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THU: Workshop to explore possible ways to increase Prison students' engagement in Higher Education (Eileen Mansfield)

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[Dr Simon Ball](#)

4 February 2014

Abstract

Engagement in Higher Education can be problematic for students who are serving prison sentences. Problems faced by such students range from a lack of suitable opportunities to study in Higher education (due to the preponderance of vocational courses available); lack of tutor support; prospect of being moved to new facilities at very short notice (e.g. 12 hours' notice); prison security routines; lack of facilities such as computers and lack of internet connectivity. The lack of internet connectivity presents a growing problem for prison students since Undergraduate and Postgraduate courses are increasingly becoming online courses rather than distance learning courses with text books and materials sent to students to complete their studies.

The question could be asked: Why is it important that people incarcerated in prison should have access to the Higher Education system? Research has shown that appropriate education within prison populations reduces recidivism on release and allows ex-offenders to become more employable (Wilson, Gallagher and MacKenzie, 2000; Torre, 2001; Vacca, 2004) and moreover builds self-esteem and self-awareness in prisoners, enabling them to change their attitude to crime and 'transform their lives' (Bhatti, 2010:36). Recidivism is defined as an ex-offender being arrested or imprisoned within three years of release (Kim and Clark, 2013); with no gender differences (Mears, Cochran and Bales 2012). This is important not only for the individual themselves and their families, but also to society since the cost to the UK taxpayer in the year 2010-2011 to keep one prisoner for one year was £39,573 (National Offender Management Service, 2011).

The workshop

This workshop aims to explore ways that prison students may be able to benefit more from online courses by making some aspects of the suitable for studying either via a secure Intranet site or as stand-alone resources and materials.

Participants are invited to explore these stand-alone resources and materials and provide feedback about their usability and suitability for the target audience. A further aspect which the presenter would like feedback for is the usability for disabled students who might also benefit from these resources.

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[Dr Simon Ball](#)

09:14 on 5 February 2014

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[Debbie Grieve](#)

2:58pm 10 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hi Eileen - I am fascinated by your topic and learning more about how online courses can help promote Higer Ed ops in prison. Looking forward to it! Best wishes,

Deb



[Avril sweeney](#)

10:12pm 11 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hi Eileen, I read your abstract and poster . I think your presentation might change alot of views on promoting Higher Ed in Prison for prisoners. Engagemnt in Education can only be a good thing. Good luck with your presentation. Avril



[Cara Saul](#)

4:39pm 12 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Would love to pass this on to a friend who works in prsion education service



[Anne Bradbury](#)

4:43pm 12 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

I used to work with long-term women prisoners ('lifers') who were taking higher education courses many years ago, and know the importance of this work, Eileen. So will be very interested in this presentation! Good luck with it!

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Anne



[Chris Pegler](#)

9:22am 13 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Eileen, I agree its a very interesting topic. I notice that you link to mention of disability at the end. Have you anything to say about disability and offenders, particular patterns or concerns. We often think about accommodation for physical disability when designing online content for learning and teaching but are there perhaps issues here, particularly within the offender population of prevalence of mental illness? Would this inhibit certain types of activity. Would you exclude some types of offenders from some activities? Or design around it?



[Anne Bradbury](#)

1:55pm 13 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

The cycle of disadvantage, broken and abusive relationships were significant factors among offenders, we found. This makes choice of material even very important. 'Hand-me-down' and second-rate technology can just compound these impressions, so a challenging (and intensive) area to work in!

Good to see your ideas on this, Eileen. How are you hoping to develop these?



[Eileen Mansfield](#)

2:51pm 13 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hello everyone, Thank you for your comments and I will try to answer all the points here. Anne - You have raised some interesting points and they lead to prisoners feeling even more distant. The idea of the tools that I am suggesting is that they feel more part of a learning community (even though remotely) this will help build up their learning skills as well as their self esteem. You are right, it is also a very challenging area, since most people have a negative view of prisoners. Disability is a big problem Chris, and that is why I think that making artefacts in various formats would help students with disabilities inside prison, but also those outside prison. Hence the project has two benefits to it. I have got some materials already made which I was going to have as a workshop. I will post the link here and maybe you could have a go at them and see what you think - whether they will work or not. I will put up more details later on. I would like to do some research in this area and see what would work best. Thanks for your interest. Regards, Eileen



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

6:51pm 13 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Following the live presentations, we asked each speaker to respond to questions posed by audience members. In the short time available, it was not possible to put all of the questions submitted to the speaker for a response. We asked all speakers if they would respond to the unanswered questions here on Cloudworks. Here are all of the questions asked during the session:

- ▶ Prisoners' access to HE may also depend on regime?
- ▶ We've heard about 'flipping the classroom' - we should 'flip the prison'. There must be technologies that CAN be used in prisons surely? These are skills they surely need?
- ▶ How much time is the average prisoner allowed for study?
- ▶ I would presume that increased participation in education assists in rehabilitation & leads to less re-offending behaviour on release?
- ▶ my experience was (a long time ago) was that its the long-term prisoners have access to HE. Have things chnaged?
- ▶ Do prison staff also get access to study through work? Could tha change attitudes?
- ▶



[Jonathan Vernon](#)

5:01am 15 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Thoughts on having a university like qualification for prison staff was dropped. What was the thinking behind this? My view is that we can all, in all things, gain from acquiring new ideas or challenging our thinking. Or are prison staff seen as 'keepers' and the educators are the external people who come in? Insightful. And troubled by it too - that so many people need to be sent to prison and the consequences of being removed from the society that they need to be part of. This is surely made far worse where so much of our world is influenced by or empowered by access to the Web.



[Ian Hoffman](#)

9:43pm 16 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Hi Eileen

Was interested to hear you mention the possibility of using MOOCs or OpenLearn modules in your programmes with the students. Having tried a MOOC and an OpenLearn module myself, I found the experience almost 'choatic'. How do you think your students will get on? What will you do to prepare them for the experience?

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