Coates Review – Submission from The Bell Foundation
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What do we need to change in order to ensure that education and training provision meets the needs and interests of all potential prison learners?

"There is a huge diversity of languages among offenders and widely varying levels of English language skills, with the majority at a basic level." (NRDC 2014 cited in Hales, 2015)

"Gypsy, Roma and Traveller prisoners are a significant but often unrecognised minority in many prisons." (HMCIP Report for England and Wales, 2012 – 13)

This response concentrates principally (but not exclusively) on issues for prisoners with English language and literacy needs which is the focus of The Bell Foundation's "Language for Change" programme. It draws on commissioned research, experience from project partners and the Foundation's experience of designing and delivering interventions to support vulnerable learners in school settings for whom English is a second or additional language. However, some of the responses to the questions may have applicability to prison learners outside this group.

It is important that every prisoner able to profit from the education facilities provided at a prison is encouraged to do so (Carroll, Hurry and Wilson, 2015) and in order for prisoners with English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) to be able to access the facilities the following issues need to be addressed:-

a) **Having Accurate Data:** Currently no national figures exist for the numbers of offenders/ex-offenders with ESOL needs and this makes it very difficult to plan and provide adequate provision. Although national data exists for the numbers of Foreign National Prisoners (FNPs), which currently stand at 13% of the prison population, this does not provide any indication of ESOL prevalence and need, as many FNPs will have English as their mother tongue. Similarly amongst UK nationals in prison, many may not have English as a first language, and there is no official data on this number. When looking at ESOL provision within prisons, Carroll et al (2015) conclude that "There is…insufficient current data that identifies how many of this (Foreign Nationals) group have English as a second language. The provision of ESOL could be more effectively strengthened if this wider context was addressed".

b) **Identifying language needs:** Research commissioned by The Bell Foundation (Carroll et al, 2015) identified the need for language screening. Firstly it is important that prisoners are correctly identified as having ESOL needs, as opposed to English literacy needs. This is something which can be difficult for non-language specialist staff to assess, as fluency may get mistaken for proficiency. The prisoner may be able to communicate at a functional level but not have the linguistic ability to access the educational facilities within the prison. Accurate screening at the initial assessment would ensure the appropriate signposting and therefore more accurate figures on ESOL need within prisons. Currently, literacy and numeracy are measured but language ability is not. Secondly, once a prisoner is identified as requiring some ESOL provision they need to be given the correct level of support. Anecdotal evidence suggests that ESOL learners are sometimes all put into one group with no regard to language abilities. This can be counterproductive for both the lower level English speaker and the higher level language speakers.

c) **Identifying literacy needs:** An additional challenge for the learning and teaching of some ESOL learners can be their lack of literacy in their primary language. Collier

and Thomas (2001 cited in Carroll et al 2015) applied the findings of their longitudinal study (1982-2001) of 'linguistically and culturally' diverse school students to the education of offenders in correctional settings. The study particularly focussed on students with no literacy in their primary language. They concluded that, particularly for this group, education in both languages would ensure greater academic progress. They supported the embedded approach for all students with English as a second language, but that this group also required additional instruction in both languages (Collier and Thomas, 2001 cited in Carroll et al 2015).

d) **Sentence planning and continuation of learning:** Movement between different prisons often makes continuation of study difficult and this can be particularly difficult for ESOL learners who may not be able to articulate or understand their language levels. We are aware that this is being addressed and Carroll et al (2015) report that some improvement is being made in the transfer of individual learning plans between prisons.

How could we better incentivise prisoners to participate in education?

"The incentive to move from education to work for those still supporting family outside of the prison was strong." (Hales, 2015)

The following points have been identified as ways to improve participation in education, from our commissioned research and programmes with partners working within the secure estate and upon release.

a) **Valuing Education:** It is important that education is given the same monetary value as working within prisons so that work is not prioritised over education. In *'The Language Barrier to Rehabilitation (2015)* Hales notes when working in the prison kitchen, a prisoner could earn twice that of those prisoners who chose to be in fulltime education meaning that the "incentive to move from education to work for those still supporting family outside of the prison was strong."

b) **Making Education Relevant:** In their literature review of current ESOL provision, Carroll et al. (2015) identified the need to move away from the 'churning out of qualifications' and to emphasize the more holistic development of the learner with ESOL needs. For example, NIACE's Citizen's Curriculum ensures all individuals have the core set of skills they need to be able to function in today's society including English, maths, ESOL, digital, civic, health and financial capabilities. In her 2015 report 'The Language Barrier to Rehabilitation" Hales concludes that service providers within custody and the community take the view that "the priority in Literacy and ESOL delivery should be to enable their students to manage the challenges they face on a day to day basis (this being particularly acute for those going through court and/or in custody and whose residential status is being decided by Immigration). Beyond this, it should help them to access key resources, improve their abilities to find legal work and provide effective support for their children within the UK" and that there is a need to adapt standard literacy and ESOL course provision to meet these goals.

c) **Improving Accessibility** Anecdotally we are aware of prisoners with low level ESOL being excluded from some vocational courses due to their low level of English including being able to take anger management courses, which are often necessary to be considered for early release. Courses could be made more accessible by embedding English provision within vocational courses by either making tutors more

language aware or providing language support assistants to the class, working alongside the tutor to support those with lower level English.

d) **Listen to and learn from the learners.** Listening to learner's experiences of education is of particular value when considering how that provision might be improved (Little, 2015) making it worthwhile, relevant and accessible. Ultimately for any learner, be they a child at school, young person, adult or offender or ex-offender there has to be motivation to learn and this will be different for different learners. It is not necessarily possible or desirable to adopt a "one size fits all" approach and listening and learning from learners will give greater insights into why people chose to participate or not participate in learning.

How could we better assess and measure the performance and effectiveness of prisoner learning?

At the moment there is a limited evidence base about 'what works' in prison education and why and how it works. Learner engagement is thought to be critical to success and there is some evidence that peer mentoring is an effective mechanism. It is important to continue to advocate and champion a greater use of evidence and data to test what interventions actually work to engage prisoners in learning, what works in terms of actual learning and delivering educational outcomes, and over the longer term measuring the impact on reducing reoffending.

The Ministry of Justice Data Lab is a very important development ensuring the greater use of evidence in measuring the impact of interventions on reducing reoffending. Similarly the "What Works" centres are a very important development but this issue does not neatly fit within the remit of the centres dealing with education or crime reduction. Publications such as the recent Ministry of Justice Data Lab report which analyses data comparing people, funded by Prisoners' Education Trust (PET), to study in prison and a matched control group are an important starting point. However, the greater use of an evidence based approach will not happen automatically and it will need to be proactively driven, particularly given some of the inevitable logistical and operational challenges of delivering and evaluating education in this context.

To deepen and more systematically understand what works, consideration should be given to how to proactively test the efficacy of educational interventions and how this can be encouraged, widely disseminated and used.

What are the most effective teaching and delivery models for education in prison settings?

The following characteristics of effective ESOL provision within prisons were highlighted by Carroll et al. in their 2015 report *A Prison within a Prison*, commissioned by The Bell Foundation, and we have seen how these models have been effective through our partnerships.

a) **Providing additional language support**
Additional language support enables English as a Second Language learner's access to vocational training through embedded learning. It is a simple and effective teaching method to ensure that everyone can access the training. This could include providing language awareness classes for all staff, as has been the case in Holloway prison or looking at the curriculum and embedding ESOL into the syllabuses.

b) **Attitudes and awareness of prison staff**

Evidence indicates that when prison staff are given the training and tools to support and understand the extra challenges which can arise for a prisoner who has limited English, this can make a significant difference to both parties.
Hurry et al (2012) reported that "where good working relationships existed between education and the wider prison staff, and where there was an emphasis on the importance of education across the organisation, education provision and outcomes are strengthened".

Fisher, Harvey and Fitt (2008) highlighted how all prison staff and teachers at Holloway prison were being trained in language awareness and the use of simple English in instructions, signs and notices.

Carroll et al. (2015) identified the lack of information for prison staff about the welfare and cultural needs of Foreign National Prisoners as being an extra layer of complexity to the experience of ESOL learners in prison or rehabilitation.

c) Useful and flexible accreditation

Evidence from focus groups of ESOL practitioners working within the secure estate has highlighted that there is too much emphasis on ESOL classes focussing on gaining qualifications. Whilst we agree that gaining qualifications is important and should be encouraged, it should not be the sole focus of language classes as the focus then shifts to learning how to pass an exam or test rather than learning for any other purpose.

Hurry et al (2012) comment on the pressure to achieve qualifications and an over reliance on basic skills being seen by some professionals in prison as "putting at the risk more holistic approaches which are valued by prison educators".

Providers and settings use different exam boards for their ESOL Skills for Life qualifications, although none of these are tailored to the prison context and often prisoners are preparing to pass an exam rather than building their language skills. Carroll et al. (2015) reported on HMP Pentonville using the NOCN Entry Level ESOL Skills for Life Qualification. The important features of this qualification were:-

- Flexibility and rapid response to a fast changing prison context
- External assessment (speaking) able to be run internally which meant more flexibility when assessing
- External moderation with two week turnaround for certificates (essential for an average six week stay)

d) Relevant material

There is a lack of materials based on an adult ESOL curriculum and also relevant to the prison environment. The Bell Foundation and British Council have been developing prison related resources which are available online for free on the ESOL Nexus website. Co-financed by the European Integration Fund these fit for purpose materials are invaluable for motivating prisoners as they directly relate to their situation: providing vocabulary on such topics as health in prison, legal issues, reporting problems, buying things and working; whilst at the same time making the prisoners aware of their rights and support services available to them. These have been welcomed by practitioners as many existing ESOL published materials contain inappropriate topics such as 'going on holiday, shopping and free time activities'. The ESOL Nexus resources include materials and lesson plans for practitioners to use with prisoners as well as self-study modules, which provide learner autonomy.

e) Using Peer mentoring

As part of its *Language for Change* programme, The Bell Foundation has two partnerships which involve the use of peer mentors. St Giles Trust is rolling out a QCF NVQ Level 3 qualification in Advice and Guidance to equip in-prison peer advisors with the skills to best meet the needs of Foreign National Prisoners. The National Reading Network project with the Shannon Trust is using the peer-supported reading plan to support ESOL prisoners to learn to read.

A significant body of evidence confirms that 1:1 peer-learning has multiple benefits to both learner and mentor; enhancing relationships, learning, communications skills and breaking down barriers of isolation (e.g. Topping, Theory into Practise 2010).

In May 2013, the Secretary of State publicly recognised the important role peer-delivered reading programmes play in rehabilitating offenders stating "*Every non-reader should be taught to read by a prisoner mentor".* Two external evaluations of the Shannon Trust Reading Programme have been conducted and both highlighted the 1:1 peer relationship as the critical factor in breaking down barriers to learning, the need for a formal tracking system and increased availability across all prisons.

Hales (2015) reports that due to the individuality of needs and ability to progress, delivery of literacy and ESOL support is sometimes most effective on a one-to-one basis. Although there are significant costs involved in this, the use of peer-mentors could be a sustainable model. She identified the value of using peer support, both in terms of providing support for those who are most vulnerable and isolated and for the supporter, whose self-esteem can be enhanced by appropriate training and formalisation of their roles.

How could we make best use of different prison environments and facilities to deliver education?

a) Flexible provision

Any teaching model should be able to respond to changes such as a sudden increase in the number of learners or a change in language level. There are several ways that the provision can be flexible, having self-contained classes to enable all learners to learn something new in each class is often useful in an ever changing prison environment. Case studies from HMP Holloway show that all ESOL classes were self-contained and students had access to dictaphones and tapes to be able study independently when on waiting lists for classes to begin (Carroll et al 2015).

Another way is to facilitate self-study. Not only does this provide learner autonomy, it can ensure the learner is motivated as the focus on the lesson is specific to them. As part of the ESOL Nexus website three sets of self-access materials were developed for higher level ESOL speakers and this will be further developed in 2016.

What is the potential for increased use of technology to support better prison education?

Examples of good practice with regard to using new technology as a learning tool have been highlighted in the Carroll et al. report (2015) and include using an intranet to replicate the learning opportunities and information offered by the internet, where server based computers were used to broadcast a menu-driven service to a television in each cell enabling multiple learners to address their own learning needs simultaneously (Dalziel and Sofres, 2005). They also identified the use of moodle-type facilities in addition to an in-house TV System, which would enable learners to use self-study materials.

What needs to change to enable technology to deliver this support?

Evidence from our partnerships and focus groups with ESOL practitioners who are currently working in prisons across the country, shows that the use of technology varies greatly from prison to prison. Some practitioners reported the Virtual Campus (VC) being unused in some settings and whole computer rooms left abandoned. Often, even if the technology is there and used, there is a lack of fit for purpose material based on the adult ESOL curriculum and relevant to the prison environment.

Carroll et al (2015) report that by 2011 there had been 7,000 prisoners who had accessed the Virtual Campus (LILAMA, 2011) and that at HMP Lewes it included an interactive course in ESOL specifically designed for ESOL learners which included targeted vocabulary for in-prison jobs. Commentators do, however, identify "significant improvement" being needed with regard to "access, co-ordination with other support services, content and usability" of the Virtual Campus (Champion and Edgar, 2013).

How could we further improve teaching standards and continue to recruit and retain the best quality teachers in the prison estate?

In 'A Prison within a Prison' Carroll et al. (2015) reflects on the challenges of recruiting and retaining sufficient ESOL teachers. Although it is difficult to establish an accurate picture, some sources indicate significant problems with recruitment and retention and low pay compared to working in other institutions and substantial regional variance in the number and type of teacher training programmes being delivered across the UK.

The following recommendations to improve teaching standards, facilitate recruitment and retain the best quality staff are drawn from focus group feedback from ESOL practitioners working in prisons across England:-

- A clear path of career progression and a recognised qualification for ESOL practitioners working within prisons. Often literacy or English subject teachers are asked to teach ESOL. It is a different discipline and requires different skills and knowledge.
- Remuneration is typically lower in prisons than in similar roles in FE colleges.
- High quality Continuous Professional Development to develop the practitioner's skills.
- A professional body or network for teachers working within prisons, who can often feel isolated due to the nature of their work.
- The availability of good quality, relevant and engaging resources to work with.

Assuming they are not commissioners, how can organisations such as employers, community rehabilitation companies, local colleges, universities and the voluntary sector, contribute to improving the curriculum, education outcomes and employability of offenders on their release.

Improving the curriculum

Organisations have a role to play when looking at and developing a curriculum, particularly when piloting and evaluating innovative ideas. NIACE have been piloting a citizen's curriculum which focuses on building a curriculum which is relevant and useful to their lives, their needs and their work. It improves English and maths while focussing on digital, health, financial and civic skills. This can incorporate ESOL skills alongside the curriculum. It has been piloted in HMP New Hall as well as other settings in the community.
As previously mentioned, The Bell Foundation and British Council have been developing prison related resources which are available online for free on the ESOL Nexus website.

Employability of offenders upon release

Courses around re-settlement/ housing or offence-related programmes in the community are geared to English speakers not to those who need/want ESOL provision, thus barring them from accessing courses and programmes to help them progress.

The New Bridge partnership which provides resettlement support and advice for FNPs was well received by prisoners and has been reported as an example of good practice from HMIP (HMIP 2006). At HMP The Verne a distinct FNP pathway had been written into the prison's resettlement strategy ensuring that the specific resettlement needs of FNPs were addressed. Similarly to HMP Ford, a wide range of translated information was kept on a computer database and made available to prisoners as required.

Are there any examples of good practice from the delivery of education in other countries we should seek to apply or introduce here? If so please give details below:

Carroll et al (2015) looked at innovative approaches to ESOL provision in their research. An award winning Language Partners programme in the United States draws on research to show the success of peer mentoring programmes in prisons. Offering benefits to the tutors as well as the tutees at Danville Correctional Centre in Illinois, USA. Bilingual offenders were trained to become ESOL teachers for other offenders. These newly TESOL qualified tutors are responsible for teaching classes twice-weekly and performing all the normal functions of teachers. They are supported by volunteer teacher trainers.

The Prison Translator is a coproduction of the European Prison Education Association (EPEA) and Prisons Canton Zurich (PCZ), designed as a direct response to the increasing need for the translation of key phrases commonly found across prison regimes. It offers open access to key issues such as reception, health, etc. in 20 different languages.