Learning and Employability Strategy

Service User and Staff Voice Research

Report by the Diffley Partnership prepared for the Scottish Prison Service

March 2024

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From many voices to smart choices

Contents

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Executive Summary

Research context and approach

The new Education & Employability Strategy will reshape all education provision across SPS moving forward, be it estate-wide contractual or locally delivered provision. This research report delivers the first of eight workstreams within the education project plan: Workstream 1: Service user and staff voice. The findings are derived from fieldwork and analysis across four stages.

Stage	
Stage 1	Data and information immersion, considering an overview of current education provision on the estate
Stage 2	Sampling: work with SPS to arrange fieldwork at selected establishments
Stage 3	Primary research stage: fieldwork at five prisons, covering all prisoner populations and relevant staff
Stage 4	Analysis and reporting
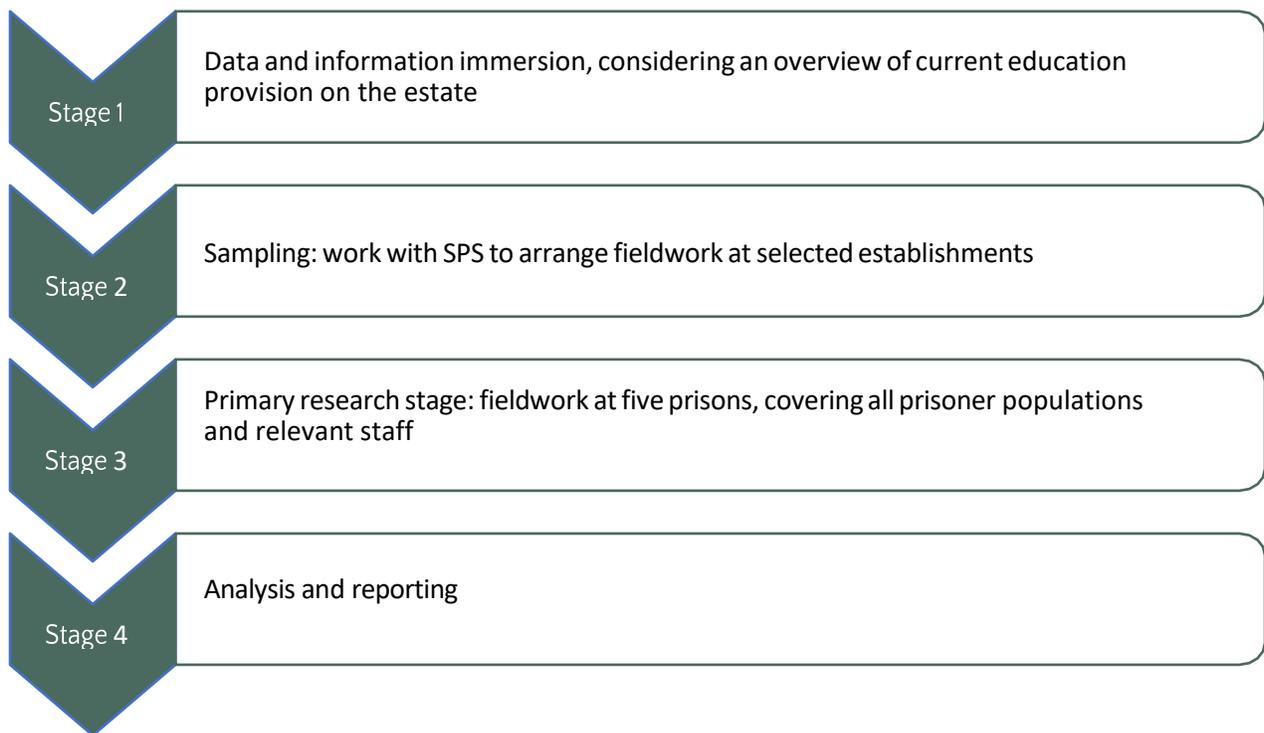
Research was conducted with:

- **5 establishments**: Polmont, Edinburgh, Barlinnie, Low Moss, Perth
- **Staff**: those employed by SPS directly, those working for Fife College, and those working for other partner agencies.

- **Prisoners**: men, women and young people; long-term, short-term, prisoners on remand; including offence protections and non-offence protections; those engaged and not engaged in current education provision.

Key findings

Findings derived from analysis of primary research with staff and prisoners were as follows:

Purpose of education and learning

The research underscores the perceived pivotal role of education in facilitating personal growth, skills development, and reintegration into society. Indeed, both service users and staff recognise education's significance in preventing re-offending and fostering positive changes in individuals' lives.

Value of education and learning

The intrinsic value of education beyond its instrumental role in improving employment outcomes, emphasising its role as a source of solace, personal development, and social connection within the confines of the prison environment. However, concerns regarding the lack of consistency in educational opportunities across different prisons underscore the need for uniformity in policy implementation to ensure equitable access to learning and skills provision for all individuals under the care of the Scottish Prison Service.

Engagement with education and learning

While there are pockets of positive engagement, significant variability exists across different contexts. The depth of engagement fluctuates depending on factors such as awareness, accessibility, and availability of educational opportunities. Participants consistently highlighted the limited availability of opportunities, with a substantial waiting list often necessitating prioritisation based on various factors.

Overall, engagement with education seemed to be limited not by a lack of interest in education, but rather by challenges outwith service users' control, including awareness of education provision, barriers to accessibility, and limited availability.

Participants highlighted instances of proactive engagement and positive experiences with education programs, underscoring the value and impact of such initiatives. However, this positive engagement is not uniform across all individuals and establishments within the prison system.

Awareness of provision

Variability in awareness, stemming from communication breakdowns and reliance on informal channels, contributes to disparities in engagement levels. While some individuals receive adequate information and support, others face hurdles in accessing educational opportunities due to administrative barriers and resource constraints. Therefore, addressing communication challenges within and beyond the prison system is imperative for ensuring equitable access to education and facilitating successful reintegration into society post-release.

Accessibility of provision

Moreover, accessibility challenges and population-specific constraints further contribute to the variability in engagement levels. Remand prisoners, for example, encounter unique challenges in accessing education compared to other prisoner demographics. Additionally, the availability of educational spaces is constrained by factors such as competition for spots, staffing shortages, and segregation policies.

Despite these challenges, the presence of proactive outreach efforts and positive experiences with education programs highlight the potential for fostering greater engagement within the prison system. By addressing systemic barriers, enhancing communication, and allocating resources equitably, it is possible to promote more consistent and meaningful engagement with education provision across all levels of the prison system.

Future provision

Participants generally expressing positive views on digital and in-cell provision. Digital education was seen as transformative, offering opportunities for daily learning activities and technological skill development. In-cell learning was lauded for its accessibility, especially for prisoners hesitant to attend

classes. However, concerns were raised about social isolation and the need to balance in-cell and classroom-based learning effectively.

Peer mentoring emerged as a promising solution, with participants recognising its potential to enhance educational outcomes and foster a sense of purpose among prisoners. The testimonials highlighted the tangible benefits of peer mentoring, from improving practical skills to creating a supportive learning environment.

Discussions on class capacity, length, and frequency underscored the need for greater funding to expand practical provision in a tailored manner. Participants called for larger classes, longer sessions, and more frequent provision, emphasising the importance of striking a balance between quantity and quality.

Access to libraries was another key concern, with participants advocating for improved access to complement learning and education. Proactive engagement by education staff and enhanced communication between departments were suggested to bridge accessibility gaps effectively.

Conclusions

Service user and staff voices show a clear desire for a comprehensive strategy for the future of learning and employability. These voices encourage SPS to prioritise elements of culture, communication, and provision, in summary:

1. Cultivating a Culture of Learning:
- Promoting a Positive Learning Environment: Establishing a culture that values education and learning and skills development is paramount. This involves creating a supportive and encouraging atmosphere within prison facilities, where prisoners feel motivated to engage in educational activities.

- Recognition of Educational Achievement: Implementing systems to acknowledge and celebrate educational milestones can significantly impact prisoner morale and motivation. Recognising achievements, such as completing courses or earning certifications, reinforces the value of

education and encourages continued participation. This includes ensuring that staff are appropriately trained to ensure appropriate accreditations can be awarded to service users.

- Integration of Education into Daily Life: Integrate educational opportunities into various aspects of prison life, beyond formal classroom settings. This can include incorporating educational components into work programs, recreational activities, and even daily routines within cells.

2. Improving Communication Channels:

- Enhanced Staff-Prisoner Communication: Establishing effective communication channels between staff, education providers and prisoners is essential for promoting educational opportunities and addressing concerns. Clear and consistent communication can ensure that prisoners are aware of available resources, upcoming classes or activity, and educational support services.

- Peer-to-Peer Communication: Facilitating peer-to-peer communication and support networks can complement formal educational initiatives. Peer mentoring programs, support groups, and collaborative learning activities can provide additional avenues for prisoners to engage with education and support one another's learning journey.

- Transparent Information Sharing: Ensure transparency in the dissemination of information related to educational opportunities, policies, and procedures. Providing prisoners with timely access to comprehensive information about available courses, enrolment processes, and academic support services empowers them to make informed decisions about their education. Current implementation of this is seen to be missing many prisoners at the induction phase which must be addressed, though this cannot stop at induction and must be consistent over the course of time in custody.

3. Strengthening Educational Provision:

- Tailored Curriculum and Resources: Develop a curriculum that caters to the diverse needs and interests of the prisoner population. Offering a range of academic, vocational, and enrichment courses allows prisoners to pursue learning and skills pathways that align with their goals and aspirations.

- Flexible Delivery Models: Implement flexible delivery models that accommodate different learning styles, preferences, and scheduling constraints. This may include a combination of in-person, digital, and in-cell learning modalities, providing prisoners with options that suit their individual circumstances.

- Resource Allocation and Funding: Advocate for increased funding and resources to support the expansion and enhancement of educational programs within the prison system. Adequate funding is essential for recruiting qualified instructors, acquiring educational materials, and maintaining facilities conducive to learning. Explore how external vocational partnerships can help to meet gaps in resourcing.

- Evaluation and Continuous Improvement: Establish mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and feedback to assess the effectiveness of educational initiatives and identify areas for improvement. Regular review processes enable stakeholders to adapt strategies, address challenges, and optimise resources to better meet the educational needs of prisoners.

1. Methodology

1.1 Purpose of the research

This report will inform SPS policy and practice as the organisation moves into its new corporate planning period (2023 - 2028) – within which SPS is seeking to take an evidence-based view on the role that learning, skills and employability provision (including digital education) can play in supporting those in our care to achieve the goals that are personal to them and those that will make the most difference in their lives (in terms of ensuring that their needs are being met and their risk is being reduced).[1]

SPS is in the process of establishing a new major project to create a new refreshed Learning & Employability Strategy that is digitally enhanced, trauma informed and encompasses clear support pathways for neurodivergent people in their care.

Currently within SPS, there are two broad types of education provision:

- **Provision delivered as part of the L&S contract:** An estate-wide Learning & Skills contract was awarded to Fife College in August 2017 with an initial contract term of five years with a 2-year extension option. The full 7-year term ends July 2024. The project team sought permission via MPMG to engage with Fife college with a view to extending further into a year 8, August 24 to July 25. This extension period is to allow to allow for research, strategy & specification development. The refreshed Learning & Employability Strategy will form the basis of the next generation Learning contract and support the procurement process.

- **Locally delivered provision**: Each Establishment delivers a unique range of 'purposeful activity' with a significant proportion of this provision having a learning / skills / employability focus (to a greater or lesser degree). Some of this provision will be delivered by SPS staff and some will be delivered by partner agencies, including third sector partners.

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[1] See Strategic Objective 3. SPS's framing of this objective ('People in Scotland's prisons are better supported to follow an individualised pathway towards release, in ways that prioritise public protection') is rooted in the Risk–Need–Responsivity (RNR) model which has become the leading model of offender assessment and treatment in the world.

The new Education & Employability Strategy will reshape all education provision across SPS moving forward, be it estate-wide contractual or locally delivered provision.

This research sits as the first of eight workstreams within the education project plan: Workstream 1: Service user and staff voice.

Key research questions set by SPS for this research were as follows:

- What works well with regards to the education provision that is delivered locally, either by SPS or by partners? What works less well, and why?
- What works well with regards to the education provision delivered across the estate by Fife College? What works less well, and why?
- How accessible / well used is the current suite of provision? e.g. proportion of service users that have engaged in any provision (i.e. attended one or more sessions), proportion of service users that attend provision regularly (i.e. once a week or more), demographics of those attending vs not attending provision, reasons for those not attending provision.
- To what extent is the current suite of provision gender and age appropriate?
- What type of education provision would service users and staff want to see provided during the 2023 – 2028 corporate plan period? & how do service user and staff priorities identified align with the corporate priorities identified in SPS's new 2023 – 2028 corporate plan, including the aspiration to become a more being person-centred, inclusive, trauma-informed, and rights-based organisation?
- What type of education provision would be preferred in terms of the mechanisms of delivery? (Longer vs shorter sessions, more cell-based learning, group size, frequency etc)
- What are the specific technical and logistical implications of the service user priorities identified in terms of SPS needing to commission in-cell digital services/infrastructure and an education service provider(s)?
- What do the views of hard to engage groups – particularly difficult-to-engage and/or neurodivergent individuals – suggest in terms of approaches and forms of provision that would deliver the best possible outcomes for those in our care?

1.2 Overview of approach

SPS's refreshed Learning & Employability Strategy will apply to the entire estate; therefore, this research aimed to ensure that all key prisoner populations and relevant staff were engaged in a way that accurately represents the range of learning and employability ongoing across the Estate.

In line with this, the methodological approach aimed to understand life events and problems faced by those in the care of the service and use inclusive, accessible, and ethical research methods to ensure that staff and prisoner voice is at the centre of this strategy development process.

The methodology was therefore considerate of the need for the research to be suited to a range of audiences and an understanding of the context and environment in which the research takes place. With that in mind, Diffley Partnership adopted both secondary and primary research methods, set out in Figure 1.1 below.

Figure 1.1: Four–stage methodological approach

Stage 1	Data and information immersion, considering an overview of current education provision on the estate
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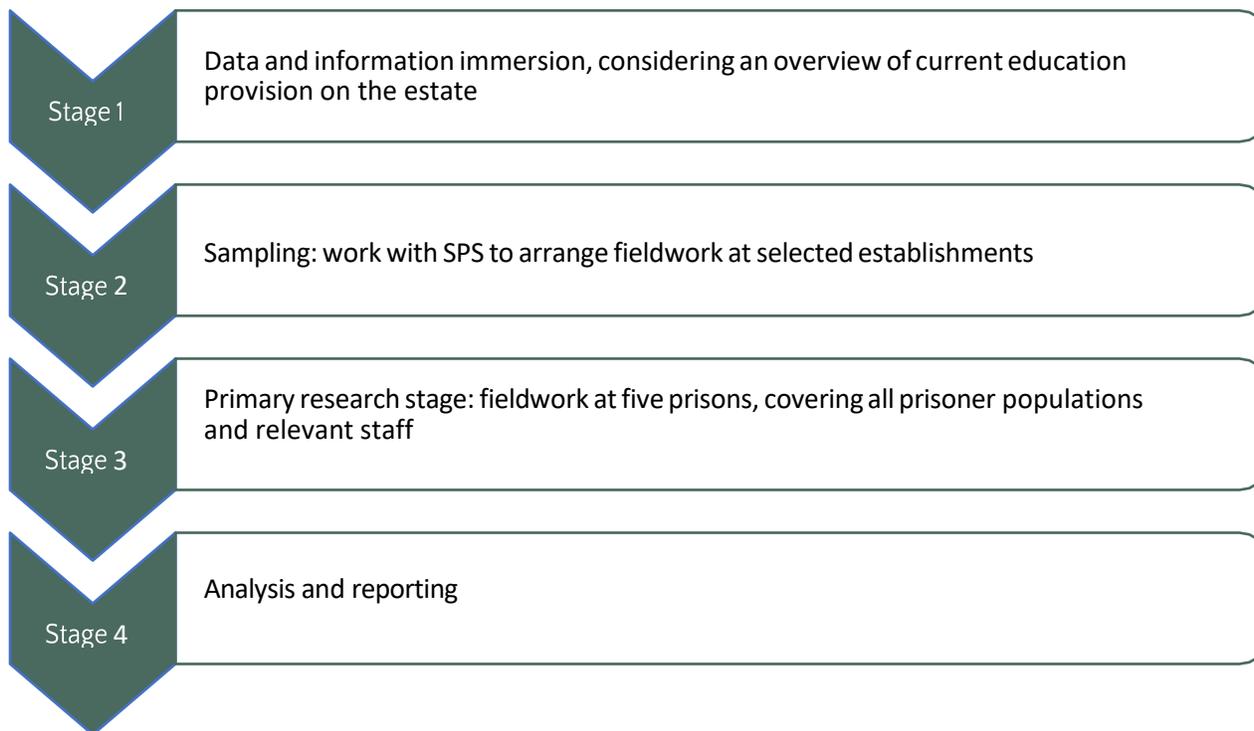
The scope of this assignment encompasses the entirety of SPS's Learning & Employability Strategy, which will be applicable across the entire prison estate. The project adopted a broad interpretation of 'education,' encompassing all forms of learning, skills development, and employability provision. This includes but is not limited to basic skills training, higher education opportunities, both internal and external programs, in-cell and out-of-cell provisions, as well as digital and analogue learning modalities. By adopting this expansive definition, the research aimed to capture the diverse array of educational opportunities available within the prison environment.

1.3 Research stages

Stage 1: Data and Information Immersion

Before starting primary research, it was imperative to establish a solid foundation of understanding regarding the learning and employability provision across the SPS estate. Following inception, SPS provided us with an overview of the learning and skills activity at prisons within the sample.

Upon receiving the overview from SPS, we familiarised ourselves with the data in order to understand the provision and rates of engagement at establishments.

Stage 2: Sampling

Following an initial meeting, SPS proposed that Diffley Partnership attend the following establishments:

- Polmont
- Edinburgh
- Barlinnie
- Low Moss
- Perth

These establishments were selected as they allowed us to interview prisoners covering a cross-section of experiences and sentence types, including but not limited to:

- Short and long-term prisoners
- Young offenders
- Female prisoners
- Mainstream and protection (both offence and non-offence protection) prisoners
- Prisoners on remand
- Those engaged and not engaged in education provision.

We also conducted interviews and focus groups with staff at these establishments.

Stage 3: Qualitative research with service users and staff

The main focus of this work was the primary research conducted to establish testimony from service users and staff at the above mentioned prisons.

We conducted the research in such a way that we ensured the following ethical considerations were met:
- participants are safe,
- researchers are safe,
- research is valid (objectivity and integrity),
- research is lawful and transparent,
- research is inclusive and respectful,

We undertook face-to-face visits in 5 prisons. We deployed two researchers at each prison, mixing our team of four researchers between prisons to ensure efficiency benefits and capturing the benefits of being able to exchange ideas during analysis through having shared experiences. We conducted small focus groups or interviews with staff and service users at each prison.

At the planning stage, we considered the following:
- ensuring that we fit in with the daily routine arrangements that make prisons tick;
- ensuring an atmosphere of cooperation and partnership during the visits, ensuring all participants engage in a spirit of working together to achieve shared goals,
- ensuring that time for discussion in sessions is maximised so that all participants get the opportunity to share views, listen and reflect,
- where possible, and with the permission of all involved, ensuring that discussions could be recorded (via audio or notes),

We worked the research around the routines and functions of each establishment and undertook preparatory work with the SPS to allow for establishments to organise a number of sessions that they could accommodate with staff and service users to contribute to the research.

Table 1.1 presents the number of groups or interviews carried out at each establishment.

Table 1.1: Research Participants and Locations

Establishment	Service Users	Staff
Polmont	2 Groups:	1 staff group

![Diffley Partnership logo]

	• Females	
	• Young Offenders	
Low Moss	2 prisoner groups: • Protection • Non-Offence Protection	4 staff interviews with 5 members of staff
Barlinnie	3 prisoner groups	2 staff interviews
Perth	3 Groups: • Long-Term prisoners (mix of engaged and unengaged in education) • Remand • Offence Protection	1 staff interview
Edinburgh	2 Groups: • Mix of mainstream prisoners including some on remand 3 interviews with prisoners not engaged in education, non-offence protection.	1 staff group

We produced bespoke Discussion Guides for research with staff and service users (see Appendices 1 and 2). The guides covered key themes, including:

- What works well and less well with current provision,
- Accessibility,
- Appropriateness for age and gender,
- Types of provision desired over next corporate plan period and mechanism of delivery,
- Technical and logistical implications of priorities,
- Views of hard to engage groups.

Stage 4: Analysis and reporting

Where permission was granted, audio recordings were made by a member of the research team.
Selective transcriptions were made from these audio recordings.
Notes were taken by a member of the research team in all sessions.

These notes and transcriptions were input into software QDA Miner. This software was used to help researchers organise and code the qualitative data. Key themes were identified relating to:

- Purpose of education and learning
- Benefits of education and learning
- Awareness of provision
- Views on accessibility of provision
- Views on availability of provision
- Experiences of learning provision
- Views on future provision

Sub-themes were also identified as qualitative text was analysed. This thematic approach was utilised further at the reporting stage. The report follows a structure relating to the themes and integrates participant voice by way of quotes. The report does not identify any research participants, but instead indicates whether views were expressed by staff or prisoners or both.

2. Learning and Employability Context

2.1 Introduction

The primary objective of this research project was to inform the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) policy and practice as it transitions into its new corporate planning period spanning from 2023 to 2028. During this period, SPS aims to adopt an evidence-based approach to understanding the role of learning, skills development, and employability programs, including digital education, in facilitating the achievement of personal goals among individuals under its care. This includes endeavours to ensure that the needs of these individuals are adequately addressed and that risks associated with their circumstances are mitigated effectively.

This findings chapter starts by outlining the development of SPS's refreshed learning and employability strategy. Next, findings from research participants are included. Their views on the purpose of education and learning in prison settings are presented. Then their views on the benefits of education. Lastly, their comments on comparisons across prisons.

2.2 Purpose of education and learning

The perceived purpose of education and skills training varied among staff and service users, but both groups recognised its inherent value.

Service users often emphasised the importance of tailoring education towards life after prison, highlighting its linkage with employability and post-prison outcomes. They see education as essential not only for acquiring skills relevant to reintegration into society but also for personal growth and development. Many also discussed that acquiring such skills could be pivotal in fostering the conditions for them in the community to reduce their chance of re-offending. In addition, education was seen to offer a pathway towards rehabilitation, providing purpose, improving standard of living, and instilling confidence.

Often service users described the immediate benefits of spending time on learning, and the potential use post release. For example:

> "I think it comes down to trying to prevent re-offending, because if we are training people inside the establishment with jobs that they can support themselves, things to do to keep themselves busy rather than doing nothing, sitting around…you have something to focus on, it helps prevent you from re-offending." (Prisoner, Female)

> "When I was outside, I didn't read a lot. I've got kids, he's getting to school age. When I get out, I can help my son." (Prisoner, Remand)

Productive use of time in custody was also frequently highlighted by service users, for example:

> "Now I have the time, then why not use it for education? Push myself, see how far I can go, or what I could do." (Prisoner, Remand)

Additionally, many reported the benefits of taking part in education provision for their mental health and allowing for time out of their cells which they saw as paramount to making their experience in custody more manageable.

Staff members, while acknowledging the significance of education, tended to prioritise its role in preventing re-offending. They viewed education as a means to equip individuals with the skills necessary for employment upon release, thereby reducing the likelihood of recidivism. Additionally, staff recognised the transformative impact of education on individuals' lives, including improvements in basic skills, confidence, and outlook on the future. For example:

> "Education in prison is about providing an opportunity for individuals to become something different." (Staff)

In summary, education and skills training within the prison environment were seen as essential components of rehabilitation efforts. These programs not only provide practical skills but also offer opportunities for personal growth and self-improvement. They serve as a means for individuals to redirect their focus, occupy their time productively, and strive for a better future. Moreover, education in prison is viewed as a way to positively impact families and communities by empowering individuals to make positive changes in their lives.

2.3 Benefits of education

Service users expressed a nuanced perspective on the role of education in prisons, particularly regarding its connection to improving employment outcomes. While they advocate for stronger links between education and employability, they also speak positively about the intrinsic value of the educational experience itself and the benefits this had on their mental health.

> "Meeting others, good to interact with people, not supposed to sit in a cell all day, good to get out and about." (Prisoner, Young Offender)

For many service users, education becomes a sanctuary within the confines of the prison, where they experience kindness and appreciation and a positive atmosphere within their establishment that could be absent elsewhere.

> "First place anyone was nice to me. First place someone said thank you to me. People saying thank you in prison is kind of few and far between, especially from staff and stuff sometimes. I look forward to coming to education…even though I wasn't getting the qualifications I needed, I still go because I can go to a nice environment for an hour." (Prisoner, Protection)

Moreover, service users highlighted the enjoyable aspects of education, emphasising its social dimension as a refreshing departure from the monotony of daily routines in confinement. Engaging in educational activities was seen to offer a sense of escape and a break from the otherwise stringent environment of the jail. Some individuals even found avenues for personal growth and self-expression

through activities like music, demonstrating the transformative potential of education and skills opportunities within the prison system.

Interaction with peers in education and skills settings was also seen to have positive impact on relationships within the prison community. Many reflected the potential for these relationships to contribute to a more harmonious atmosphere within the prison and serve as a mechanism for diffusing tensions that may arise in other contexts.

> "It's great for building relationships, because when you're coming into education, you don't have any control over the people you're sat in the classroom with…you might find that you're not meshing well with somebody when they're around you [in the hall] but suddenly you get them in an education classroom and you're having a pleasant conversation and it kinda helps diffuse things from what's happening." (Prisoner, Female)

Overall, service users recognised the multifaceted benefits of education in prison beyond its instrumental value in enhancing employability. It serves as a source of enjoyment, personal development, and social connection, offering moments of respite and opportunities for growth within an otherwise challenging environment.

2.4 Comparison across prisons

Service users within the prison system voiced concerns regarding the lack of consistency observed across different establishments. Despite being governed by overarching policies set by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS), discrepancies in the implementation of these policies have been noted, leading to varying experiences for prisoners.

A recurrent theme highlighted by service users is the disparity in educational opportunities depending on the location of the prison. Participants noted differences in provision and emphasis on learning between institutions.

> "It's weird how the jails are run [differently] because they're not sticking to SPS policies."
> (Prisoner, Long-Term)

> "Every jail you go to, they run it differently. They should all have the same kind of structure."
> (Prisoner, Long-Term)

Furthermore, the lack of consistency across prisons not only affects the quality of education but also disrupts the continuity of learning for prisoners who are transferred between establishments. The need to readjust to new routines and structures upon relocation impedes the educational progress of individuals and highlights the challenges in maintaining a cohesive learning experience throughout their time in custody.

> "Some jails are quite difficult. I was down in [establishment] last year and I was there for six months and I never got an education once. [It] was a nightmare to get an education. [establishment], you could get in education all the time...here is quite good, you've got a bit of freedom to walk about, you can go into the different classes, it's quite well run here." (Prisoner, Non-Offence Protection)

In essence, the discrepancy in the provision of services across different prisons underscores the need for adherence to the rights and opportunities of service users to access learning and skills provision to ensure equitable access to education and other essential services for all prisoners across the estate.

Examples of good practice

Service users' reflections on inconsistencies in provision across different establishments also included examples of particularly good practice in certain prisons.

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has provided an overview of the development of the Scottish Prison Service's refreshed Learning & Employability Strategy, shedding light on the multifaceted perspectives regarding the purpose and benefits of education within prison settings.

The research underscores the perceived pivotal role of education in facilitating personal growth, skills development, and reintegration into society. Indeed, both service users and staff recognise education's significance in preventing re-offending and fostering positive changes in individuals' lives.

Furthermore, the chapter highlights the nuanced perspectives of service users on the intrinsic value of education beyond its instrumental role in improving employment outcomes, emphasising its role as a source of solace, personal development, and social connection within the confines of the prison environment. However, concerns regarding the lack of consistency in educational opportunities across different prisons underscore the need for uniformity in policy implementation to ensure equitable access to learning and skills provision for all individuals under the care of the Scottish Prison Service.

3. Engagement with learning provision

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focusses on findings from this primary research on engagement with learning provision. This is structured into sections on awareness, accessibility, and availability of education provision in prisons. The chapter concludes with a short summary of relevant points around substance use in prisons.

3.2 Awareness

This section outlines findings in relation to awareness of education provision in SPS prisons. The primary findings with regards to engagement were around the communication of learning and skills opportunities within establishments.

Awareness of education provision within prisons emerged as a critical factor influencing engagement. Participants highlighted communication breakdowns both within the prison system and between prisons and external agencies.

Findings examine how much awareness varies, depending on the information and inductions that service users receive. We also outline how service users often rely on informal channels to find out about education due to a lack of information, and how proactive engagement from education staff in halls could improve awareness of opportunities available. Lastly, we discuss how limited information about, and awareness of education can act as a barrier to engagement.

Communication as a whole

Communication breakdowns and disconnects within the prison system were discussed in two primary contexts, shedding light on significant barriers to accessing education and broader systemic issues affecting service provision.

Firstly, service users and staff alike highlighted limited practical communication between hall staff and education staff as a critical hindrance to accessing educational opportunities. This disconnect was

viewed as systematic, reflecting a broader gap between halls and education services. Participants emphasised the necessity for better integration between the education provided by external entities such as Fife College and local provisions within the prison system. Staff members acknowledged the impact of this disconnect on access to education, stressing the potential role of officers in encouraging prisoner participation.

> "Hall staff don't know anything about the education and Fife college don't come down." (Prisoner, Non-Offence Protection)

> "I think there's also a perception that education is something that Fife do, it shouldn't be that. They're the lead on providing learning centre [provision], but I don't think there should be anything stopping learning on the halls, with the staff and staff engagement [in addition to the learning centre]. If you've got officers who are passionate and invested in delivering something it will generally get done...they can also be key in encouraging people to come [to the learning centre]." (Staff)

Secondly, service users highlighted a more extensive lack of communication and coordination across the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) as a significant barrier to education provision. This lack of joined-up thinking was perceived as hindering not only educational opportunities within prison but also the potential for leveraging acquired education for positive outcomes post-release. Instances were cited where education undertaken during time in custody was not recognised or utilised effectively upon reintegration into society due to poor communication between prison authorities and external agencies such as social workers.

The impact of this communication gap extended beyond the confines of the prison system, with participants noting similar challenges across the broader justice system. This lack of communication was seen as contributing to misconceptions and barriers to reintegration, with individuals facing difficulties in accessing further education or employment opportunities due to a failure to recognise their educational achievements and efforts within the prison system.

"I've done construction, I've done education, I've done a lot of stuff and this is where the communication part of it never [happens]…I've done whole courses, I've done woodwork, but…I've had a social worker sitting in front of me saying 'you're still high risk for education and employment'. There's a lot of guys getting involved in education and recovery and getting involved in courses and the communication is not getting through to the social workers. There's a lot more communication needed between the people making decisions and education because there are boys trying their best in here…and they're just tarring them with the same brush." (Prisoner, Long-Term)

Therefore, addressing communication challenges within and beyond the prison system is imperative for ensuring equitable access to education and facilitating successful reintegration into society post-release. Efforts to improve communication and coordination between different stakeholders within the prison system and across relevant external agencies are essential for promoting positive outcomes for individuals involved in the justice system.

Variability in information dissemination

Participants in the study demonstrated a range of experiences and perspectives regarding their awareness of educational opportunities within the prison system. Some service users expressed frustration and disappointment over the lack of information provided to them regarding available educational programs.

"My experience is I've had no opportunity to go to education and I don't know what's available to me, and also I don't know if I'd be interested in anything that is available to me." (Prisoner, Non-Offence Protection, non-attendee)

Variability in induction experiences

The experience of inductions did vary within prisons, with some service users stating that they had had been well-informed of what education was available and others within the same establishment reporting otherwise.

Some reported minimal induction, including explaining educational opportunities.

> "You only get inducted – supposed to be after your sentence, so I done two remands, so they don't induct you when you're on remand – this is my second sentence and both times I haven't been inducted, supposed to get a handbook, tells you about your rights, your responsibilities, what's available to you, very few people get these books, [which would be very helpful] especially for folk who haven't been in before." (Prisoner, Non-Offence Protection)

Some prisoners did remark that they had been inducted and received the appropriate communications which meant they had a good idea of the offering available from the point that they entered prison. However, some felt there were barriers to follow up on the opportunity for education. For example:

> "When you first came in up to the link centre, there was an option there for education, but once you become convicted as well, they'll send you an invitation for an induction as well…But to try and get a hold of education, you need to speak to the hall staff and they apply for it for you." (Service User, Non-Offence Protection)

We heard more from staff about the induction process for learners after their referral to education provision. They described their 'induction' as an opportunity to assess their current level of learning and skills and create a tailored plan:

> "With the induction process, the first thing we do with everybody that comes to education is we establish their literacy and numeracy levels, and we do a personal development plan, we talk to them, ask how education was in school, have they done any training since etc, all of those questions are asked. And then a plan is put in place and we construct a timetable for them, based on what they want to do." (Staff)

One service user at another establishment highlighted that Barlinnie's approach was positive – improving access by giving service users the opportunity to see the benefits of education beyond the

class content, which could encourage those who initially had little interest in education to engage after all:

> "In Barlinnie, you don't just get an induction, they do a day where you can try basically everything…that helps you because you could say 'well, I don't like music so much but I like the guys that are in it and I think I could learn off them'" (Prisoner, Long-Term)

Reliance on informal channels

Participants who did not feel education featured in their prison inductions noted that they only found out about education via other prisoners, or through attending other activities such as recovery groups.

> "It was mainly word of mouth…The induction isn't great, doesn't go into what's available. It's not highlighted, it's not something that's promoted." (Prisoner, Protection)

Others remarked that literature in the halls on notice boards with regards to these offerings was either lacking or significantly out of date.

> "When in prison, you don't ask, don't get. You have to learn that. But I genuinely think a lot of the time you don't know what to ask for. So, if I don't know what to ask for, how can I ask for it? …eventually, [education staff member] did come and speak to me but it's because I said I'm looking to go to education. If you're a new prisoner and you don't know, then how do you know how to ask for that?" (Prisoner, Protection)

There were a few examples of prisoners in learning explaining how they had either been helped to access education by another prisoner in education or vice versa.

> "What's becoming more and more common is if we go to a class, we're having to ask the teacher to put people's names down, to enlist them for a class, rather than the staff doing it. There's not enough communication between here and the halls." (Prisoner, Long-Term)

Staff corroborated this in some prisons:

> "In my experience, a lot of people getting added to classes will be guys coming down and saying 'oh I told my co-pilot, can you add them to the list for education' so I think it is a lot of kinda word of mouth and people recommending classes and letting them know what's on and stuff." (Staff)

This reliance on informal channels perhaps underscores the need for greater formal awareness-raising of educational opportunities in prisons.

Proactive engagement

Participants suggested that more proactive outreach efforts from education staff could help attract individuals to educational programs. There were some good examples of staff visiting halls such as:

> "I've got a different experience, it was a Fife college education officer, she comes round the halls, [asks for your cell to be opened] and asks you 'what are you doing with yourself, are you active, are you involved in education' [and if not] 'would you like to do something'. She gave me a list, there's an education application form you can fill in from Fife college. I found it was quite open for me, and very helpful" (Prisoner, Protection)

However, the general feeling from prisoners was the education staff don't go to the halls to improve awareness of education. For example:

> "I can honestly say I've never seen anybody from education up that hall, so that's a big problem, why are they not going up that hall to liaise with the hall and say 'I need these people down' …[or] say to people 'do you want to go to education?'" (Prisoner, Long-Term)

Uncertainty and Anxiety

Participants described how the uncertainty surrounding the nature of educational provision was a significant barrier to their engagement. Some expressed concerns about the unfamiliarity of the

educational environment and the potential anxiety it could provoke. They emphasised the need for more information and support to help them navigate this unfamiliar territory.

> "Some people suffer from anxiety and coming out of your comfort zone, down to education, uncertain what it's gonna be like, and how many's gonna be there…" (Prisoner, Non-Offence Protection, non-attendee)

Staff observations corroborated these concerns, noting that many service users were hesitant to engage with education due to negative past experiences. This reluctance stemmed from a variety of factors, including previous failures in traditional classroom settings and a lack of confidence in their academic abilities.

> "A lot of individuals… they've had negative experiences of what it's like to be in a classroom…so maybe they're scared to engage." (Staff).

Moreover, both staff and prisoners pointed out that prisoners often wanted to understand who else was taking part in education and be in classes with them. This may affect their decision to participate positively or negatively depending upon their relationship.

Incentivisation

Moreover, participants discussed the potential benefits of incentivising education attendance as a means to encourage uptake. Suggestions included offering financial incentives to prisoners who participate in educational programs. This approach was seen by service users as a way to motivate individuals who might otherwise be reluctant to engage with education. Although this suggestion was not raised by any staff taking part in this research, service users in other establishments highlighted that similar incentivisation schemes had been used in prison and were successful in improving engagement.

> "We can make quite a bit of cash for doing e-learning modules on the computer – that's another pull factor – and once you're in there you find other stuff to do" (Prisoner, Protection)

3.3 Accessibility

This section explores accessibility of education and skills provision within prisons, examining administrative hurdles, population-specific constraints, and the impact of sentence length.

Administrative

Administrative and communication hurdles pose significant obstacles to accessing education within prisons. Participants noted administrative procedures and decision-making processes as influential factors in access to education. While delays and inconsistencies were acknowledged, there were also instances of efficient enrolment processes, indicating areas where administrative practices could be streamlined for greater accessibility.

Service users and staff frequently encounter issues with booking systems, resulting in missed educational opportunities.

> "There's a massive issue with booking system in this establishment, you could get booked for something but it doesn't go across multiple systems…I could be booked for education but I'm not booked on the computer system for the hall staff to open me up to go for education…there's so many different systems and it does not translate well across all of them... that booking system can be screwed beyond belief in so many ways, and things fall off the system, someone forgets to enter a booking, or they enter it but they don't say they've done it after they've done it and it's not actually on the system… and so the staff won't open your door." (Prisoner, Female)

Accompanying prisoners to education

Many prisoners and staff highlighted instances where prisoners missed classes due to logistical issues, such as not being escorted from their halls due to staff shortages or breakdowns in communication. This lack of escorting often resulted in missed educational opportunities, leaving prisoners frustrated and deprived of attending their classes.

> "For me, I didn't refuse, they said to me, no screw was sent down to come and get me…I said to them I need to go for this art class but they said, nobody has been sent down to come and collect you so we can't take you to there and that was a class missed." (Prisoner, Long-Term)

Additionally, some prisoners recounted being wrongly assumed as non-participants by education staff, leading to their removal from classes based on attendance records alone, without proper inquiry into their absence.

> "If you miss two sessions, you get taken off. There should be a thing in place where teacher phones up to ask why they're not there, if they've got a valid reason not to be there, don't take them off it." (Prisoner, Non-Offence protection)

Moreover, staff members noted that this breakdown in communication was indicative of a broader issue: the perception that education and skills attendance were not prioritised by residential staff within the establishments. There seemed to be a disconnect between the importance of education and its execution on the ground, with some hall staff failing to recognise or support prisoners' educational endeavours adequately.

> "There have been occasions where entire flats or sections have apparently refused to come to education and the staff have just been like 'yeah, no attendance and they're not coming'. That sounds suspect. That should ring alarm bells. You would question what's happening on that landing with the staff enabling prisoner access. It's seen as 'nah you're not going to your education today'…for whatever reason." (Staff)

> "Better communication with the hall [is needed] so that people don't miss out when they're actually meant to be in education and hall staff aren't stopping that. It's the staff on the hall, they're the ones who tend to pick and choose [who can go]." (Prisoner, Remand)

Population–specific access

Some prisoners reported distinctive barriers when trying to access education, facing restricted opportunities and resources compared to other parts of the prison population.

For instance, individuals on remand expressed frustration at being excluded from certain work parties and educational opportunities due to their classification as high risk. This exclusion not only deprives them of potential skills and experiences but also perpetuates a cycle of limited access to educational pathways.

> "We don't get that being on remand…we don't get offered that [the opportunity to take part in certain work parties, such as Domestic Appliances, which would be helpful post-prison] because we're considered high risk…" (Prisoner, Remand)

Staff members acknowledged the challenges of engaging with the remand population effectively, recognising the need for tailored approaches to address their unique circumstances and ensure their educational needs are met.

> "We need to learn a way to better engage with our remand population who can be quite transient but are in our care." (Staff)

Similarly, women prisoners highlighted disparities in access to educational opportunities, particularly regarding work parties and certifications, which appeared to be more directed towards the male population. This gendered imbalance in resource allocation further marginalises adult women, leaving them with fewer avenues for skill development and personal growth.

Furthermore, funding priorities within the prison system seemed to favour initiatives targeting younger offenders, leaving adult women with inadequate support for educational endeavours beyond basic provisions.

> "When it comes to purposeful activities or stuff of that nature [for example, a dance group], that's still very difficult to get access to as an adult female in here, because most of the funding in this establishment is geared toward under 25's and most of the women population are not in

that age bracket…It's a lot of that nature of things where the different extra stuff that could be done, there's no money for adult women, it's all towards YO's." (Prisoner, Female)

Sentence length emerged as another significant barrier to educational access, with individuals on shorter sentences feeling discouraged from participating in educational programs due to the perceived lack of time to complete courses effectively. This sentiment was echoed by both long-term prisoners and those not currently engaged in education, illustrating the deterrent effect of only being able to attend for a short period each week on their desire to participate in learning and skills activities.

"If I was doing a long-term sentence, I'd be more interested in having more things to do [e.g. education]...only get in to do an education course one or two hours a week so I wouldn't be able to do even one module in the time I have left, it's more of a long term thing." (Prisoner, Short-Term)

In essence, these challenges underscore the need for a more inclusive and responsive approach to education within prisons, one that addresses the unique needs and circumstances of all prisoner demographics and ensures equitable access to educational opportunities for personal development and rehabilitation.

3.4 Availability

This section explores the availability of opportunities for learning and skills. Challenges including competition for spaces, staffing shortages and implications of segregation are included.

Competition for spaces

Service users described competition for space in education classes, and waiting long times to access education, highlighting the popularity and perceived value of such opportunities. Despite the evident popularity, they highlighted a paradoxical situation where classes often operated well below their capacity, indicating that issues related to awareness and accessibility may be impeding meaningful engagement.

Another service user lamented the inconsistency between the scarcity of available slots and the willingness of prisoners to participate, questioning the rationale behind allowing classes to remain half-empty while individuals eager to learn are left waiting for their turn.

> "[Prisoners] are begging to come down to education, I don't get how somebody can condone classes being half-full and then say to people you need to wait to come down to education." (Prisoner, Long-Term)

Moreover, a participant at another establishment suggested a potential solution to address the issue of availability by referencing the wellness hub in Barlinnie, which took proactive measures to provide alternative courses and activities to prisoners awaiting access to formal education. This initiative demonstrated a practical approach to mitigate delays and enhance engagement by offering supplementary learning opportunities outside traditional classroom settings.

> "The wellness hub in Barlinnie basically said 'while these guys aren't getting education, we'll bring them down for courses, for psychology, for art, music', and they basically streamlined it…to make up for the delay." (Prisoner, Remand)

These accounts shed light on the complex dynamics surrounding educational access within prison environments, emphasising the need for proactive measures to address barriers to engagement and optimise utilisation of available resources to meet the diverse educational needs of prisoners.

Staffing Shortages

Concerns regarding staffing shortages and their detrimental impact on educational provision within prison facilities were brought to the forefront by various participants, highlighting the critical nature of this issue. Of particular concern was the shortage of teaching staff, compounded by the challenge of maintaining adequate class sizes to accommodate the educational needs of service users.

> "It's good but teachers retire, they never get replaced, so we lose education classes. They are short-staffed, there is not enough, teachers cover multiple subjects." (Prisoner, Remand)

One service user voiced their frustration over the lack of continuity in educational services, attributing it to the failure to replace retiring teachers. This chronic understaffing not only results in the loss of educational opportunities but also places undue pressure on the remaining staff members who are often stretched thin, having to cover multiple subjects to meet the demand for instruction.

Moreover, limitations on class sizes were identified as a significant barrier to educational access, with the availability of educational spaces being contingent upon staffing levels within the prison as a whole. As one participant pointed out, the maximum capacity for classes is determined by the number of officers present, underscoring the interplay between staffing shortages and the physical constraints of the prison environment.

> "Quite limited on space in this jail, you can only get so many bodies in. Most of the time that's down to the SPS cos if there's only one officer there, they're only allowed 20 people in, if there's two, that's 40 [prisoners allowed in], so it depends if SPS are short staffed." (Prisoner, Non-Offence Protection)

While the challenges posed by staffing shortages are substantial, there were glimmers of optimism in the form of proposed solutions. Suggestions were made to invest in staffing resources to address the shortfall and bolster educational access for prisoners. By increasing staffing levels, prisons could not only alleviate capacity constraints but also pave the way for the development of more diverse and specialised educational programs tailored to the unique needs and interests of the prison population.

Segregation

Segregation policies within prisons present both challenges and opportunities for education and skills access, reflecting a balance between security considerations and inclusive practices. While segregation policies may limit access for certain groups, they also serve to address security concerns and facilitate tailored programming for specific populations.

> "Females get laundry [so] we can't do laundry. Females get the cooks as well." (Prisoner, Young Offender)

> "For us in [prison name], our restrictions are always going to be staffing and the timetable...I don't know how you would uncomplicate our prison population. When [hall] went from females to males, that removed one group [meant one group no longer had to be catered to, and removed a complication]." (Staff)

Participants acknowledged the need for balancing these considerations while exploring opportunities for greater integration and inclusivity where feasible. Staff participants highlighted how lack of resources (space and staff) further exacerbates the impacts of segregation on availability of classes, for example:

> "We need this education centre to be double or triple the size, the ability to have sex offenders' classes running on one level and mainstream on the next..." (Staff)

However, a lack of segregation for some populations was also mentioned as a barrier in the case of sharing with offence protection prisoners. One service user who no longer attended any learning or skills provision described how mixing with protection prisoners put him off attending:

> "Non-offence protection would have to go down to education with sex offenders, that's off-putting, that's a barrier...I'd go to education if it wasn't with [the sex offenders]." (Prisoner, Non-offence protection, non-attendee)

3.5 Lack of funding and resources

The inadequacy of funding and resources emerged as a recurrent theme affecting various aspects of learning and skills provision within the prison system. Participants consistently highlighted the detrimental impact of limited financial support on staffing levels, course offerings, and access to materials necessary for educational activities.

> "Problem is they just need to spend more money at the end of the day, if they wanted to be doing more education in prisons, then they would do it" (Prisoner, Long-Term)

"I find that education in here is just a box ticking exercise, it's just so people can say we do something but they really don't put any emphasis on it. They don't put any money into it." (Prisoner, Protection)

One prevalent concern among participants was the struggle to attract and retain staff within the prison education system due to resource constraints. The scarcity of funding not only impedes recruitment efforts but also affects the overall quality of educational services available to prisoners.

Moreover, the lack of financial resources often translates into tangible limitations in educational programming, particularly in terms of access to materials and equipment. Instances were cited where prisoners were unable to participate in certain educational activities, such as art programs, due to the unavailability of essential materials.

The issue of funding extends beyond the prison's internal resources to encompass external partnerships and programs. Participants recounted instances where external initiatives, such as radio production programs, faced disruptions or cancellations due to staffing shortages or other operational constraints within the prison. Despite the availability of funding for such initiatives, the erratic nature of staffing and operational decisions within the prison led to missed opportunities and reduced access to educational programs.

"Glass Theatre in Dundee did a radio production programme with the women…they received a six week funding grant…unfortunately we ended up having less than what we should have had because [on one day that they were in] the officer that ran the performing arts was redeployed over to another hall. So we weren't allowed to go but because the guys had shown up to the jail that counts as a session for their funding so [we lost that session]..even when there are little bits of funding you still are at the mercy of the jail and what ends up going on in the establishment, and you lose out on things like that." (Prisoner. Female)

Overall, participants stressed the urgent need for increased funding to address the myriad challenges facing education provision within prisons. The lack of financial resources not only hampers the delivery of educational services but also exacerbates existing issues, such as the failure to prioritise education within the prison system.

Moreover, participants perceived there to be a disparity in funding allocation across different regions, highlighting the need for a more equitable distribution of resources to ensure uniform access to educational opportunities for prisoners throughout the country.

3.6 Substances in prisons

Service users and staff also highlighted a number of concerns around substance use, and the interaction between these issues and education provision.

One service user highlighted how the failure to provide purposeful activity, such as education, to service users could lead service users to use substances in prisons – even if they had not done so outwith prison:

> "I've seen a big rise in people who used to not take anything [drugs] and get on with it, they used to be alright…Someone who used to be fit and healthy, and they're struggling now, because they've got nothing to do. I was one of those boys a few years ago and I started to struggle a wee bit because there's nothing to do." (Prisoner, Long-Term)

Service users highlighted how pervasive the substance use culture is in SPS prisons and how this could be mediated by a shift in this culture towards prioritising education, which would simultaneously support education provision and also address the drug issue by providing purpose:

> "There's a tacit approval of drug taking and drug dealing in SPS jails, and there has been kinda since the last time I've been in. Their attitude is if they're taking drugs and we don't have to see it, they're quieter, they're easier to subdue… if they embraced education, which they don't, it would be a massive bonus for them [the officers]" – it would make life easier - "two ways of making life easier [for officers]: you can either make people weak and zombified and leave it at

that or you can let them get educated and be better people so that you deal with them on a common level. They don't want us educated in here, they see it as a threat. There is no rehabilitation." (Prisoner, Remand)

3.7 Conclusion

In examining engagement with education provision in this study, it becomes evident that while there are pockets of positive engagement, significant variability exists across different contexts. The depth of engagement fluctuates depending on factors such as awareness, accessibility, and availability of educational opportunities. Participants consistently highlighted the limited availability of opportunities, with a substantial waiting list often necessitating prioritisation based on various factors.

Overall, engagement with education seemed to be limited not by a lack of interest in education, but rather by challenges outwith service users' control, including awareness of education provision, barriers to accessibility, and limited availability.

Participants highlighted instances of proactive engagement and positive experiences with education programs, underscoring the value and impact of such initiatives. However, this positive engagement is not uniform across all individuals and establishments within the prison system.

There is a perceived need to implement successful strategies from other establishments in prisons where educational programs are not as effective. This may involve increased partnership and communication between institutions to share insights and improve processes like the induction process.

Variability in awareness, stemming from communication breakdowns and reliance on informal channels, contributes to disparities in engagement levels. While some individuals receive adequate information and support, others face hurdles in accessing educational opportunities due to administrative barriers and resource constraints. Therefore, addressing communication challenges within and beyond the prison system is imperative for ensuring equitable access to education and facilitating successful reintegration into society post-release.

Moreover, accessibility challenges and population-specific constraints further contribute to the variability in engagement levels. Remand prisoners, for example, encounter unique challenges in accessing education compared to other prisoner demographics. Additionally, the availability of educational spaces is constrained by factors such as competition for spots, staffing shortages, and segregation policies.

Furthermore, there is a suggestion to frame education as a non-negotiable part of the daily routine to improve engagement. Implementing incentives to participate in education and improving booking systems to prevent access to classes from being hindered are also recommended steps. Developing processes to accommodate valid reasons for non-attendance without penalisation are essential for fostering a supportive educational environment. Short workshops or courses could be made available while individuals wait for formal education, providing continuous learning opportunities and increasing the chances of engagement once places become available.

Despite these challenges, the presence of proactive outreach efforts and positive experiences with education programs highlight the potential for fostering greater engagement within the prison system. By addressing systemic barriers, enhancing communication, and allocating resources equitably, it is possible to promote more consistent and meaningful engagement with education provision across all levels of the prison system.

4. Experiences of Learning Provision

4.1 Introduction

This findings chapter contains experiences of participants of learning and skills provision during their time in the prison environment.

In each section, variations are highlighted such as gender, age-group or prison setting. These are aimed to provide a sense of the variables at play, rather than a comprehensive analysis of the experience of all provision across all SPS establishments.

4.2 Overall experience of provision

Before delving into the specific challenges and limitations of the learning provision, it is important to acknowledge the positive aspects highlighted by participants. Those engaged in education generally expressed positive sentiments towards their experiences. They found attending learning and skills activities to be a positive endeavour overall, appreciating the opportunity to learn and develop new skills.

Participants also generally praised the quality of teaching, both from Fife College and local provision within the prison. They felt supported in their learning, with tutors offering assistance and guidance. However, despite the supportive environment, frustrations arose due to communication issues, which were perceived to potentially hinder their progression. Additionally, participants felt that there was not enough time allocated to these activities, indicating a desire for more dedicated learning opportunities.

These positive aspects serve as a foundation upon which to build improvements in the provision of education within the prison system. Understanding the strengths of the current system is crucial in devising strategies to address its shortcomings and enhance the overall learning experience for participants.

4.3 Level and breadth of provision

Participants consistently highlighted that there exists a commendable range of educational level and breadth of provision. This demonstrates an effort to accommodate varying learning needs and facilitate educational progression within the system.

However, prisoners articulated a common sentiment regarding the limitations they encounter in their educational journey. They expressed frustration at reaching a plateau where they feel stuck due to the absence of opportunities for further advancement. Despite the availability of courses up to Level 5, there is a notable absence of provision beyond this threshold, leaving prisoners yearning for more intellectually stimulating and challenging educational experiences.

> "There is only so much you can do. There is a point where you're stuck at one point: you run out of the modules, you run out of the levels, or you run out of the books, the learning materials Would be good to have something new, something more." (Prisoner, Remand)

> "I haven't done education in this jail, I fell away from it 7 years ago. The stuff they were teaching was the same stuff they were teaching in secondary school. I was trying to tell them: 'I've done all this'." (Prisoner, Long-Term)

Staff members echoed these sentiments, expressing their desire to provide higher-level courses but being constrained by staffing shortages and resource limitations. The reduction in Level 6 courses due to staffing constraints has exacerbated this issue, leaving both staff and prisoners feeling restricted in their educational pursuits.

> "The staff, the tutor staff are limited to teaching only up to level 5, I've never been involved in any education institution that says you can go so far but we're not going to teach you any further than that. There are opportunities to do level 6, it's incredibly limited and it's been reduced quite dramatically in the last couple of years because of staffing." (Staff)

Open University was seen as a good opportunity, but one with much competition between prisoners, and limited places.

> "Another thing about education in the jail is to make the Open University grants more freely available to people. I've been in the jail four times I've only met one guy that's done open university…" (Prisoner, Non-offence protection, non-attendee)

Furthermore, participants highlighted challenges arising from the lack of resources and staffing constraints, which impacted the delivery of education across different levels. The shortage of staff meant that individuals at various educational stages often found themselves in the same class, creating difficulties for both progression and engagement. Additionally, the lack of funding not only limited the breadth of educational offerings but also constrained the availability of essential educational materials or ability to provide certain classes and activity at all.

> "Done first year again in [another prison]…I enjoyed it. But obviously teachers all changed, they took away history and philosophy." (Prisoner, Long-Term)

> "And they lost several tutors during COVID…there used to be a photography course, history classes, there were all sorts of other things you could get involved with, and it's all stopped. And they just don't have the staff and they don't have the funding, to put more people in." (Prisoner, Female)

Staffing issues also contribute to a lack of specialised instruction, with educators stretched across multiple subjects and sometimes lacking the necessary qualifications to provide comprehensive instruction or appropriate accreditation. The perceived lack of funding exacerbates these challenges, limiting the scope of educational provision and impeding the acquisition of necessary accreditations for both staff and prisoners.

> "Teachers leave and instead of getting new staff they just give another teacher that class…I wouldn't say he [the maths teacher] is very qualified for the English classes." (Prisoner, Remand)

A perceived lack of funding was identified as the source of this issue too with it being perceived to limit the breadth of the education provision, the opportunities people could have, and the educational materials available:

> "I work between the performing arts department and our media centre and neither of those have anybody in there that can find funding to give them the training to be able to administrate SVQ's for that, but it requires the jail to spend the funding to train the officers to then administer the SVQ's inside of here, and there's no funding for that right now." (Prisoner, Remand)

> "There's just not enough funding going into it, and this is why everybody's got nothing to do. You're getting posters took off you these days because you can't get paper." (Prisoner, Long-Term)

4.4 Link with employability

One of the key themes that emerged in discussions with participants about their experiences of education was the need to link prison education with employability. Participants frequently expressed how the current education provision could be improved if it included more employable skills, such as manual trade skills or modern apprenticeships, as it was seen to be the route that most prisoners would ultimately go down post-release. Bricklaying, plastering, tiling, painting, basic carpentry skills, and car mechanics were highlighted as examples.

Many participants expressed how valuable it would be to know they could potentially get a job more easily after leaving prison.

> "Guys are getting outside and getting 46 quid and then they're telling you you've not got a house, there's nothing there for you, but if you've got a trade in here like painting or decorating, something productive, you could even fix a washing machine, you could make a lot of money." (Prisoner, Long-Term)

As noted above, a major concern expressed by participants was that those teaching classes or hosting work parties did not hold the relevant accreditations to issue qualifications to those taking part in education or work parties. This was considered a particularly pertinent concern in the context of ensuring that prison education led to employment outwith prison.

> "The problem we've got [in joinery] is that the teacher is a joiner by trade but he's not got the teaching qualification and it doesn't look like he's gonna get it any time soon." (Prisoner, Long-Term)

It was suggested that greater interaction between education and work parties would allow education to be more tailored towards employability, and work party activities to lead to more qualifications. Staff highlighted how greater Fife College presence at the work parties might be a way forward with this, noting that Fife College have courses that complement the skills learned in work parties and could lead to qualifications in those skills. Service users echoed this, querying why Fife College could not introduce SVQ's for skilled trades.

Service users also provided another perspective: because the jobs in prison do not reflect what is taught in education classes, a lot of education provision is only theoretical – but the two could be linked so that jobs involved the skills learned in education.

> "A person might want to do something like construction, but it will only be in a theoretical way, they don't have the practical ways to do that, so maybe if the jobs that are offered within the prison system can reflect the subjects that are offered, probably there [could be a link]." (Prisoner, Long-Term)

The possibility of prisons supporting service users to make connections with employers and companies on the outside before they left prison was suggested on a number of occasions. Service users discussed how connecting prisoners with potential employers would also provide them with an incentive to take part in education and work parties.

Service users were cognisant of how their criminal records would affect their employability, and their discussions often made reference to these restrictions – for example, in highlighting occupations they could do and companies they could work for, despite their record.

In line with this, service users and staff emphasised the need for greater engagement with companies via schemes which involve companies coming into prisons to train service users with Timpsons being mentioned as an example. This benefits service users, by providing them with employable training; the companies involved, by providing them with a willing cohort of potential staff; and the prison system, by freeing up funding that would have been spent on training to be spent elsewhere.

Service users mentioned companies that already have policies in place to employ people with criminal records, and suggested that such companies could be better engaged with by the SPS – encouraging them to conduct interviews with prisoners before they leave prison for example.

The need for prisoners to be supported in making connections with employers was echoed by education staff, who felt that the prison system discouraged this. The connection between not having a job after leaving prison and reoffending was also noted during these discussions.

> "There's a huge gap in terms of where we can encourage them to go when they leave prison. [connecting people with employers is] not encouraged, we're not meant to do that. There's a huge gap that the prison service and the government need to look at in terms of its policies." (Staff)

Other post-prison outcomes were also discussed in a similar way: service users and staff discussed how useful it would be if education in prison could be continued outside. At present, service users reported that the classes done in prison do not allow them to go directly into further education, either because the level is too low, or because they were unable to complete a course outside that they had begun in prison. The value of this in preventing re-offending was also noted. Staff echoed this, expressing the value of service users being able to continue their education on the outside.

4.5 Link with continuing education

Other post-prison outcomes were also discussed in a similar way: service users and staff discussed how useful it would be if education in prison could be continued outside. At present, service users reported that the classes done in prison do not allow them to go directly into further education, either because the level is too low, or because they were unable to complete a course outside that they had begun in prison. The value of this in preventing re-offending was also noted. Staff echoed this, expressing the value of service users being able to continue their education on the outside.

One service user succinctly expressed the value of continuing education post-prison – how it could both improve appetite for education within prisons and prevent re-offending:

> "A lot more people would take up education if they knew they had something to go out the door for, socialising, [working with people], getting into college… maybe get a program to let people get into education straight out the door…
>
> …If you gave these boys an opportunity to walk out the door into college and gave them a purpose, you'd see a difference in the amount of people coming back because it's putting them in education, putting them in a social group instead of going out and selling drugs. You're sending boys out the door with no purpose." (Prisoner, Long-Term)

This perspective resonates deeply with the idea that education should not be a standalone experience confined to the prison environment but rather a stepping stone to a brighter future outside. Young offenders and staff in another prison echoed this sentiment, stressing the importance of education in preparing prisoners for continued learning and personal development post-release.

Relatedly, many participants highlighted the value of support in preparing for life post-prison generally, particularly considering the challenges some people face upon leaving prison, with no home, job, or community to return to. Service users expressed the need for classes that would teach them about the housing system, their rights and entitlements, and other practical issues, as well as more support generally as people are getting ready to leave prison.

4.6 Varied needs

Addressing Additional Support Needs

Some service users commended the efforts of tutors in accommodating diverse learning difficulties. However, challenges persist, notably in catering to learners at varying proficiency levels within the same class. Participants highlight the importance of core literacy and numeracy skills, emphasising the necessity for tailored support to facilitate effective learning outcomes.

> "There's different people with different aspects of learning difficulties. I think the tutors here are great when it comes to [that]." (Prisoner, Non-Offence Protection)

> "I suffer from dyslexia and they couldn't be any better with us." (Prisoner, Non-Offence Protection)

Moreover, historical diagnoses of conditions like ADHD and dyslexia present complexities in identifying learning needs, suggesting a need for careful assessment processes to avoid mislabelling and subsequent disengagement from education.

> "They don't always want to do it [the screening process to establish learning needs]. They will come in and say 'I was told I had ADHD, that I'm on the spectrum, and I have dyslexia' and when you try and unpick it, they possibly don't but they've actually been left with the belief [that they do]. I curse the phrase ADHD because you can guarantee that virtually everybody through there has been diagnosed [with ADHD] usually by someone who's entirely unqualified to do it…but it leaves a mark on them and their education experience. Being labelled can cause people to avoid education." (Staff)

Furthermore, physical health issues pose additional barriers to learning, as some individuals struggle to attend classes due to medical conditions and the side effects of medication.

Gender Disparities

Some female participants voiced concerns regarding a perceived discrepancy in educational opportunities between male and female offenders. Women felt they had limited vocational training options that directly translate to employability post-release.

> "I would say that the current offering does not work well for the females, for the boys it works fantastic, there's a lot of stuff on for the boys, there's a lot of programmes, there's a lot of activities, there's a lot of courses, for females there's very little." (Prisoner, Female)

The disparity in vocational qualifications further exacerbates gender inequalities, with male offenders afforded opportunities in fields like scaffolding and construction, while female offenders are limited to fewer options such as forklift operation.

> "The SVQ's are only there because of the work parties having been boys to start with…The boys basically get put through scaffolding, how to measure, [various other vocational courses], they could go straight out and straight into scaffolding, building, roofing, stuff like that. The women don't even get a CSCS course card, like they don't have those sorts of qualifications with it. The women can do a forklift, that's it. I don't know how many women are gonna go out and get a forklifting job." (Prisoner, Female)

4.7 Perception that learning and skills not viewed as a priority

A recurring theme across various discussions in this research was a perceived lack of prioritisation of learning and skills provision by both the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) and its staff. Participants consistently underscored the urgent need to elevate the status of education within the prison environment and to foster a culture that values and promotes learning among prisoners.

One significant aspect highlighted by participants is the disparity in treatment between educational activities and other tasks within prisons. There is a prevailing sentiment that education should be accorded the same level of importance and organisation as other mandatory activities. Service users expressed frustration at the discrepancy in treatment, advocating for a structured approach to education.

"They've got to have the same attitude with education as they do with the work sheds, [where] everyone's there in the morning, education should be like that, education should be on the rota, [it should be that] they shout you and then you go… "if I wasn't the pass man in the library, I wouldn't get a shout [get called to leave the cell] every day. It's only because it's my job. So why can they not have the same attitude to guys who want to go education, but they'll come to my door because im going to my work…they're on the list, they're choking to go." (Prisoner, Long-Term)

Moreover, some service users criticised the prevailing attitude towards education within the prison system, where it is often perceived as an optional pursuit rather than a fundamental component of rehabilitation. This sentiment reflects a broader systemic issue where education is not considered a priority, resulting in a lack of support and resources allocated to educational initiatives.

"You don't get the same buy-in [about education]. We should be getting more buy-in from other areas of the establishment to increase footfall up here, if it carried the same weight. It's critical that we get people to the learning centre, it's not seen as that." (Staff)

Participants also highlighted bureaucratic obstacles and institutional inertia as hindrances to improving educational opportunities within prisons. The bureaucratic red tape and risk aversion at higher administrative levels were cited as barriers to implementing meaningful changes in educational policies and practices.

"Basically [education] needs support of SPS. No complaints about education department. You can see in their eyes sometimes they want to give more but they're limited to what they can offer. And you can see they're just constantly wanting to give you an education, and want you to learn, and you can tell there's a good vibe when you come in, happy to see you, happy to teach you, and the more they could get from the SPS, they more they could give that back to the prisoners." (Prisoner, Protection)

Staff echoed these sentiments, pointing out the disproportionate emphasis placed on other activities, such as physical training, over education within the prison system. The lack of recognition of the transformative potential of education not only affects prisoners' access to learning opportunities but also impacts staff morale and well-being.

> "But at the political level, and the very senior level of both colleges and the SPS….[there is not an understanding of the fact that] education is the only thing that changes lives. Worldwide, we know that education is the thing that has the biggest impact on prisoners and those that are leaving the prison system. Without that understanding of the value of education, there will continue to be a churn…people simply coming back."(Staff)

Furthermore, the limitations imposed by contractual agreements and reduced session hours directly affect the availability and variety of educational programs offered within prisons. This reduction in educational hours forces prisoners to make difficult choices between attending educational sessions and participating in other activities, further exacerbating the challenge of accessing education.

> "Our working day is reduced, we're now at about 5 and ¾ hours a day, so quite a cut to the number of sessions, there are now only ten mainstream sessions and 5 protection sessions, as opposed to 20 sessions, that we had 7 years ago. So, there's been a lot of changes. Numbers are reduced because students need to pick between gym at 9am and education at 10am. Limited education hours reduce choice." (Staff)

Service users described how this failure to prioritise education manifests in their daily experiences within prisons, where educational opportunities are under-promoted, and communication between staff and prisoners regarding educational activities is lacking. This systemic neglect of education not only perpetuates a cycle of disengagement but also undermines efforts to reduce recidivism and promote positive outcomes post-release.

4.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, the experiences of individuals engaging with educational opportunities within the prison system offer a nuanced narrative that intertwines both positivity and challenges. Across the spectrum of participants, there exists a shared appreciation for the transformative potential of education and the purpose that pursuing these opportunities can give during their time in prison.

Those who have participated in learning and skills activities often speak glowingly of the positive impact on their lives. They describe moments of personal growth, newfound confidence, and a sense of purpose that transcends the confines of their current situation. For many, education represents not only a pathway to acquiring knowledge and skills but also a journey where they can challenge themselves and push their boundaries.

Moreover, participants frequently express gratitude for the dedication and support of their tutors, recognising them as mentors and allies in their educational pursuits. The relationships forged within the educational setting foster a sense of community and belonging, providing much-needed encouragement and guidance on their journey toward self-improvement.

However, amidst the positivity lies a landscape marked by challenges and limitations. Communication barriers, limited resources, and staffing constraints often hinder the delivery of educational programs, leaving participants frustrated and longing for more dedicated learning opportunities. The breadth of educational provision was recognised, but concerns were raised about the upper limits of education levels available and the lack of opportunities for further advancement, particularly in vocational training and employable skills.

Improving employability through education emerged as a significant theme in the discussions. Many recommendations for future provision centred around enhancing opportunities for acquiring practical skills and qualifications that could lead to employment upon release. Participants highlighted the value of certifications such as the CSCS card and suggested ways in which educational institutions like Fife College could support prisoners in obtaining them.

Moreover, there were calls for greater integration between educational programs and work parties within the prison environment. This integration would not only tailor education towards employability but also enable work party activities to result in recognised qualifications. Suggestions included the introduction of modern apprenticeships, vocational skills training, and opportunities for gaining qualifications in areas like painting and decorating, gardening, and car mechanics.

In addition to vocational training, participants emphasised the importance of providing support for individuals preparing to leave prison. Recommendations included offering classes or social groups to address employment, housing, and financial concerns, as well as support with developing business plans and accessing external resources. Furthermore, programs aimed at improving confidence, well-being, and rehabilitation, such as self-compassion courses and drama therapy, were also highlighted as beneficial initiatives.

Furthermore, the perceived lack of prioritisation of education within the prison system poses a significant barrier to progress. Participants in the research commented on the discrepancy in treatment between educational activities and other mandatory tasks, advocating for a structured approach that accords education the same level of importance and organisation.

5. Views on Future Provision

5.1 Introduction

This chapter includes suggestions for the future based upon the research conducted. These are grouped into sections on various aspects of future provision.

5.2 In-cell and digital provision

Service users and staff expressed various views on digital and in-cell provision.

Digital

Participants generally expressed positive views on digital infrastructure to support learning and skills, recognising its potential benefits while also highlighting some concerns.

Digital education garnered considerable support from participants, who recognised its potential to revolutionise learning opportunities behind bars. Both service users and staff highlighted the advantages of digital platforms in augmenting access to educational materials beyond the confines of traditional classroom settings. For prisoners, the prospect of engaging in daily learning activities and seamlessly transitioning between in-cell study and classroom instruction was particularly appealing.

> "Digital education would allow you to get education every day, and would allow you to finish things in-cell that you started in education." (Prisoner, Protection)

Furthermore, staff members echoed these sentiments, emphasising the transformative impact that digital education could have within the prison system. They underscored the need for a tailored approach to digital learning, acknowledging that while it offers significant benefits, it may not suit all learners, especially those who require more personalised support.

> "I was an education officer when the internet was going into schools…schools have been doing it very successfully for more than 30 years…It is not beyond the wit of man to come up with a system whereby we can use 21st century resources in our classrooms." (Staff)

Staff also suggested that digital provision could be used to connect education staff with service users when they were in their cells, allowing staff to contact service users if they missed class. It was noted that this could potentially address issues around miscommunication preventing service users from attending education.

In addition to facilitating learning, digital education was seen as a conduit for imparting essential technological skills, thereby enhancing prisoners' employability prospects upon release. However, concerns were raised regarding the potential misuse of digital resources and the necessity for robust safeguards to prevent unauthorised access to certain online content:

> "There are some students who would really struggle with independent learning and not having that face to face support in the classroom. A lot of people take their work back to the cell and can work independently but for students particularly at lower levels that's not a possibility." (Staff)

In-cell

Similarly, the concept of in-cell learning received widespread support from prisoners and staff alike, who recognised its potential to complement traditional classroom instruction. In-cell provision was particularly lauded for its ability to cater to prisoners who may be hesitant to attend classes or those with physical limitations.

Staff and service users generally viewed in-cell learning positively, recognising its potential to supplement traditional classroom education. In-cell provision was seen as particularly beneficial for prisoners who might be hesitant to attend classes or those with physical limitations.

> "I would love for us to be able to increase in-cell learning. I think there's new tech meant to be going into cells…in [this prison] that would be massive, that would make such a difference. Already Fife provide really good in-cell activity packs…but we absolutely in [this prison] would

benefit massively from some sort of technological interactive learning suite that people could access during in-cell hours." (Staff)

Several prisoners, albeit supportive of in-cell provision in theory were concerned about the lack of space in cells. This was especially for those in halls with shared cells. They suggested that being able to have time to go through education materials at the tables in their halls, but outside their cells would be preferrable.

While acknowledging the benefits of in-cell learning, concerns were voiced regarding the potential drawbacks, such as increased social isolation and a loss of human interaction. Participants stressed the importance of striking a balance between in-cell and classroom-based learning to ensure that social engagement and interaction are not sacrificed in favour of technological advancement.

"I don't know about that…later down the line we would lose more things than what we would gain…prisoners have got worries about getting locked up a lot, especially with a new regime [having come in], because people's mental health starts to go downhill and just having that social contact with teachers and other prisoners [is good]…if it was just about the equipment itself, aye it would be a brilliant thing and it would help us. But prisoners are gonna worry about: 'well hold on a minute are we gonna get locked up more cos of it?'" (Prisoner, Non-Offence Protection)

5.3 Peer mentoring

Peer mentoring emerged as a promising solution to various challenges identified in the study. Both staff and service users highlighted the potential benefits of peer mentoring programs in enhancing educational outcomes and fostering a sense of purpose among prisoners.

Firstly, it was acknowledged that prisoners had skills to pass onto other prisoners:

"You've got people who've got trades here, why are you not utilising them? Why are we not teaching other prisoners: 'this is how you do tiling, basic plumbing, xyz'. Why can you not utilise

us if you've not got the manpower, all you need is an officer there and we can teach people as well and obviously that gives us a sense of purpose." (Prisoner, Short-Term)

Secondly, peers were seen as relatable to other prisoners:

"It helps with learners who don't engage with education so catch them in the halls, they might feel more comfortable with a peer. But also in terms of communicating information in the halls, any forms, understanding any information that's being communicated to them. Peer tutoring benefits everyone, the tutor and the person receiving it." (Staff)

"Sometimes guys that have learning difficulties, they struggle to listen to a teacher, [it can be better] if it's a prisoner telling them, probably telling them the exact same thing but they tend to listen." (Prisoner, Non-Offence Protection)

Thirdly, it was seen to give the peer mentors themselves additional skills and opportunities. Staff members noted the positive impact of peer mentoring on class dynamics and the potential to address issues of varying skill levels within classrooms effectively.

"[the peer mentoring scheme] was going very well but when we tried to create a work party for that, it was really difficult and that kind of all fell away. But up until then having the peer mentoring was really beneficial. So, the guys who were mentoring tended to be higher level, they were able to get additional qualifications like peer mentoring, volunteering, working with others, if they'd already got all the other qualifications available and they were also helping the [mentees]." (Staff)

5.4 Class capacity, length, and frequency

Views on class capacity, length, and frequency reflected those on other topics, in that participants overall emphasised the need for increases in provision – more classes, longer sessions, more often. However, findings also included reflections on the need to tailor provision carefully.

Discussion about class size hinged on two concerns: the need for more people to have access to the classes, and the issue around classes needing to cater to various different levels at once.

In general, participants wanted to have bigger classes, to allow more access, but they struggled with sharing classes with people at different levels. Staff noted that smaller classes tended to work better – however, this was noted in the context of having to accommodate several different levels in the one class. The possibility of more one-to-one work was also suggested. A minority also highlighted already existing concerns about group dynamics within classes, mentioned certain classes where smaller numbers were better (music, namely), or mentioned preferring small groups generally, perhaps suggesting any introduction of larger classes would need to be done carefully.

> "I would really like to see larger class sizes and more classes, more than the few that you get access to." (Prisoner, Female)

> "That's probably the worst part of it, you're sitting there trying to work, and you get some argument going on behind you." (Prisoner, Young Offender)

In relation to session length, participants were again broadly in favour of increased provision, but also highlighted that this varied depending on the subject. For example, anything involving set up and tidy up should have a longer class length so that the core provision was not squeezed.

> "Longer classes, longer sessions [would be good], we're only up here for an hour…Maybe enough time for people doing basic literacy but for art and music, by the time you're getting into the swing of it, it's time to go back." (Prisoner, Long-Term)

Some also mentioned that there used to be a helpful short break during longer classes but this no longer happened due to lack of SPS staff. Staff highlighted how more officers were needed to facilitate breaks and so they happen less often than they should.

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> "In the mornings, there's not enough of a break, we used to have a tea break around ten but
> they have stopped…3 hours is a long time without a break" (Prisoner, Remand)

Participants regularly mentioned wanting more frequent provision – particularly for basic skills in Maths and English, this was on the basis that waiting a week for the next class was too long a gap when you are trying to progress your skills in literacy and numeracy.

Service users also mentioned how classes at night helped to prevent prisoner isolation.

> "I think this prison has addressed [the issue of prisoner isolation] to a good degree with regards
> to giving options of art classes, art at night, and a couple of nights of rec opened up…other
> prisons have people locked down at 5 o'clock, 7 days a week, that's shocking in my opinion."
> (Prisoner, Long-Term)

Storybook Dads and smaller group session for those who struggled with education were cited as examples of potential evening activities.

The need to tailor the provision – class length and size and restrictions – to the establishment was noted:

> "In Corton Vale, what worked best was a mix and match session, you had x available in this
> room, x available in that [and you would ask] 'what do you feel like today?'…again that would
> have challenges somewhere else. Here they have a really nice large space which allows you to
> offer lots of different subjects at the same time." (Staff)

5.5 Libraries

Library access was frequently mentioned in relation to education provision across various establishments. Participants emphasised the value of access to a library in prison and discussed the limitations around this currently.

Service users highlighted how only those in education could access the library in one establishment:

> "Unless you're in education, you can't go to the library, so you could be here in your first six months and that might be your most difficult six months in jail, and you could really be doing with books or music or DVD's, but unless you're in education, you're actually barred from the library. So, if someone's not got money coming in, they can't afford to go to art, and they're also barred from the library. There should be another way of accessing the library." (Prisoner, Long-Term)

Staff participants mentioned that lack of staff meant that the library could only be accessible to people who are in education. Service users provided suggestions for improving access to the library, including putting a library on each landing or satellite libraries (wherein a trolley comes around the cell doors). One service user highlighted how a library staff member in one establishment improves access by visiting the halls himself and taking requests from prisoners – and has suggested encouraging prisoners to sign up to visit the library, even if they are not in education:

> "The man who works with the council libraries, he visits the halls and tries to take requests, and work with satellite libraries, he's in favour of hall visits…to get people to sign up to come up just to visit the library when education is on." (Prisoner, Long-Term)

Service users in some establishments described how they could access library materials but could not physically go down to the library and had to write out requests on paper slips for books and other items, limiting what they could find. Those in Open University struggled with waiting for research they had requested to be provided by the library and relying on the library to send the right information.

5.6 Proactive engagement by education staff

One suggestion to bridge the perceived gap between desire to take part and engagement involved education staff engaging directly with prisoners within the halls, thereby fostering interaction and addressing accessibility issues. Additionally, participants emphasised the importance of enhancing communication between different departments within the prison to facilitate initial engagement and promote awareness of available opportunities, giving examples of where this had been successful.

"Unless we get asked to come down and we get to speak to a teacher, you've got no interaction with education, you cant talk to them, because if you say to an officer, they'll just say that's nothing to do with me…you could get someone who's knowledgeable just to go up the halls." (Prisoner, Long-Term)

"The team is great, even with the current changes in the regime which are going to affect us, they are starting to think about can we get into the recovery café, can we work with life skills, how do we work with the link centre, can we get into the halls…" (Staff)

5.7 Additional recommendations for future provision

In addition to the various recommendations outlined above in relation to each findings chapter, participants also provided a number of miscellaneous ideas for the future:

- More frequent opportunities for prisoners to give feedback
- A drop-in facility to ask tutors questions
- More funding for external groups and tutors to come in and facilitate other kinds of learning, such as art and media projects
- Exhibitions of artwork in the visitor room
- More education channels on the television, such as documentary-style or learning-style programmes
- Phone calls with external tutors
- Provision of activities to keep people busy in their cells
- Enhanced digital skills provision including programming

5.8 Naming the new strategy

The research conducted delved into the preference for the title of the forthcoming strategy, weighing the merits of naming it as the "Personal Development Strategy" as opposed to the incumbent "Learning & Employability Strategy".

Findings from the study revealed a lack of pronounced preference among participants. However, insights garnered from both staff and prisoners indicated that the term "personal development." implies a comprehensive approach, encompassing not only learning and employability initiatives but also incorporating various support programs provided by ancillary services such as psychiatry. As such this implies a more overarching strategy for more service aspects which would go beyond any education and learning provision.

Furthermore, there was a notable sentiment favouring simplicity, with participants expressing a preference for a name that straightforwardly conveys the essence of the strategy, akin to the idea of "what you see is what you get."

Therefore, the naming of the strategy should be led by what is contained within it.

5.9 Conclusions

The findings from this chapter offer valuable insights and recommendations for the future of education provision within the prison system. Participants highlighted various concerns and suggested ways to improve access, engagement, and the overall effectiveness of educational programs.

The chapter begun by exploring the potential of digital and in-cell provision, with participants generally expressing positive views on these approaches. Digital education was seen as transformative, offering opportunities for daily learning activities and technological skill development. In-cell learning was lauded for its accessibility, especially for prisoners hesitant to attend classes. However, concerns were raised about social isolation and the need to balance in-cell and classroom-based learning effectively.

Peer mentoring emerged as a promising solution, with participants recognising its potential to enhance educational outcomes and foster a sense of purpose among prisoners. The testimonials highlighted the tangible benefits of peer mentoring, from improving practical skills to creating a supportive learning environment.

Discussions on class capacity, length, and frequency underscored the need for greater funding to expand practical provision in a tailored manner. Participants called for larger classes, longer sessions, and more frequent provision, emphasising the importance of striking a balance between quantity and quality.

Access to libraries was another key concern, with participants advocating for improved access to complement learning and education. Proactive engagement by education staff and enhanced communication between departments were suggested to bridge accessibility gaps effectively.

In addition to these recommendations, participants outlined miscellaneous ideas for future provision, emphasising the need for more frequent feedback opportunities, drop-in facilities, and diverse learning opportunities.

Overall, the findings from this chapter provide a comprehensive roadmap for the future of education provision within the prison system, highlighting the importance of inclusivity, accessibility, and holistic growth. By incorporating these recommendations into future plans, the Scottish Prison Service can ensure that educational programs effectively support the personal development and rehabilitation of prisoners.

6. Conclusions: Forming the future Learning and Employability Strategy

Based on this research it is clear that participants feel that a comprehensive strategy for the future of learning and employability, should prioritise elements of culture, communication, and provision. By addressing these key areas, the SPS can foster a more conducive learning environment, enhance prisoner engagement, and ultimately contribute to reducing recidivism rates. This chapter outlines the core components that should be central to such a strategy based on the reflections of participants.

1. Cultivating a Culture of Learning:

- Promoting a Positive Learning Environment: Establishing a culture that values education and learning and skills development is paramount. This involves creating a supportive and encouraging atmosphere within prison facilities, where prisoners feel motivated to engage in educational activities.

"I've been in education a long time and I've worked in absolutely every bit of education, I am incredibly concerned about what could come out into the next contract because if it's more or less a pattern, the same thing as what they've got now…there are some good aspects to the current contract, there are some incredibly concerning [things] about the current contract….I think the SPS are incredibly unambitious about education. I think they see it as a sector of the prison that's important and can do good things but without understanding what education is about and the philosophical perspective about what education is about and what it means for human beings to have the opportunity to be educated…I worry then about the people who are writing an educational policy who haven't actually ever stood in a classroom and who have no experience of it, what the hell are they doing writing a policy on education… It's a hugely exciting time to be writing this document, I just worry about the bean counters and the accountants, who are going to want a spreadsheet at the end, and you can quote me on that." (Staff)

- Recognition of Educational Achievement: Implementing systems to acknowledge and celebrate educational milestones can significantly impact prisoner morale and motivation. Recognising achievements, such as completing courses or earning certifications, reinforces the value of education and encourages continued participation. This includes ensuring that staff are appropriately trained to ensure appropriate accreditations can be awarded to service users.

- Integration of Education into Daily Life: Integrate educational opportunities into various aspects of prison life, beyond formal classroom settings. This can include incorporating educational components into work programs, recreational activities, and even daily routines within cells.

"It's an incredible point in history to be looking at prison education, there are so many brilliant examples around the world and Scotland could be a leader in this. Need to be less concerned about explaining numbers on a spreadsheet to bureaucrats, [which just say such and such a number went down or up from one month to the next].The radio station could revolutionise what we do in itself, it could do astonishing things, and we're going to be stymied by a spreadsheet at the end of the month." (Staff)

2. Improving Communication Channels:

- Enhanced Staff-Prisoner Communication: Establishing effective communication channels between staff, education providers and prisoners is essential for promoting educational opportunities and addressing concerns. Clear and consistent communication can ensure that prisoners are aware of available resources, upcoming classes or activity, and educational support services.

- Peer-to-Peer Communication: Facilitating peer-to-peer communication and support networks can complement formal educational initiatives. Peer mentoring programs, support groups, and collaborative learning activities can provide additional avenues for prisoners to engage with education and support one another's learning journey.

- Transparent Information Sharing: Ensure transparency in the dissemination of information related to educational opportunities, policies, and procedures. Providing prisoners with timely access to comprehensive information about available courses, enrolment processes, and academic support services empowers them to make informed decisions about their education. Current implementation of this is seen to be missing many prisoners at the induction phase which must be addressed, though this cannot stop at induction and must be consistent over the course of time in custody.

3. Strengthening Educational Provision:

- Tailored Curriculum and Resources: Develop a curriculum that caters to the diverse needs and interests of the prisoner population. Offering a range of academic, vocational, and enrichment courses allows prisoners to pursue learning and skills pathways that align with their goals and aspirations.

- Flexible Delivery Models: Implement flexible delivery models that accommodate different learning styles, preferences, and scheduling constraints. This may include a combination of in-person, digital, and in-cell learning modalities, providing prisoners with options that suit their individual circumstances.

- Resource Allocation and Funding: Advocate for increased funding and resources to support the expansion and enhancement of educational programs within the prison system. Adequate funding is essential for recruiting qualified instructors, acquiring educational materials, and maintaining facilities conducive to learning. Explore how external vocational partnerships can help to meet gaps in resourcing.

- Evaluation and Continuous Improvement: Establish mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and feedback to assess the effectiveness of educational initiatives and identify areas for improvement. Regular review processes enable stakeholders to adapt strategies, address challenges, and optimise resources to better meet the educational needs of prisoners.

In conclusion, when considering the future learning and development strategy there is a clear desire for a strategy that prioritises the development of a supportive learning culture, effective communication channels, and robust learning and skills provision. By fostering an environment that values these, promotes communication, and enhances educational opportunities, the prison system can empower prisoners to acquire valuable skills, pursue personal growth, and ultimately, successfully reintegrate into society upon release.

Appendix 1: Discussion Guide: Service User Interviews

SPS Learning and Skills– Service Users
Discussion Guide

Set up

Introduce Diffley Partnership Team

Welcome to the Interview/Discussion Group–
- Explain the discussion will last 30/45 minutes
- There will be plenty of time to get your views across my role is to keep the conversation flowing, ensuring we cover the broad areas we need to and ask any follow-up questions,
- Fully anonymous and confidential; The Diffley Partnership abide by the Market Research Society Code of Practice and the SRA Ethical Guidelines.
- Request permission to record discussion – with your permission I will record the discussion; this is just so we can go back and listen again after the discussion

Explain that we're going to be discussion education, this includes all forms all forms of learning, skills and employability provision, spanning basic skills through to higher education, internal and external provision, in-cell and out-of-cell provision, plus digital and analogue provision.

Do you have any questions before we start?

General reflections on education

How did you become aware of the education programs available when you first came to the prison?
Prompt: Were you offered options during your screening & induction process in accordance with your needs and interests?

Can you share your personal experience with education programs while in prison?
Prompt: What types of educational opportunities have you participated in, and how have they impacted your time in prison?
Prompt (if no experience): Why did you decide not to engage in education programs?

What do you believe is the primary purpose of providing education in prison?
Prompt: From your perspective, what do you think the main goals of offering education in prison are?

How do you see the role of education in shaping your personal development during your time in prison?
Prompt: In what ways has education influenced your growth and development while in prison?

In your opinion, how does education contribute to rehabilitation and preparing individuals for re-entering the community?
Prompt: How do you see education playing a role in the process of rehabilitation and re-entry into the community? Explore the link to employment RE training.

Local Learning Environment

How has SPS engaged you in education and opportunities for personal growth and development?
Prompt: How have you been informed of opportunities relevant to you and by whom?

What aspects of the education or you've received locally, either from SPS or partners, have been positive for you?
Prompt: Share any success stories or positive experiences you've had with local education i.e. courses you enjoyed or completed. Improved confidence? Development of interests?

Are there any challenges or things that don't work well with the local education you've encountered? Why do you think that is?
Prompt: Discuss any difficulties or areas where improvements can be made in the local education provision i.e., logistical issues affecting access, changes to course content, style of delivery, types of qualifications?

Fife College

How did you come to know of education and opportunities for personal growth and development with Fife college?
Prompt: Reflections on discussions with staff members or requests to participate in learning subjects of interest?

Can you tell us about any positive experiences you've had with education delivered by Fife College?
Prompt: Share any strengths or good things you've observed in Fife College's education programs. i.e., courses you enjoyed or completed. Improved confidence? Development of interests?

Have you faced any challenges or areas where you think Fife College's education could be improved?

Prompt: Discuss any obstacles or aspects that you feel need attention in Fife College's education provision i.e., course content, staff engagement, style of delivery, types of qualifications?

Access to and Use of Current Education

How easy has it been for you to access the education available to you? Have you attended sessions regularly?
Prompt: Share your experience regarding the accessibility and regularity of your engagement with education. Any changes in accessibility over time?

In your opinion, is the current offer of classes and course options suitable for people of different genders and ages and backgrounds? Why or why not?
Prompt: Discuss your perception of how well the education meets the needs of different genders, age groups and different existing educational backgrounds

In what ways is the education on offer relevant to life in the community?
Prompt: How well do you feel the education on offer equips people for life and work opportunities on release?

How has your learning and growth helped you to contribute and support others?
Prompt: Has your learning enabled you to connect with and add value to family members?

Future Education Preferences

What kind of education would you like to see provided between 2023 and 2028?
Prompt: Share your preferences and desires for future education offerings.
Prompt: What changes or enhancements would you suggest making educational programs in prison more effective and beneficial? What kinds of courses would you feel motivated to undertake?
Researcher to note 2023-2028 corporate plan includes aspiration to be person centred, trauma informed and rights-based

What type of education delivery would work best for you in terms of session length, session frequency, time of day, learning styles, and group sizes?
Prompt: Share your preferences for how education is delivered to you.
Prompt: Cover each of length, frequency, time of day style and size in turn if not covered in initial answer.

What are your thoughts on introducing digital services or equipment for in-cell education?

Prompt: Share your opinions on the idea of incorporating digital services into your education (additional courses online in your cell using a tablet or laptop).

How could the SPS change the culture or perception of Education?
Prompt: *With less than 1/3rd of individuals attending the learning centres, what could be done to improve people's opinions on the importance of education and learning services? What is important to you?*

Conclusions and wrap–up

Thank you very much for the discussion, **is there anything not already covered that you would like to mention?**

Thank and close

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Appendix 2: Discussion Guide: Staff Interviews

SPS Learning and Skills– Staff
Discussion Guide

Set up

Introduce Diffley Partnership Team

Welcome to the Interview–
- Explain the discussion will last 30 minutes
- There will be plenty of time to get your views across my role is to keep the conversation flowing, ensuring we cover the broad areas we need to and ask any follow-up questions,
- Fully anonymous and confidential; The Diffley Partnership abide by the Market Research Society Code of Practice and the SRA Ethical Guidelines.
- Request permission to record discussion – with your permission I will record the discussion; this is just so we can go back and listen again after the discussion

Explain that we're going to be discussion education, this includes all forms all forms of learning, skills and employability provision, spanning basic skills through to higher education, internal and external provision, in-cell and out-of-cell provision, plus digital and analogue provision.

Do you have any questions before we start?

General reflections on education

What is your job role?

What do you believe is the primary purpose of providing education within a prison setting?
Prompt: From your perspective, what do you think the main goals of offering education in prison are?

How do you perceive the role of education in shaping personal development for service user?

In your opinion, how does education contribute to rehabilitation and preparing individuals for reintegration into society?
Prompt: How do you see education playing a role in the process of rehabilitation and re-entry into the community?

Local Learning Environment

How has the learning environment changed since you arrived in post?
Prompt: improved or worsened over time and why?

How do staff support prisoners to access and benefit from learning initiatives?
Prompt: Who supports prisoners and how? Describe how this is done? Is it prioritised?

From your observations what learning initiatives or courses have been the most popular and why?
Prompt: are there any initiatives that have been really well attended or received positive feedback? If so what do you think are the reasons?

From your experience, what positive aspects have you observed in the local education provided, either by SPS or partners?
Prompt: Share any success stories or positive experiences you've witnessed with local education and be as specific as you can in regard to any individuals i.e., someone may have taken a course and grown in confidence or put their learning and skills into use beyond it or used it to help others.

Are there any challenges or areas that you think do not work well in the local education provision? Why do you think that is?
Prompt: Discuss any difficulties or areas where improvements can be made in the local education provision based on your observations i.e., prisoner feedback or complaints, sessions with poor retention, accessibility issues, stigma & attitudes etc.

How does SPS foster a culture of continuous development at all levels, including staff?
Prompt: what learning and reflection activities have you been involved in? Are there regular staff meetings to evaluate the education provision and engagement of service users? Could this be an area for improvement?

Fife College

How do Fife college engage prisoners to undertake learning?
Prompt: What outreach and promotion is undertaken? How do they reduce stigma? How do they engage prisoners who may be harder to reach?

Can you share positive experiences or strengths you've observed in the education delivered by Fife College?
Prompt: Share any positive aspects or strengths you've noticed in Fife College's education programs. Any specific examples of success stories for individuals?

Have you encountered challenges or areas where you believe Fife College's education could be improved?

Prompt: Discuss any obstacles or aspects that you feel need attention in Fife College's education provision from a staff perspective.

Access to and Use of Current Education

How would you describe the ease of access to education for individuals in your establishment?
Prompt: Share your observations regarding the accessibility and regularity of engagement with education.
Prompt: Is access equal for all types of prisoner?

What efforts have been made to date to engage prisoners in learning opportunities with historic low attendance or lack of motivation?
Prompt: Describe any outreach efforts or mechanisms to support or incentivise attendance?

From your viewpoint, is the current education suitable for people of different genders, ages and socioeconomic backgrounds? Why or why not?
Prompt: Discuss your perception of how well the education meets the needs of different genders and age groups from a staff perspective.

Is the learning on offer perceived to be relevant for community life on release by prisoners?
Prompt: Are there pathways and linkages to employment or further learning? Do you receive feedback about relevance in discussions?

How can we improve opportunities for individuals who are hard to engage?
Prompt: What insights or ideas do you have about the approaches and ways of providing services that might work best for them? Feel free to think outside the box i.e., different modes of delivery, new staff positions, different models of operating!

How can we improve opportunities for individuals who are neurodivergent?
Prompt: What insights or ideas do you have about the approaches and ways of providing services that might work best for them?

Future Education Preferences

In your opinion, what kind of learning & development would be beneficial between 2023 and 2028?
Prompt: Share your perspectives on the desired direction for future learning & development offerings within the prison.
Prompt: 2023-2028 corporate plan includes aspiration to be person centred, trauma informed and rights-based.

Regarding improvements, what changes or enhancements would you suggest to make educational programs more effective and beneficial?
Prompt: Share your insights into potential improvements to enhance the effectiveness of educational programs in prison.

What type of education delivery methods do you think would work best for service users in terms of session length, session frequency, learning styles, and group sizes?
Prompt: Share your perspectives on the most effective methods for delivering education to service users.

Are there any technical or logistical challenges you foresee in implementing changes in education delivery?
Prompt: Discuss any practical challenges with the regime or requirements related to implementing preferred changes in educational delivery.

What are your thoughts on introducing digital services or infrastructure for in-cell education from a staff standpoint?
Prompt: Share your opinions on the idea of incorporating digital services into the education of service users. How digitally literate are the prisoner population? Could there be any resistance to accessing educational courses on a tablet or laptop? Any issues i.e., utilisation of devices in multiple occupancy cells.

Strategy Title

The SPS has had some discussion around titles such as Personal Development Strategy opposed to Learning & Employability Strategy.

What are your thoughts on choosing a title that captures the totality of someone's learning journey without carrying the same perceived weight as a formal Learning & Employability Strategy?
Prompt: From a staff perspective, how do you feel about the balance between formality and inclusivity in strategy titles?

Prompt: What are your thoughts on titles that aim to encompass the entirety of an individual's learning journey without the formality associated with "Learning & Employability Strategy?

Conclusions and wrap-up

Thank you very much for the discussion, **is there anything not already covered that you would like to mention?**

Thank and close

Diffley
Partnership

From many voices to smart choices

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