

Strategy Statement on Prison Education for 2003 to 2007

Introduction

Policy documents, strategy statements, business plans and so forth are prominent in all quarters nowadays. This kind of taking stock, collectively asking and answering questions like "What's our purpose?", "What do we want to achieve?", "How do we get there?", was far less common over twenty years ago when we made our first venture into this area. From 1981, meetings took place in every Prison Education Unit in the country, out of which a paper was drafted, circulated, redrafted several times and finally issued by the Department of Justice as 'Policy Document on Prison Education' (1984). It was something of a novel event at that time.

The participation of prison educators themselves in that process was crucial. It meant the document spoke from the very experience of teaching and learning within the prison context. I believe it helped give us all a sense of direction in our work. As time went on, the ideas set down in the early 80's were developed and refined. In 1990, the Council of Europe published 'Education in prison', a Recommendation and report, that complemented what we were seeking to do in Ireland.

The next milestone was the Department of Justice's 'The Management of Offenders', which appeared in 1994. The chapter on prison education in that built on the policy document of ten years earlier, yet still reflected the 'adult education' philosophy of the original, which was (and is) very much the consensus approach within prison education. We then entered the era of the 'business plan' in the public sector generally, but those formulated for prison education remained true to earlier values, while also facing up to new challenges and experiences. The most recent of these documents was 'Strategy Statement, 1999-2001 (updated in February 2000)'. We have taken time and care with the Strategy Statement now produced here for 2003 to 2006. Again, there has been detailed consultation within prison education, but also beyond it - within the wider Irish Prison Service, with education authorities and with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, which retains responsibility for policy. The feedback from all of these was greatly appreciated, and, I think, is fairly reflected in the document now issued. I hope this Strategy Statement will help give encouragement, direction and stiff challenges to all who work in prison education. I also expect that, along with a very detailed review of the curriculum just now being completed by the Prison Education Service, it will give those beyond our service a fuller sense of what we are trying to do.

Finally, I want to thank the committee which worked with me on the formulation of this strategy Statement, who are listed below. In particular, I want to express my appreciation for Camilla

McGourty, who chaired the committee, and Anne Costelloe, who acted as secretary and main author.

The Prison Education Service is a partnership between the Irish Prison Service and a range of educational bodies. The Prison Education Service works, in particular, in conjunction with the Regimes Directorate of the Irish Prison Service. The Vocational Educational Committees (VECs), the Department of Education and Science and the Public Library Services are the major contributors to this partnership. Also involved are the Open University, the Arts Council, the National College of Art and Design (NCAD) and many other public and community groups.

Prison education has expanded and developed in recent decades. The Prison Education Service plays an integral role in all prisons and the majority of those in custody participate in educational activities on a voluntary basis. Underpinning this is the professional expertise of prison educators together with the design and delivery of a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of those in custody.

The Prison Education Service has developed within a framework based on the principles and ideas advocated in the Council of Europe Recommendation (89) 12 and its accompanying report, *Education in Prisons (Strasbourg 1990)*. The aim and objectives of the Prison Education Service, as outlined in the Management of Offenders (1994), can be summarised as follows:

AIMS

To provide a high quality, broad and flexible programme of education that meets the needs of those in custody through helping them:

- Cope with their sentence
- Achieve personal development
- Prepare for life after release
- Establish the appetite and capacity for lifelong learning

Prison Education will continue to:

- Design and deliver relevant programme that cater for the needs of the whole person.
- Widen access and increase participation in education.
- Ensure that those with basic education needs are prioritised.
- Adapt programmes to take into account the diversity of the student body, their views and the complex nature of prison life.
- Facilitate ongoing curriculum and staff development.
- Promote the principles of adult and community education.
- Extend library services and upgrade provision in line with best practice in the community.
- Prepare those in custody for reintegration into the community.
- Advance interaction between those in custody and the wider community.

- Foster co-operation and promote best practice among those working in prison education.
- Support a multidisciplinary and partnership approach within the prison system to promote positive sentence management for all those in custody.

RESOURCES

The achievement of these goals is dependent on the following:

- Provision of appropriate education facilities in all prisons and places of detention as well as full consultation in the planning and design of new ones.
- The necessary allocation of teaching posts by the Department of Education and Science to the VEC's.
- The appropriate funding of libraries and librarians by the Irish prison Service.
- The appropriate funding of educational fees, equipment and materials by the Irish prison Service.
- The backing of developmental, support and liaison structures (e.g. In-service support, Prison Education Council, Physical Education Development Group) by the Irish prison Service and education bodies.
- The involvement of prison officers (e.g. School officers, library officers, gym instructors) in the provision of education.

FOCUS AREAS

The following developments and strategies will be prioritised over the next three years.

Increase participation in education among those in custody from the present rate of 50% to 55% by the end of 2006.

Facilitate each Education Centre in the production of an annual plan. These plans will be developed locally by the teaching staff in consultation with relevant agencies and will complement the Business Plan for that prison. Each plan will be agreed with the Education Centre's VEC, prison Governor and the Co-ordinator of Education. This development will be in place by the end of 2005.

Continue the development of an individual learning plan for each student by the end of 2005. These plans will be developed by the student in consultation with teaching staff and will involve ongoing evaluation, monitoring and review.

Publish the Curriculum Review Group Report during 2003 and promote this report as a guide to good practice.

Publish the Guidelines for Adult Literacy Work in Prisons by the end of 2003 and encourage the application of its recommendations and conclusions. Evaluate and disseminate the findings of the Prison Adult Literacy Survey (PALS) (i.e., the commissioned research into literacy levels among those

in custody) by the end of 2003. Derive plans for developing literacy provision in light of the research findings by 2004.

Implement recommendations of Physical Education Development Group as outlined in its publication; 'Physical Education in the Irish Prison System: The Challenges Ahead' (2001) by the end of 2004.

Strengthen and develop the well-established pre and post release programmes available through the Education Centres in order to prepare those in custody for release and support their transition to educational and other constructive endeavours after release.

Promote and develop other well-established programmes on offer in Education Centres, such as Addiction Studies, Health Education, Family Matters, Group Skills, etc.

Optimise the availability of new forms and sources of accreditation (e.g., FETAC) for those who opt for accreditation. Similarly, maximise involvement in higher education through increased participation in distance education, extra mural courses, access courses and so on.

Implement new structures for prison libraries agreed between the Irish Prison Service and City and County Librarians in November 2000, and meet the consequent need for further training and development of prison staff involved in libraries.

Establish a national research and resource centre for prison educators (Prison Education Resource Centre, PERC) by the end of 2005. This will function as a focal point for curriculum and professional development. It aims to:

- Act as a repository for materials, resources, audio-visual aids, etc., relevant to those working in prison education,
- Support and encourage research into Prison Education through providing a comprehensive library and catalogue of research articles, journals, policy documents, etc.
- Inform, update and contact interested parties as to developments, events, and activities, relevant to Prison Education through a user-friendly web site and email service.

Continue to participate fully in the range of multidisciplinary committees, working groups and other initiatives within the Irish Prison Service, and especially the Regimes Directorate, that are geared towards the improvement of prison regimes in line with Rule 64 and 65 of the European Prison Rules¹.

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