

# Grundtvig Project : Effective Induction for Prison Teachers

## Focus Groups Report: Scotland



### Teaching & Learning

1. **What types of information about Prisoners' backgrounds - educational background, learning difficulties, psychological/mental health problems - would help you do your job more effectively and why?**
  - Knowledge of previous educational background and qualifications
  - Mental and Psychological health issues (suicidal) or learning difficulties that might impact on ability to learn. Helps to identify suitable classes and group mixtures.
  - Sufficient information available through SQA Core Screening, Alerting Tool and ILP's and PR2.
  - Information on likelihood of violence or difficult behavioural issues, e.g. ADHD, Autism, Dyslexia.
  - Access to SQA Navigator to provide confirmation of existing qualifications and levels.
  
2. **How do you currently assess student educational level and their progress in prison? Would you benefit from training in this regard? What kind of training would you like to see?**
  - SQA Core skills Screening, Alerting Tools, existing information on PR2.
  - Individual learning Plans (ILP) and (ILP Reviews)
  - Through one to one interviews at Induction.
  - Training on techniques to identify learning requirements would be beneficial, i.e. how to carry out basic dyslexia diagnosis.
  - Awareness training on specific beneficial learning resources to meet specific needs of individuals with learning difficulties.
  - Observation of students in classroom assessing participation, interaction and skills.
  - Use of soft indicators such as confidence, interpersonal skills improvement as well as hard indicators through formative and summative assessments.
  
3. **How do you motivate and encourage Prisoners to engage in learning? To what extent is this process encouraged and supported by the prison authorities?**
  - Comprehensive induction provides platform to market available curriculum on offer and what would best suit individuals.
  - Contextualise learning to reflect the experiences of individuals in order to recognise and respond to different learning tasks.
  - Ensure the learning experience within the classroom is enjoyable, through varying your style and encouraging group discussions.
  - Encouragement and support from the prison authority varies. It is often

- dependent on individual Officers and their perception of Education.
- Often engagement in education can come from word of mouth amongst Prisoners rather than direct support intervention by the prison authority.
- Activities and Education often seek to engage prisoners at the same time therefore restricting their options.
- Periodically carry out marketing and open events to encourage participation, including award ceremonies.
- Try to create within the learning centres a warm, relaxing, non-threatening environment to encourage attendance and participation.
- Various agencies from within each prison often provide agency referrals.
- Ensure there is a large bank of learning and teaching materials

**4. What is the content of the curriculum in your prison? Do you think the current curriculum is adequate? What would you add/change?**

- Curriculum is limited to the size of your prison and available resources
- Students often not inspired to take up education because the curriculum does not match their interests – no history, politics, science etc. Limited arts provision
- Consider introduction of more project based activities to provide alternative route to gaining core skills and additional qualifications.
- Core skills often limited to only three main subjects, communications, numeracy and ICT – prisoners also restricted as to the level of qualifications they can achieve. Would be good to make better use of distance and e-learning to support progression
- Content of curriculum is varied enough to provide basic education, life skills and recreational/creative skills but is limited in terms of progression.
- Core skills are primarily covered well within most establishments, however many would benefit from an increase in softer skills areas such as basic budgeting, personal/social development and food hygiene and preparation.
- Consideration to expand existing curriculum to include NQ units across various subject areas.
- Increase ICT to include higher level qualifications i.e. CADD, Web design, etc.

**5. What specific teaching and learning approaches do you adopt in your prison? Do you think these are adequate? What would you change?**

- Student centred due to varying needs of individuals and the environment often being on a roll on roll off basis
- Would benefit from more group work participation exercises.
- A flexible learning plan to encompass the needs of the group and constant changes in attendance patterns.
- Contextualise teaching where appropriate and encourage self expression and learning.
- Opportunity for more expressive activities through the arts and more access to Promethean Board.
- Use of cognitive, holistic skills and encourage a greater degree of self learning.

- Standardisation of Core skills material and delivery should exist in order support smooth transition from one establishment to another.
- Access to a wider range of e-learning options would be helpful

**6. What is the balance between one to one tuition and group teaching? Do you think the current balance is correct? What works best (methodologically) for both approaches?**

- One to one tuition is limited in most establishments due to requirement of contract targets. (PLHs)
- Difficult to measure as one to one is often delivered with a group setting due to the various needs of individuals, therefore difficult to quantify levels.
- Both situations can work well together if the balance and mix of students is thought out carefully in advance.
- Encouraging students to be self activated often works well within mixed groups due to retention levels varying enormously.
- Get the balance right in terms of abilities and the need for one to one tuition is reduced and more emphasis should be placed on group working to encourage progress
- Group teaching based on project approaches requires a higher degree of preparation and skill – high turnover of students can frustrate project based approaches

## **Prisoner Psychology and Health**

**1. Do you need/want more information on mental health issues of Prisoners? How would this help or hinder you?**

- Prior knowledge would be useful in order to ensure approach and responses to learning are monitored and controlled effectively.
- Teaching styles could become reactive and responsive to the needs of individuals if we were aware of any mental health issues.
- Do not necessarily want to know too much information about a prisoner as this could have a negative affect as much as it could support them on a positive basis.
- Only require limited information, i.e. they are suicidal, having problems inside or outside the prison. No requirement for detail. To much can affect the how the lecturers interacts with the student.
- Only require information if it was deemed necessary to prevent an incident or have an adverse affect on the class.
- More information would enable lecturers to improve how they integrate with the student and support any problems they may have in the learning environment.
- There would be a requirement for training as part of our CPD, as knowing a student has a mental health issue is one thing, however understanding the issue requires training.
- General awareness of mental health issues would be very positive – particularly in dealing with groups such as sex-offenders.

2. **Have you experienced manipulation by Prisoners? Did you know how to deal with it? Have you been given training in this area? If so, who provided the training?**

- A number of staff responses indicated that they had experienced incidents where they had been subject to manipulation.
- Although it is important for all lecturers to adopt a common sense approach, refresher training on an ongoing basis by SPS would be beneficial.
- Not all prisons have provided manipulation/conditioning training. Should be universally provided at all establishments and to everyone at Induction.
- It would seem the larger establishments have not provided this training to staff, however certain prisons have due to the type of offender. (sex offender).
- Training in this area is very basic, and if you are an experienced member of staff you should already have a degree of understanding as the level of training is very basic.
- What training there is is provided by SPS and is not tailored to the needs of teachers.

3. **Is it important to know the Prisoners' criminal record? What sort of information would be useful and why?**

- Do not need to know a prisoners criminal record, however would benefit from knowledge of any potential risks around behavioural disruption etc.
- A number of staff prefer not to be aware of any details around a prisoners criminal record.
- Security Alert information as regards any risk to staff around specific prisoner is essential. e.g. not to be in the company of a female or requires an officer present during any interviews etc. (Safe System of Work)
- Knowing the crimes a prisoner as committed could have an adverse affect on a lecturer and how they would interact with the individual.
- Most important information is length of sentence in order to support completion of ILPs etc.
- Useful to know criminal record for the purpose of disclosure training to identify realistic opportunities and provide accurate advice.

4. **How do you manage a group situation where some prisoners may have mental health problems and others don't?**

- Experienced staff react responsively to the needs of everyone within the group and ensure attention is not drawn to any mental health issues for an individual.
- Provide more attentiveness to such an individuals needs without being over bearing or detrimental to the rest of the group and their needs.
- Adopt a compassionate, comprehension and common sense approach to dealing with such individuals.
- Prisoners are very receptive and could pick up easily if a colleague has mental health issues so important that lecturer controls the conversation and dynamics of the group (prevent potential bullying)

## Security

1. **Were you provided with formal training regarding security issues prior to starting work in the prison?**

- All responses indicated they received formal security training, however timing and range of training varies for each establishment.

2. **Who provided this training and what form did it take? (i.e which areas were covered, how long did it last?)**

*Must note that levels of training do not get delivered consistently at every prison.*

- Majority of training provided by SPS Staff. This training consisted of Breakaway Training, Hostage Awareness Training, Conditioning Training, ACT, Key Training, Fire Awareness Training.
- Breakaway Training is practical based and duration 2-3 hours
- Hostage Training simply the reading of a 5 minute document on procedure to follow.
- Key Training, is practical demonstration and varies between establishments depending on security procedures. Normally 30 minutes.
- Conditioning Training duration ½ day lecture basis.
- ACT duration varies between establishments and is now done on-line.
- Fire Training practical and theoretical based training normally no more than 2 hours.

3. **Were you given a paper copy of security guidelines when you started as reference? If yes, who provided these?**

- Paper copies of SPS security guidelines not made available in case they got into the wrong hands. Clearly has security implications – however all staff issued with security guidelines prepared by the College.

4. **Do you think the training provided was adequate? If not, what sorts of issues would you like to have seen covered? Please be specific and relate your answer to questions and problems you had as a new prison teacher.**

- The majority of responses indicated that training provided was adequate, however in some instances in terms of the type of prisoner some staff felt they could benefit from more Psychological/Manipulation training and more training in relation to sex offenders.
- Staff would also benefit from the internal language and references used within the prisons.

5. **Do you receive regular updates to security training? How often do these take place?**

- SPS have tightened up their guidelines and procedures and ensure all staff receive specific refresher training annually and maintain records

accordingly. This training however is only applicable to Breakaway Techniques. Everyone would benefit from an introduction to prison terminology – what does short-term and longterm mean, what is a remand prisoner etc. often assume an understanding which is not there.

- Everyone would benefit from regular refresher training no matter how experienced

6. **Did you make any mistakes in relation to security when you first started? How could you have been prevented from making such a mistake?**

- The majority of staff during the early stages in their post have unintentionally done something that could be considered a security risk. This could be bring in an item that could be used to the benefit of a prisoner, mobile phone, tinfoil, memory stick, metal spoons etc.
- Failure to recognise the need to report a potential security incident that may have been overheard within the classroom. This could be overcome by making all staff aware of 5 by 5 reporting.
- Staff would benefit from receiving awareness training on simple items of material that could be potentially used as a weapon etc.

7. **Would better 'intelligence' (i.e. knowledge) of prisoners' criminal convictions, mental health status help in managing classroom discipline? If yes, tell us how you think it would help?**

- Prior knowledge would aid lecturers in anticipating behavioural problems and responding appropriately.
- Better intelligence enables staff to adopt learning and teaching strategies to suit the needs of specific individuals.
- Concern on knowing more information might mean lecturers are constantly on edge in the event that something could arise.
- As per previous response most staff are not concerned about the individuals personal criminal record, only the duration of sentence and relevant mental health issues that a lecturer would benefit from knowing.

8. **Do you feel there is any tension between your role as a teacher and security considerations? If yes, please tell us what they are.**

- Most staff feel a level of frustration due to security issues limiting the role of the lecturer.
- Access to internet is restricted to specific staff
- Staff do not have proper work rooms where they can store resources and access the internet for materials etc
- Unable to bring in certain storage devices, e.g. memory sticks with teaching materials.
- Constant need to sign in and out specific equipment that could be used inappropriately, i.e. sharps in art classes, (Necessary requirement to support everyone's health and safety but impinges on the flow of lessons.)
- Teaching staff require to develop good interpersonal skills to engage with prisoners and have developed various ways of securing their attention and encouraging concentration. Classroom management by teaching staff sometimes does not match expectations of SPS and on occasions can

- cause conflict between both groups.
- In many respects the roles of the lecturer and security are mutually incompatible but in a day-to-day operational context the relationship is a mutually supportive one.
  - Security often prevent students from returning to their cells with unfinished work from the art classes which they want to continue working on when not at the learning centre.

## **Prison Teacher Networks**

### **1. Would you find it helpful to have access to an electronic forum which links prison teachers and acts as a source of advice and information for the profession?**

- Electronic access/networking forum to share ideas, experience and provide advice would support CPD and would ensure best practice
- This would be useful, however as per previous response access to internet is limited to college staff as they would require a SPIN number.
- Would be beneficial if the forum not only provided a range of operational and practical guidance but also was a source of information about resources and good practice in learning and teaching.
- Network forum could provide useful advice and best practice and sharing of ideas etc but staff need to be able to access it from work as not many will give up their free time to access from home.

### **2. How would you use new means of communication in a teachers network? What issues do you think you could debate and resolve with these new means of communication?**

- Create debate, discussions around funding of projects, issues of assessment, materials and professional practice.
- Networking between key players within the profession as well as peers.
- Awareness of new innovative teaching aids and resources that would support offender learning.
- Discussion would need to take place around the level of autonomy and decision making that would take place through networking.
- Placing of sampled teaching and lesson plans for subjects including useful exercises to engage learners.

### **3. How can teachers in prison - as a community - encourage government aid in implementing/setting up networks for teachers in prison?**

- By raising the profile of prison education through lobbying networks.
- Produce case studies and examples of distance travelled through education to encourage additional funding and prioritising.
- Demonstrate validity of existing programmes of potential future programmes to networks that could associate with key objectives of existing government including local as well as national issues.

**4. How much time would you, as a teacher, be ready to devote to communicating with other colleagues at a distance from home - to help you in your work?**

- The responses were varied from 1 to 2 hours per week to none.
- Some staff felt that they should have access to networking to support their job during their working day, however not always feasible.
- Some responses indicated they had no access to internet at home therefore limiting their opportunity to network.

**5. Are you currently involved in any prison teacher networks?**

- Some staff involved in groups such as SOLA, PAN, COPAL and OLN.
- Opportunity also available through some of the Adult Literacy Networks.
- Majority of respondents indicated they are not involved in any prison teacher networks.

**6. Are you aware of the European Prison Education Association? If yes, do you think it does a good job of representing you?**

- The majority of responses indicated they were not aware of EPEA.
- Some staff were aware of the Scottish branch SOLA, however due to its infancy are unable to comment on how good a job it does in representing prison lecturers.