

Prison Education gets a D- in its Summer Report

Last week, the Education Select Committee published a [new report](#) into the prison education system. The report builds on the work of Sally Coates' pioneering [Unlocking Potential](#) review; Charlie Taylor's later and more focused [review into reading education](#); recent Government policy papers; and a range of other independent reports.

Below, we have set out seven consistent themes which have been illuminated by these reports over the past six years.

Quality of Delivery	Qualifications	Digital	Approach to Education
<p>2/3 of Ofsted inspections showed "poor management of the quality of education, skills, and work"</p> <p>Education Select Committee Report (2022)</p>	<p>There has been a "marked decline" in the number of prisoners in England, aged 18 and over, participating in educational qualifications since 2015/16</p> <p>Education Select Committee Report (2022)</p>	<p>"The digital divide between prisoners and the community is ever increasing", and lack of digital access is "affecting learning in prisons"</p> <p>Education Select Committee Report (2022)</p>	<p>Education is not perceived as integral for rehabilitation (despite reducing re-offending by 7.5%), therefore it is "undervalued and under resourced"</p> <p>Education Select Committee Report (2022)</p>
<p>60% of prisons in England have received Ofsted grades of 'Requires Improvement' or 'Inadequate' over the last five years</p> <p>Prison Strategy White Paper (2021)</p>	<p>"Three fifths of prisoners leave prison without an identified employment or education outcome"</p> <p>Coates Review (2016)</p>	<p>"Only four adult prisons and one Youth Offender Institution in England and Wales have access to in-cell technology"</p> <p>Prisons Strategy White Paper (2021)</p>	<p>Reading education is not given sufficient priority in the prison regime and often, "prisoners are made to choose between education and work"</p> <p>Taylor Review (2022)</p>
<p>Ofsted's 'Overall Effectiveness' judgements in 2014/15 showed only two prisons were 'Outstanding', whilst 27 prisons 'Required Improvement' and seven were 'Inadequate'</p> <p>Coates Review (2016)</p>		<p>Equipment is "outdated" and whilst OLASS providers are responsible for refreshing and maintaining IT equipment, there "is only sporadic evidence that this is being done"</p> <p>Coates Review (2016)</p>	<p>"All education providers operate within the constraints of each prison's regime"</p> <p>Ofsted (2021)</p>

Facilities	Personalisation	Learning difficulties/challenges
<p>A lack of capital investment in infrastructure has led to some prisons having “rotting walls and doors, mould, leaking roofs requiring buckets, and a lack of adequate heating”</p> <p>Education Select Committee Report (2022)</p>	<p>The 2016 review’s recommendation for every prisoner to have a Personal Learning Plan is “not yet happening consistently across the prison estate”</p> <p>Education Select Committee Report (2022)</p>	<p>“There is one qualified Special Educational Needs Coordinator per four prisons”</p> <p>Meanwhile at least 30% of prisoners have a learning difficulty, but the screening practice “is not adequate” and much goes undetected</p> <p>Education Select Committee Report (2022)</p>
<p>Libraries are not being used to give prisoners opportunities to practice reading, and reading provisions are “dependent on delivery from voluntary organisations”</p> <p>Taylor Review (2022)</p>	<p>“In all the prisons we visited, systems to assess prisoners’ reading ability, identify their reading needs, implement solutions and monitor progress were largely absent”</p> <p>Taylor Review (2022)</p>	<p>“Prisoners with the greatest need to improve their reading generally receive the least support”</p> <p>Taylor Review (2022)</p>
		<p>“Nearly one third of prisoners self-identified on initial assessment as having a learning difficulty and/or disability”</p> <p>Coates Review (2016)</p>

50 Degrees’ view on the main factors driving this lack of progress is:

- Across public prisons, education is provided by **four main** educational providers, who mostly work independently from the prison operators.
- Being a separately delivered industry, education is a **disjointed element** within prison operations.
- Prison operators need a greater incentive to prioritise education of its inmates, as the education providers can only deliver within the constraints of each prison’s regime and structure.

- Prison education is procured through a highly competitive selection process which is **price driven**, rather than **quality driven**.

The Ministry of Justice is currently in the process of market engagement for the replacement of prison education services. The challenging operating context, which has been reinforced by last week's report, coupled with a lack of real reform and the stretched funding environment presents a significant challenge to these prospective bidders.

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