

Discussion Session on the Role of Higher Education and Open and Distance Learning in Prisons

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OUTLINE OF THE PROPOSED SESSION

The session will facilitate a discussion on the role of Higher Education (HE) and Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in a prison environment. The participants will draw on their experiences in order to debate the benefits and the barriers to HE and ODL for offenders, security staff and educators. The aim would be to share good practice and to produce a position paper which could promote change and develop a future strategy.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Education is a "right for all" and for offenders it is crucial. Offenders are an extremely vulnerable layer of society; they are far more likely to have truanted or been excluded from school and are more likely to have left school with no qualifications. Often they want to use time usefully but are unable to associate with a classroom environment or the standard education in prison, which focuses on Basic and Life Skills, may not be at a high enough level. There is a need, therefore, to ensure they have access to ODL to develop the confidence and skills at an appropriate level to gain meaningful employment on release and to open doors which they never knew existed.

E-learning is a vital component of 21st century education hence the dilemma. There is wide variation in available technology across prisons. Access to computers and storage media can be a serious barrier to participation and learning. The prison service remains highly sceptical of any form of web access, no matter how secure. The need for control and protection of the public is their first priority.

The Open University (OU) are commencing trials to investigate alternative pedagogies, either using dedicated secure web access or using off-line Open Source information on prison intranets (with plans to introduce course-specific interactive assessment material). There are those, however, who would argue that the risks of misuse and the costs outweigh the benefits for rehabilitation.

POSSIBLE THEMES FOR DISCUSSION:

- IT and Internet access - issues of security or deployment
- Intranet developments
- Conflict of security v education for offenders
- HE - natural progression from mainstream education?
- Funding
- Security officer staff development
- Teacher training
- Women in prison
- Embedding ODL into Vocational skills development - Foundation degrees?
- Curriculum concerns

INTENDED OUTCOMES:

- Identify the key roles of HE and ODL in a prison environment
- identify barriers to ODL development and progress
- identify benefits for offenders
- identify benefits for security staff and teachers
- share good practice and identify key development areas for future strategy
- produce position paper which could inform two UNESCO International Conferences in October 2008:
 - Education in Prison (CIEP) in Brussels
 - EDEN Workshop in Paris.
- prove that international collaboration can promote change

SUGGESTED PROGRAMME:

Prior to the conference: Participants to contribute to a Wiki http://www.wikieducator.org/PCF5:The_role_of_Open_and_Distance_Learning_in_Prisons to develop the themes for discussion and to collect possible studies for presentation. This will also allow contributions from those who may not be able to attend the conference.

At the conference: Two x 90 minute sessions on 2 separate days. The discussions in the first session will be developed and formulated into key issues. Contributors will then have time for further thoughts and reflections before the second session which will complete discussions and present the findings. This format may also allow wider participation - perhaps allowing one-day delegates to contribute.

First session:

- Presentation on results from study in UK by Anne Pike (10 mins max) **(see attached poster for advertising)**
- Presentation on results from study in India by Sushmita Mitra (10 mins max)
- Up to 2 other presentations from other countries (5-10 mins each)
- Discuss broader themes (in small groups?) (40 mins)
- Plenary – collaborate on framing themes to take forward to next session

Second session:

- Resumé of session 1 with additional reflections
- Discuss main themes and share ideas
- Produce output for a position paper which could inform the UNESCO International Conferences, with a global message for governments.