mental health issues have a great impact on my everyday role as a large percentage of the learners have declared a mental health issue. This may lead to challenging behaviour, moods or missing lessons.'

'I have not experienced violence in the classroom but shutdowns can occur when violence goes beyond a certain point (officer shortages again) and this causes some shutdowns: however, this is a minor reason for shutdowns.'

The impact of overcrowding on prison education

At the beginning of August 2018 the prison population in England and Wales stood at 83,017 (Ministry of Justice, 2018), with most prisons continuing to be overcrowded, consistent with recent trends (Howard League for Penal reform, 2018). Amongst our participants although prison overcrowding represented less of a concern than other issues, a substantial 27% of our prison educators reported that overcrowding had ‘a lot’ or ‘a great deal’ of a negative impact on their teaching in the past year. However, one third reported observing no negative effects from prison overcrowding in the past year. Perceptions of the extent of impact overcrowding had on prison educators work did not differ according to respondents’ age, gender, length of time working as a prison educator or who they worked for.

Figure 8: To what extent have issues associated with prison overcrowding had a negative impact on your work as a prison educator over the past year?



Although reported to have less of an impact on teaching and learning than some of the other issues raised within this report, our respondents still raised serious concerns about how overcrowding would delay prisoner induction to education and the completion of courses:

‘Overcrowding can be an issue when the prison has a high intake which means it is difficult to get learners moving through inductions. Also with such a high population, it is difficult to get learners on the correct educational journey as quickly as possible and they may be released before they had chance to make positive changes.’

Respondents also highlighted how temporary increases in capacity in particular establishments had a detrimental impact on already stretched facilities and resources:

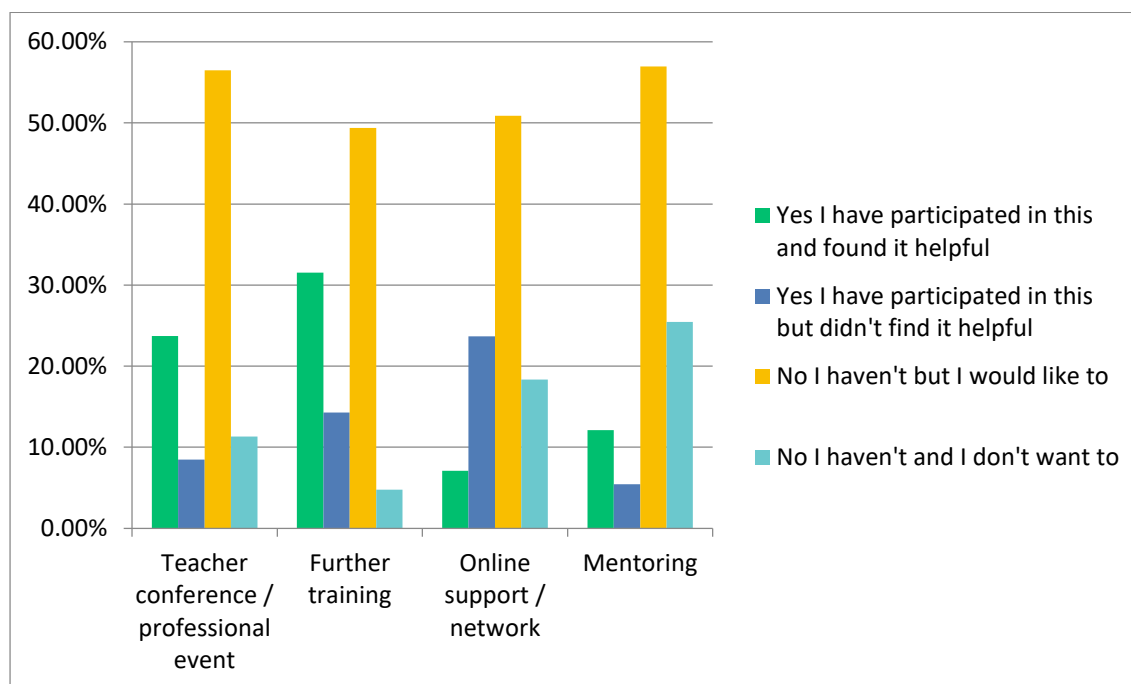
'Overcrowding and doubling up has affected the budget of the prison and has meant that more room has had to be made for more books in the library and so we have lost classrooms as it is a legal requirement to have so many books per prisoner. Budgets are tighter as the government gives no extra money to a prison for temporarily raising the maximum capacity. We are really starting to see the effects of austerity hit prison services.'

The professional development of prison teaching staff

It is well recognised that teaching staff in any context require ongoing support and professional development in order to carry out their roles effectively (Hunzicker, 2011). Given the increased strains upon and challenges facing prison educators, it could be argued that this is a professional group requiring additional support and training. However, despite working in increasingly challenging conditions, our prison educators reported engagement with very few professional development opportunities in the last year. Just under one half (46%) had engaged in some form of training and almost one third (32%) reported participating in some form of teacher conference or professional event, but a substantial 49-57% of all respondents reported that they hadn't engaged with each form of professional development presented to them, but would like to. The most preferred professional development options were attendance at a teacher conference or other professional event and mentoring, but there was also some enthusiasm for further training and an online support network.

There was a statistically significant difference in whether prison educators had engaged in any CPD in the last year (whether perceived to be helpful or not) according to provider ($\chi^2(5) = 10.35, p < .05$). There was also a significant difference in whether respondents had completed CPD by age group ($\chi^2(5) = 15.99, p < .05$). Participants under 35 years of age were more likely to report they had attended some form of CPD event in the last year, whereas for those aged over 35 most (over 70% for every age category over 35 years) had not attended CPD in the last year. Respondents in the older age groups were however more likely to state they did not want to attend CPD. There was no difference in whether respondents had attended CDP according to gender.

Figure 9: Involvement in professional development activities over the past year and willingness to engage in such activities.



Unprompted, several staff respondents also raised the issue of a lack of continued professional development (CPD) when asked if there were any other factors that impacted on their ability to carry out their roles. For example:

'I don't feel that I get sufficient CPD.'

'Virtually no CPD available unless I pay/organise myself/use my annual leave to complete it.'

'No CPD outside of college delivered internal courses. No incentive for tutors to upskill. No pay rise beyond annual increment on already low payscale. Staff morale low from feeling unvalued.'

'Lack of CPD, real CPD because delivery of lessons comes first.'

These findings echo those of Rogers, Simonot & Nartey (2014), who have already identified a lack of relevant training opportunities across the teaching career journey to equip educators with the skills needed to teach in prisons. A lack of such opportunities raises issues not only in terms of maintaining quality of teaching provision, but also in attracting new staff, retaining existing staff and promoting career progression.

Other professional issues impacting on prison educators

Poor management and incidences of reported bullying

When asked to reflect on any other professional issues that impacted on their ability to carry out their teaching duties, respondents reported concerning incidences of bullying, echoing and extending findings from Rogers, Simonot & Nartey (2014), who also noted issues around poor management, both locally and at the provider level.

Just one year ago, a report published by the Education and Training Foundation, which sought to encourage people to consider a career in prison education, reassured potential applicants that:

“Your learners will need flexible and creative teaching and learning methods to support their progress... You will be part of a supportive education team working in prison, enhancing the rehabilitation of offenders and energising their interest in learning and gaining new skills”
(The Education and Training Foundation, 2017, pp.3-4).

However, it appears that the reality - as reported by some respondents – can be dramatically different. Respondents across all four educational providers cited lack of support and/or poor attitude of management toward staff as other issues affecting their ability to carry out their duties.

A total of 29% of respondents cited issues concerning a lack of support from management or poor attitude of the education provider management toward staff. Worryingly, respondents from three of the education providers represented in the research cited bullying and/or harassment from management as concerns: without prompting, 13 different individuals raised bullying and/or harassment as reasons they were considering leaving. For example:

‘The treatment of teaching staff by [named education provider] managers has been horrendous and good honest teachers are being forced to quit due to the constant bullying and vindictive nature of other staff members, which is constantly overlooked by the education manager and area managers.’

‘The lack of support from management at [named prison]. Harassment and bullying culture throughout [named education provider’s] management’

‘Bullying and ineffective managers.’

‘Racism, bullying, victimisation.’

‘Selection of poor educational manager staff. Managers not assisting staff, seem to be losing basic management skills, people skills.’

‘Systemic bullying and harassment.’

Increased stress, sickness and low morale was attributed to a toxic management approach by some of our respondents:

'Lack of staffing, and higher management managing creating a very toxic workplace leading to high sickness levels and management bullying. This has left those of us still working very tired and having low morale as admin sessions have been taken away, so constant working to catch up all the time.'

'Management with no people skills who seem to bully certain staff, that causes a lot of stress.'

'The staff management team have seriously undermined the morale of the staff team. I don't know why this has happened but it must be addressed in an open and honest fashion.'

'Poor management from [education provider] has resulted in poor morale, high stress and sickness rates.'

Some respondents described how the education provider's business model had led to a lack of care and consideration for individual needs of both staff and students:

'[Education provider] do, as an organisation, appear to lack empathy with staff and do not consider the individual. The more Education has become a business the less the learner seems to matter. There also seems to be a lack of understanding of how different every prisoner is and their individual needs.'

One participant explained how the demoralising professional culture they experienced had resulted in them feeling uncertain and unsupported in the work environment:

'There have been internal issues of threats to staff, by staff. The culprits have not been named and/or are unknown which has left me feeling uneasy about who I can trust in the workplace and whether I too could be a target.'

The following testimonies illustrate the complex, challenging and distressing issues that prison educators can face in carrying out their roles, coupled with a frustration at a lack of understanding by, and support from, fellow staff:

'A learner in one of my classes died this year. A spice user almost permanently on "basic" because his behaviour was poor. More done to resolve his mental health issues at an earlier phase of his life may have prevented his early demise.'

'A manager who gave me a bollocking for reporting my concerns for a mentally ill prisoner in my own (lunch) time. "They'll never change" he said. "They're all liars anyway" was the gist of it. This demonstrates a complete lack of knowledge of "meaningful professional relationships" and education as the biggest factors in desistance. This attitude affects the morale of many teachers: by the time we have a class full of people we have a duty of care and teaching demands human connection. Sometimes our students suffer greatly for what they have done, simply by being in prison, and deserve every opportunity to change. It is difficult knowing that someone you once taught hung himself but it is more difficult to know, and teach, and not have every support with being effective in this unique learning environment.'

Poor relationships between prison educators and non-teaching staff

Extending the concerns of those reporting incidences of workplace bullying, poor professional relationships with other non-teaching prison staff have been reported elsewhere in the consideration of the impact of uniformed staff shortages and an inexperienced non-teaching workforce. Such issues were also highlighted by respondents in the context of some of the more general issues impacting on prison education:

'Lack of resources and been treated like second class citizens by prison staff'.

'Yes when officers do not understand the mandatory requirement of prisoners attending education.'

'Lack of negotiation between prison and education department means expectation and demands are unreasonable.'

Some participants highlighted how the 'us' and 'them' culture could lead to safety concerns being ignored:

'Prisons treat contractors' concerns over health and safety with contempt and postpone changes to workplaces.'

'No collaboration between direct and indirect staff. There's a "they and us" mind set and a blame culture. There are a few long term staff who are amazing but the rest are in the wrong job. The governors are more concerned about how they look to the outside and will ignore staff concerns.'

Failure to collaboratively work to promote safety is unlikely to create a safe and stable environment in which teachers are free to teach and students are open to learning.

Lack of administrative support or time

Aside from the time allocated to educators to deliver their teaching in direct contact with their learners, it is well recognised that a substantial time commitment is required of educators in any setting in carrying out preparatory activities and teaching administration. In prison environments, where learner documentation is often both complicated and incomplete, coupled with the poor recording systems and the complex wider bureaucracy of prison governance, teaching administration can be a convoluted and demanding feature of a prison educator's role, and one that is not always recognised across different teaching roles. Our respondents reported a lack of support in carrying out these essential aspects of their roles, together with reports of an inevitable impact on teaching quality:

'Not getting non-teaching time to do required paper work, planning and marking done. This has led to a drop in quality.'

Limited time for preparatory and administrative tasks was clearly a source of stress for prison educators and will inevitably impact on relationships with students as teachers try to do these tasks in class:

'No time to catch up and improve things. We are expected to do this as well as teach within our hours. All college staff on campus get review weeks to do this.'

'Vocational trainers do not get the same non-contact time as the more academic colleagues even though we are expected to manage the workshops, stock control, tool orders, health and safety. Awarding bodies don't have a minimum entry level for maths and English so the prison management will expect an entry 3 maths learner to pass a level two joinery course which may include trigonometry. We are there to embed the maths, not start from scratch, if we are to be expected to do this surely we should get the same non-contact time as the maths teacher to prepare worksheets for the student.'

Pay and limited progression

In accordance with findings from Rogers, Simonot & Nartey (2014), poor working conditions, terms and opportunities were raised by staff as impacting negatively upon their morale and their commitment to the prison teaching profession. Such concerns were raised across respondents from different education providers:

'Low pay and no way to progress upscale.'

'Low salaries in the offender learning sector with a feeling of being second tier teachers.'

'Lack of CPD, no pay rise or valued recognition.'

Retaining teaching staff: push and pull factors

These findings have highlighted the enormous challenges facing the teachers and instructors operating in our prisons today, coupled with low morale and high levels of frustration and anxiety among our prison educators. It is therefore not surprising that teaching staff are experiencing very low job satisfaction and are seeking alternative employment outside of prison education, at a time when - more than ever - high quality prison education is needed in efforts to support those in custody and in offering hope for rehabilitation.

Although a minority of respondents remained committed to their roles, the majority of those who responded to the consultation reported actively seeking alternative employment, for a variety of reasons. Those who reported that they wished to remain in the profession tended to refer to a commitment to prison education, and a belief that they could make a difference:

'I love my job and just keep plodding on.'

'I get a great deal of satisfaction from the work my learners do and the respect I have earned from them.'

'I really enjoy working with the learners and feel they need someone like myself to constantly stick my neck out and make a fuss about the appalling resources that we are expected to work with.'

However, an alarming 55% of the respondents reported that they were planning to leave their role, typically due to the accumulation of several different factors, thus highlighting the complexity of the issues facing educators in our prisons today:

'Lack of effective management. For true progressive change prison educators need to be treated and to act professionally. Poor salaries and conditions are part of the problem.'

'Lack of career progression. Feeling unsafe. Feeling like we, as teaching staff are pawns in a game of chess, just moved around to meet the needs of the business model statistics but forgetting about the quality of teaching and delivery.'

'Overwork and dealing with stressful situations on a daily basis with no immediate support on hand.'

'Everybody in the department is looking for other work.'

Several participants reported that despite wanting to teach in prisons, many issues contributed to them looking for other work:

'I'm thinking to leave this job. I like working with disadvantaged young people. However, the not competent [education provider] management put me really down. Lack of basic resources, e.g. I have not ink in a printer in my class from April 2017.'

'I entered education to educate, not to earn funding for a business.'

In turn, when asked what factors could encourage them to remain in prison education, our respondents typically pointed to a set of factors including pay, conditions, and a better, more supportive, relationship with managers:

'I love the job but need to feel valued by my employers.'

'Being valued. Being thanked. Having some direction. Being given time for marking etc. No one can work flat out in our sort of environment week in week out.'

'More support and debriefing after a prisoner has had to be removed from a course because of aggressive, confrontational or inappropriate behaviour.'

'Better facilities, conditions for teachers. Fairer pay for the work undertaken.'

'Fair pay (equivalent to colleagues), further training (as promised in my contract) and better access to HR.'

Summary

Our respondents reported major issues with the regime and culture of the prisons they operated in undermining their safety and security. Teaching staff are continuing to experience a lack of respect or support from the institutions they operate within and report being regularly required to undertake the roles and responsibilities of their uniformed HMPPS colleagues in the context of decreased uniformed staffing numbers and more inexperienced uniformed staff. A lack of management of poor behaviour and little resource to address the impact of substance use and mental health problems amongst their learners was described as detracting from teachers' core teaching role and impinging on the educational opportunities for prison learners. Prison educators feel isolated, reporting a lack of support from senior managers, poor leadership and high staff turnover, all resulting in low morale amongst teaching staff.

Prison education relies on committed, experienced and effective teachers who in turn need to feel safe, supported and valued in carrying out their duties. Although the findings from this report have painted a bleak picture in terms of the profession support, morale and safety of educators in our prisons, the consultation has also led to the development of a set of recommendations. If education is going to be used to its full potential in supporting those in our prisons to improve their life chances and desist from further offending then HM Prison and Probation Service, prison governors, education managers and education providers urgently need to respond to these recommendations.

Recommendations

Operational staff

1. Increase the presence of operational staff in education departments to increase staff and students sense of safety.
2. Provide training for operational staff regarding how to support prisoner education.
3. Ensure operational staffing is adequate to conduct searches, escort prisoners, etc. in order for prison learners to access education.

Promoting learning cultures

4. Ensure prisoners' payment for attending education is equitable to that of other jobs within the prisons.
5. Where possible, schedule teaching sessions according to pedagogical need rather than regime.
6. Resource and prioritise mediation and conflict resolution techniques over 'keep-apart' reactions to conflict between prisoners.

Managing risk

7. Promote greater multi-disciplinary working between mental health, substance misuse, operational and education departments to support and manage issues associated with prisoners presenting with complex needs.
8. Recognise that drug use (including new psychoactive substances) is impacting on teachers. Provide additional support and training in substance use for educators.
9. Work with the mental health team to ensure prisoners with mental health problems are asked for consent to share relevant information with education staff.
10. Ensure education staff have access to mental health training delivered by health care departments.
11. Ensure processes for handover of information concerning prisoners presenting with behavioural, mental health, substance misuse or security risk are in place both from wing staff and other departments.

Staff morale, leadership and workforce development

12. Review supervision, mentoring and well-being opportunities for prison educators.
13. Ensure that protected CPD time and activities are factored into workloads.
14. As a minimum, providers should provide an annual teacher conference and establish a prison educator mentoring scheme.
15. Provide clear guidance from the relevant unions on how to get support regarding bullying or harassment.
16. Provide protected administrative time and consider a review of the administrative processes associated with prison teaching and learning.
17. Review teaching schedules and workload models to include / support administration time and comfort breaks.

18. Review pay scales and invest in workforce development, taking into account the additional needs and capabilities of prison educators.
19. Review senior management structures: staff feel undervalued and under supported.
20. Include teaching staff in recognition schemes and awards.

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